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EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan Security Situation



December 2017

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EASO Country of Origin Information Report

Afghanistan

Security situation

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ISBN: 978-92-9494-837-3

doi: 10.2847/574136

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Acknowledgements

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

Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Cedoca (Center for Documentation and Research)

France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division

Poland, Country of Origin Information Unit, Department for Refugee Procedures, Office for Foreigners

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

Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

Finland, Finnish Immigration Service, Country Information Service

Furthermore, the following cooperated in reviewing and commenting on the report:

Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Country of Origin Information Department

The Netherlands, Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA)

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), RSD Section

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 does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012)⁽¹⁾. The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced. To the extent possible and unless otherwise stated, all information presented, except for undisputed or obvious facts, has been cross-checked.

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

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as a generic terminology and not as legally defined in the EU Asylum Acquis and the Geneva Convention.

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The target users are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decision-making authorities.

The drafting of this report was finalised in October 2017. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the introduction.

⁽¹⁾ The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: <http://www.easo.europa.eu>.

Glossary and Abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
ACSO	Afghanistan Central Statistics Office
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AGEs	Anti-Government Elements are armed opposition fighters, or insurgents, who are fighting against the Afghan government and its international allies. Examples of such groups of fighters are the Taliban, the Haqqani network and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan ⁽²⁾ .
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
Amir-ul-Momineen	Leader of the Faithfull, the highest Islamic ruler who can claim legitimacy from the community of Muslims ⁽³⁾
ANSF ⁽⁴⁾	<p>Afghan National Security Forces: The Afghan government’s official armed forces, composed of:</p> <p>ANA (Afghan National Army): The internationally trained Afghan army (2002);</p> <p>AAF (Afghan Airforce);</p> <p>ANP (Afghan National Police): Afghanistan’s police force, with the following subdivisions:</p> <p>AUP (Afghan Uniformed Police), including the community police, traffic police, and fire-fighters;</p> <p>AACP (Afghan Anti-Crime Police), including a counter narcotics, a counter terrorism, and a criminal investigations department</p> <p>ANCOP (Afghan National Civil Order Police) which provides crisis and anti-terror response capabilities in urban environments;</p> <p>ALP (Afghan Local Police): security initiatives under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior, funded by the US ⁽⁵⁾;</p> <p>ANBP (Afghan National Border Police), which is planned to come under the responsibility of the ministry of Defense, and thus part of the ANA;</p> <p>NDS (National Directorate of Security): The intelligence service of the Afghan government.</p>
APPF	Afghanistan Public Protection Force
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation
Arbaki	A community-based security system.

⁽²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 75.

⁽³⁾ Dawn, Analysis: Battle for ‘Ameer-ul-Momineen’, updated on: 6 December 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 75.

⁽⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 46.

AXO	Abandoned explosive ordnance is an explosive ordnance that has not been used during an armed conflict, that has been left behind or dumped by a party to an armed conflict, and which is no longer under the latter's control. Abandoned explosive ordnance may or may not have been primed, fused, armed or otherwise prepared for use (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Protocol V) ⁽⁶⁾ .
Bacha Baazi	Dancing boys: Young boys who dance and are often sexually abused. This practice is often associated with powerful men.
Buzkashi	An ancient game that is still played in Afghanistan. Horsemen play a sort of polo with a goat's carcass.
CIP	Critical Infrastructure Program: predecessor of the Afghan Local Police (ALP)
Civilian	UNAMA refers to international law for a definition of 'civilians': persons who are not combatants or otherwise taking part in the conflict (not members of military/ paramilitary forces or fighters of organised armed groups of a party to a conflict or those who are not part of a mass uprising) ⁽⁷⁾ .
COMISAF	The Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.
Complex attack	A deliberate and coordinated attack that includes a suicide device (i.e. BBIED, VBIED), more than one attacker and more than one type of device (i.e. BBIED + mortars). All three elements must be used for an attack to be considered complex ⁽⁸⁾ .
CPAU	Cooperation for Peace and Unity
Daesh	See Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War: These are unexploded ordnances (UXOs) and abandoned explosive ordnances (AXOs) ⁽⁹⁾ .
Escalation of Force	refers to incidents, or 'force protection' incidents, involving the use of lethal or non-lethal force by military personnel when civilians ignore, do not understand, or do not see warnings from military personnel in approaching or overtaking military convoys, or in circumstances where civilians do not follow instructions at military checkpoints ⁽¹⁰⁾ .
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 ⁽¹¹⁾ .
Haqqani network	An armed insurgent movement under the leadership of Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin. The headquarters and base are in

⁽⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 76.

⁽⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 74, 76.

⁽⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 66.

⁽¹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 45.

⁽¹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 77.

North Waziristan (Pakistan) and South-East Afghanistan, in areas of the Pashtun tribe of the Zadran.

HIG (Hezb-e Islami/ Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) Untill 2016, an armed insurgent movement under the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, with strongholds in the East, North-East, South-East and Centre of Afghanistan. Since a peace deal was signed between the group and the Afghan government, the group started integration into Afghan politics.

HRW **Human Rights Watch**

IAG **Illegal armed groups**

IDP **Internally Displaced Person**

IEC **Independent Election Commission**

IED **Improvised Explosive Device:** usually a self-made bomb. It is used in asymmetric warfare. Variants are ⁽¹²⁾:

BBIED (Body Borne Improvised Explosive Device), or suicide bomb, is usually a self-made explosive device worn on the body of the attacker. It is commonly held in a vest, but also, for example, concealed in a turban.

MIED (Magnetic Improvised Explosive Device) is an IED with a magnet, allowing it to be attached quickly and easily to objects such as a vehicle.

PPIED (Pressure-Plate IED) is an IED that is detonated when the victim steps on a pressure-plate.

RCIED (Radio or Remote-Controlled Improvised Explosive Device) is an IED that can be detonated by remote control. Users can aim at a specific target passing the location of the IED and detonate from a distance.

VBIED (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device), or car bomb, is usually a self-made explosive device placed in a car that is driven towards a target or parked at the target location.

VOIED (Victim-operated IED) detonates when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch, such as a pressure plate or pressure-release mechanism, trip wire or another device, resulting in an explosion.

IMF **International military forces**

IMU **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan:** An armed insurgent movement operating in Afghanistan and other countries with many fighters originally from Uzbekistan.

Indirect fire Indirect fire weapons, such as mortars, rockets and grenades are highly explosive weapons systems which fire projectiles to a location without a direct line of visibility to the target. Mortars cannot be guided to hit a specific target and have a wide area of impact; when used in civilian-populated areas the risk of civilian casualties is very high.

⁽¹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 77.

IO	Information Operation: the collection of tactical information about an adversary as well as the dissemination of propaganda in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent.
IS, ISKP	Islamic State , also called ISIS, ISIL or <i>Daesh</i> . Islamic State in Afghanistan is referred to as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force: An international military coalition based on the NATO alliance. Until 31 December 2014, it supported the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its efforts to secure and stabilise the country. It was replaced by Resolute Support Mission.
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
IWPR	Institute for War & Peace Reporting
Jamiaat-e Islami	Political party with support predominantly within the Tajik ethnic group in Northern Afghanistan. During the Soviet war and the following civil war, Jamiat-e Islami was one of the most powerful of the mujahideen groups. Since 2001, it plays a central role in Afghan politics.
Jihad	This is a term derived from an Arabic root meaning ‘to struggle’ or ‘to strive’. It has different meanings but in this report refers to ‘armed struggle of Islamic insurgents against the Afghan government and their (inter-)national allies’.
Jihadi	The insurgency against the communist regime and Soviet occupation was called a <i>jihad</i> and fighters or commanders from the period (1979-1989) are still today often referred to as jihadi (commanders).
Junbesh-e Melli	Political party with support predominantly within the Uzbek ethnic group in Northern Afghanistan. The party and its leader, Abdul Rashid Dostum, play a central role in Afghan politics.
Jundullah	Armed opposition group, split off from the IMU, recruiting mainly from the Uzbek community in the North of Afghanistan.
KIA	Kabul International Airport
LDI	Local Defense Initiative
Lel	Lashkar-e Islami: A Sunni militant sectarian group formed in 2004 under Mufti Shakir in Khyber Agency in Pakistan ⁽¹³⁾ . On March 12, 2015, Lashkar-e-Islam announced that it was joining Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan ⁽¹⁴⁾ .
LeJ	Lashkar-e Jhangvi: A violent, anti-Shiite – itself being Sunnite – militant group in Pakistan, formed in 1995. It has carried out a number of attacks on minority groups in Pakistan with the aim of establishing Pakistan as an orthodox Deobandi state ⁽¹⁵⁾ .
LeT	Lashkar-e Taiba: A Sunni militant group, formed in 1990 and initially trained in the Kunar Province of Afghanistan. It is now based near

⁽¹³⁾ Stanford University, Lashkar-e-Islam, updated on: 28 August 2012 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Reuters, Pakistani splinter group rejoins Taliban amid fears of isolation, 12 March 2015 ([url](#)); Roggio, B., Pakistani jihadist groups, Lashkar-i-Islam merge into the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan ([url](#)), 12 March 2015.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Stanford University, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, updated on: 7 July 2015 ([url](#)).

Lahore in Pakistan. LeT fights for the unification of the Kashmir region and its integration into Pakistani territory and also attacks civilian targets in Afghanistan (¹⁶).

Mawlawi	An honorific title given to a scholar who completed Islamic studies in a madrassa.
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
Moi	Ministry of the Interior
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
Mujahideen	Islamic ‘holy warriors’. In the context of the conflict of Afghanistan, the term dates back to the 1980s, when it referred to Islamic fighting groups opposed to the communist regime and the military forces of the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Its fighters have since been called mujahideen. Currently, the Taliban refer to their fighters as mujahideen.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUG	National Unity Government , installed following the 2014 presidential elections. The NUG is led by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah.
OSI	Open Society Institute
Pastunwali	The idealised customary, social and legal codes of behaviours and conduct among Pashtuns; honour (<i>nang</i>) and shame, as well as hospitality (<i>melmastiya</i>) and dignity (<i>ghairat</i>) are core concepts.
Paramilitary group	A paramilitary is a semi-militarized force whose organisational structure, tactics, training, subculture, and (often) function are similar to those of a professional military, but which is not included as part of a state's formal military armed forces.
PC	Provincial Council
PGM	Pro-Government Militia
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PSD	Protection Status Determination
Resolute Support Mission	As of 1 January 2015, the new NATO mission with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF, is the successor of ISAF. (http://www.rs.nato.int/)
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
SAF	Small Arms Fire
Salafism	Branch of Sunni Islam whose modern-day adherents claim to emulate “the pious predecessors” (<i>al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ</i> ; often equated with the

(¹⁶) Stanford University, Lashkar-e-Taiba, updated on: 30 January 2016 ([url](#)).

first three generations of Muslims) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible.

Shura	Community council
Taliban	An armed Islamic insurgent movement in Afghanistan under the leadership of Haibatullah Akhunzada (following Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, leader of the Taliban from July 2015 to May 2016, who had succeeded Mullah Mohammed Omar, founder and long-time leader of the Taliban, deceased in April 2013, but whose death was only officially announced two years later in 2015) and the Leadership Shura in the Pakistani city of Quetta. The movement originated in the Mujahideen era (1980s and 90s), took control of Kabul in 1996 and, by 2001, controlled most of the country. The movement refers to itself as the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'.
Tora Bora Military Front	was formed in 2007 by the son of the mujahideen commander Younus Khalis. The group conducted attacks against Afghan and foreign forces in Nangarhar and has its stronghold in the district of Khogyani, and in the areas of Pachir Agam and Shinwar ⁽¹⁷⁾ .
TTP (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan)	The largest militant group in Pakistan. The organisation was founded in 2007 and is an umbrella of mostly, but not all, Pakistani Taliban groups. Baitullah Mehsud was appointed the commander of TTP. TTP had pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar, at that time the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The main goal behind TTP's establishment was to unite the various factions of the Pakistan Taliban in order to organise synchronised attacks on NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan. The group also carries out "defensive jihad" against Pakistani military forces conducting operations in FATA ⁽¹⁸⁾ .
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone)
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGASC	United Nations General Assembly Security Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Ushr	An Islamic tax (normally 10%) on certain products, for example agricultural products.
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WFP	World Food Programme
Zakat	A religious duty in Islam comparable to almsgiving. As its rules are clearly laid down it is as well comparable to a tax on assets and liquidity (2.5%). The practice of almsgiving or Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam.

⁽¹⁷⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 24.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Stanford University, 'Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan', last updated on: 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

Introduction

This report was drafted by Country of Origin Information (COI) specialists from the COI units and asylum offices listed as authors under the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

The report aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for international protection status determination (PSD; refugee status and subsidiary protection). 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 in January 2016 and in November 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁾.

- Defining the terms of reference ⁽²⁰⁾

For the assessment of the need for refugee protection and subsidiary protection, especially taking into account article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD), the following are key elements

- a real risk of serious harm;
- an internal or international armed conflict;
- indiscriminate violence;
- the term civilian; and
- a serious and individual threat to life or person.

Based on various sources consulted by EASO ⁽²¹⁾, 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.

Members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference that were finalised by the co-authors in September 2014 taking all the inputs into account. In March 2015, EASO held a practical cooperation meeting on Afghanistan in Brussels, in which the participating EU+ countries ⁽²²⁾ gave feedback on the first EASO COI Report - Afghanistan Security Situation of January 2015.

⁽¹⁹⁾ EASO COI reports are available via EASO's website: [\(url\)](#).

⁽²⁰⁾ See annex 2.

⁽²¹⁾ 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 [\(url\)](#).

⁽²²⁾ EU+ countries are the EU Member States plus the associated countries Norway and Switzerland.

- Collecting information

This report is the third security situation update and presents information until 31 August 2017. A number of specialised paper-based and electronic sources were consulted.

The authors of the report additionally interviewed contact persons. For security reasons, not all contacts were named; the choice had to be made between not interviewing them at all, or referring to them as ‘anonymous sources’. Considering the value of the information provided, the latter approach was preferred.

In particular, one source was used as a standard for quantitative data on security incidents. A Western security official ⁽²³⁾ provided data on security incidents on a level of detail, per district, not available via any public source. The source has been assessed as highly reliable and as using a detailed and appropriate methodology for the collection of data on security incidents in conflict zones. The number and type of security incidents is an important indicator in the terms of reference of this report (see [Annex 2](#)) and is potentially very useful for the assessment of the situation in the different provinces and districts of Afghanistan. The information provided by the source is in line with trends or information provided by other (public) sources. The statistics provided by the source should not be used as conclusive for the assessment of the protection needs, but can be taken as indicative of security trends when read together with other indicators and information in this report.

The data are presented in tables in every provincial subchapter. The categories of violent incidents include several types of incidents, for example:

- Violent incidents targeting individuals: kidnapping, targeted killing, intimidation, harassment...
- Explosions: IED detonations, suicide bombings...
- Non-conflict related violent incidents: criminal activities, drug trade...
- Security enforcement: arrests, discovery of weapons caches...

In several provincial sections, reference is made to an International Organisation that for security reasons requested to remain anonymous. This international organization is active in almost all provinces in Afghanistan and is assessed by EASO as highly reliable. The organization provides EASO with background information on the provinces by e-mail during the drafting period of report.

Further, this report relies extensively on data 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 ⁽²⁴⁾. According to analysts, this stringent verification standard also means ‘there may be many more casualties than UNAMA is able to confirm’ ⁽²⁵⁾.

⁽²³⁾ Throughout the report referred to as :

Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, briefings, March 2017 and June 2017.

⁽²⁴⁾ UNAMA’s full description of their methodology can be found at: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 1-2.

⁽²⁵⁾ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., UNAMA Mid-Year Report 2017: Number of civilian casualties still at “record level”, 18 July 2017 ([url](#)).

Where deemed relevant, information coming from parties in the conflict has been added. This includes US Department of State ⁽²⁶⁾ and the Taliban's English websites ⁽²⁷⁾. While Taliban reports on casualties inflicted on the enemy or military equipment seized are probably exaggerated, sources indicate that they are fairly accurate concerning territorial gains ⁽²⁸⁾ and provide valuable information concerning their own command structure ⁽²⁹⁾. It should be noted that Western or Afghan media reports that cite local officials on casualties inflicted on AGEs and regained control over district centres are at times not accurate or exaggerated ⁽³⁰⁾.

- Quality control

In order to ensure that the authors 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.

Structure and use of this report

This report provides information on elements and indicators that may help in assessing the need for protection. It is not meant to be read as a whole. In the first part a general description is given on the security situation in Afghanistan and regional differences are highlighted. These are then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a regional description of geographic subdivisions (Kabul City and 34 provinces).

The provincial parts have the following structure: A general description of the province contains information on the geography and population; the background of the conflict takes a longer term look at the security situation in a province, including the actors active in the province. In the part on recent trends in the security situation, the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims are described within a timeframe from 1 September 2016 until 31 August 2017. Finally, a separate part is dedicated to population displacements caused by the conflict.

Both the general and regional parts, 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).

Provinces and districts

Contrary to previous reports, the provinces in this report are ranked alphabetically.

⁽²⁶⁾ <https://www.defense.gov/>

⁽²⁷⁾ <http://shahamat-english.com/>; <http://alemarah-english.com/>.

⁽²⁸⁾ See also: Roggio, B., Taliban claims it seized 3 districts in Takhar province, 29 September 2015 ([url](#)); Bernatis, V., The Taliban and Twitter: Tactical Reporting and Strategic Messaging, 2014 ([url](#)); LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists 'Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen', 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽³⁰⁾ See for example reporting on Musa Qala in Helmand in 2015: Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)).

There are a number of provinces and districts for which boundaries or status are unclear. For example, it is unclear whether the district of Gizab belongs to Uruzgan or Daykundi ⁽³¹⁾. Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Fayab ⁽³²⁾.

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

'[t]here 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' ⁽³³⁾.

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 ⁽³⁴⁾. However, as EASO's source for the incident numbers does not follow this mapping exactly, figures for Gizab ended up under several different districts in Uruzgan and certain numbers from the district of Baghran in Helmand were placed under Daikundi. EASO did not have the means to correct these figures according to the administrative divisions used by UNOCHA.

⁽³¹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Respons. Afghanistan: Gizab-distriktet, 11 December 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽³²⁾ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁾ Brittan, R., Managing Director Alcis, e-mail, 16 August 2017.

⁽³⁴⁾ All their relevant maps can be found here: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographics>

1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan

The so-called *Saur* Revolution on 27 April 1978 brought the Afghan communists to power ⁽³⁵⁾. In 1979, the government of the former Soviet Union (SU) invaded Afghanistan to support the communist Afghan government headed by Babrak Karmal. The invasion was followed by a decade of armed conflict between the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops, and armed opposition groups, often referred to as the ‘mujahideen’. These groups were divided into several different factions, but they all participated in a nation-wide armed uprising that lasted until the government finally collapsed in 1992, following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 ⁽³⁶⁾.

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as ‘Civil War’ saw different mujahideen groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fight for control of Afghanistan. War between the competing mujahideen factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches ⁽³⁷⁾. 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 ⁽³⁸⁾. 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 ⁽³⁹⁾.

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 ⁽⁴⁰⁾. By then, the Taliban had reorganised and engaged in an insurgency against the Karzai government. The latter was supported by an international coalition of armed forces. These anti-government elements (AGEs) initially infiltrated pockets in South and East Afghanistan. They extended their reach gradually to more areas and started to control territory ⁽⁴¹⁾. Other AGE groups operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/ Gulbuddin

⁽³⁵⁾ Barfield, T., *A Cultural and Political History*, 2010, pp. 195-225.

⁽³⁶⁾ Barfield, T., *A Cultural and Political History*, 2010, pp. 227-233, 238-239; BBC News, *Afghanistan profile – Timeline*, updated on: 30 October 2017 ([url](#)); Ipsos/ICRC, *Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey*, June 2009 ([url](#)), p. 10; Oxfam International, *The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009*, November 2009, available at: ([url](#)), pp. 7-9.

⁽³⁷⁾ Barfield, T., *A Cultural and Political History*, 2010, p. 253.

⁽³⁸⁾ Zaeef, A. S., *My Life with the Taliban*, 2010, p. 10; ICG, *The Insurgency in Afghanistan’ Heartland*, 17 June 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 3-4; Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., *Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011*, January 2012 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽³⁹⁾ Barfield, T., *A Cultural and Political History*, 2010, pp. 248-254 and 258-262; BBC, *Afghanistan profile – Timeline*, updated on: 30 October 2017 ([url](#)); Ipsos/ICRC, *Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey*, June 2009 ([url](#)), p. 10; Oxfam International, *The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009*, November 2009 available at: ([url](#)), pp. 9-12.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Oxfam International, *The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009*, November 2009 available at: ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁴¹⁾ CS Monitor, *Taliban appears to be regrouped and well-funded*, 8 May 2003 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., *Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011*, January 2012 ([url](#)), p. 44; Roggio, B., *Taliban contest or control large areas of Afghanistan*, 2 December 2009 ([url](#)); *New York Times* (The), *Taliban Making Military Gains in Afghanistan*, 26 July 2014 ([url](#)); Osman, B. and Muzhary, F., *Jihadi Commuters: How the Taleban cross the Durand Line*, 17 October 2017 ([url](#)).

Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani network, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) ⁽⁴²⁾. This insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and suicide bombs and complex ⁽⁴³⁾ attacks, intimidation of civilians and targeted killings to destabilise the country. This was countered by searches, clearance operations and bombings by the ANSF and international military forces ⁽⁴⁴⁾. The security situation rapidly deteriorated from 2006, leading to more direct and open armed confrontations ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Between 2001 and 2010, AGEs gradually infiltrated and gained ground in the different provinces of Afghanistan ⁽⁴⁶⁾. From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread into all regions of Afghanistan. By the end of 2014, a transition of security responsibility from international troops to the ANSF was realised. Most foreign troops withdrew as Afghan command took over ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

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, who belongs to the Jamiaat-e Islami. In its first two years in power, the NUG was deeply divided and often unable to make strategic decisions ⁽⁴⁸⁾. According to the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN) in January 2017, 'its complex power-sharing arrangements has paralysed governance in Afghanistan' ⁽⁴⁹⁾. Its popularity is further undermined by increasing security problems ⁽⁵⁰⁾. A series of violent events in Kabul in May-June 2017 (see the chapter on [Kabul City](#)) caused a political crisis, resulting in a 'significant shift in the political climate' marked by a rift between President Ghani and key members of the Jamiaat-e Islami party ⁽⁵¹⁾.

⁽⁴²⁾ ICG, 'The Insurgency in Afghanistan' Heartland, 17 June 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 14-15; UN Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', 18 June 2014 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁴³⁾ See [glossary](#).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahim, N., 'Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011', January 2012 ([url](#)); UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Midyear Report 2014', July 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Ipsos/ICRC, 'Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey, June 2009' ([url](#)), p. 10; Geiß, R. and Siegrist, M., 'Has the armed conflict in Afghanistan affected the rules on the conduct of hostilities?', March 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 17-21; UN Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', 7 March 2014 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security' ([url](#)), 18 June 2014.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahim, N., 'Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011', January 2012 ([url](#)), p. 44.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ NATO, 'Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead', updated on: 7 January 2015 ([url](#)); NATO, 'Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan', updated on: 10 November 2017 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan', 15 May 2015 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Asia Foundation, 'A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015', 17 November 2015 ([url](#)), p. 95; UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan', 19 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 12; UN Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', 10 June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ AAN, 'What to Watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017', 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Asia Foundation, 'A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015', 17 November 2015, p. 95; UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan', 19 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 12; UN Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', 10 June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁵¹⁾ UN Secretary-General, 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security', 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

According to AAN, crises and conflicts in the government ‘risk further escalating ethnic, religious and geographical tensions’. However ‘[t]he rifts, for the moment, are not expected to be bad enough to pull the country or the government apart’, according to AAN ⁽⁵²⁾. The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG ⁽⁵³⁾ and in the first eight months of 2017, the NUG made progress on high-level appointments, ‘which had previously been a source of tension ⁽⁵⁴⁾. After a mass-casualty attack on a military hospital in Kabul in March 2017, the Minister of Defence, Minister of Interior and Director of NDS all survived a vote of no-confidence, yet after another major attack on an army base in Mazar-e Sharif in April 2017, the Minister of Defence and the Army Chief-of-Staff both resigned ⁽⁵⁵⁾.

The Independent Elections Commission set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections: 7 July 2018. In September 2017, the UN called this timeline ‘ambitious’ but ‘achievable’ ⁽⁵⁶⁾. On the other hand, the UN also observes that ‘many parties and civil society organizations have expressed scepticism about the will and the capacity of the Government to organize credible elections, citing both security concerns and doubts about the independence of the Independent Election Commission’ ⁽⁵⁷⁾. In anticipation of these elections, a number of opposition coalitions were formed ⁽⁵⁸⁾, some of them including members of the current government ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

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 ⁽⁶⁰⁾. 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* ⁽⁶¹⁾. After the death of Mullah Omar was revealed in July 2015, a power struggle broke out within the Taliban. This power struggle, at least in part, prevented further progress in the peace talks ⁽⁶²⁾.

⁽⁵²⁾ AAN, What to Watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ 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.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, US trying to reduce differences between govt, Turkey-borne alliance: Reports, 16 September 2017 ([url](#)), accessed 9 October 2017.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁶¹⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 27 February 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 1-3; Rupert, J., Urgent Imperative: Get Afghanistan’s Government Working, 10 December 2015 ([url](#)); UN Security Council, June 2015 Monthly Forecast, Afghanistan, 1 March 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 1-2.

⁽⁶²⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

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⁽⁶³⁾. In 2017, President Ghani offered the Taliban a 'last chance' for reconciliation in the 'Kabul-process'⁽⁶⁴⁾. But '[t]here was no discernible progress on peace talks between the Government and the Taliban in 2017'⁽⁶⁵⁾. Although the Kabul Process is the first real Afghan-owned peace effort, the Taliban are said to have no incentive to proceed peace at a time they seem stronger than any time before since 2001⁽⁶⁶⁾.

In 2016, the government signed a peace deal with the Hizb-e Islami/Gulbuddin (HIG). But with HIG described by sources as a 'fading insurgent group', the likely effect of this deal on the battlefield has been described by analyst and researcher Osman as 'unlikely to significantly lower the current levels of violence'⁽⁶⁷⁾. Hekmatyar's return in May 2017 took place at a time of flux in Afghan politics, which is partly driven by increased jockeying among political figures ahead of the 2019 presidential elections⁽⁶⁸⁾.

1.4 International context

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. The US are expected to send 4,000 extra troops to Afghanistan⁽⁶⁹⁾. As of August 2017, there are an estimated 11,000 US troops in Afghanistan⁽⁷⁰⁾. Around 7,000 of them are part of the 13,500-strong international NATO force that is training and advising the Afghan military, the Resolute Support Mission⁽⁷¹⁾. President Trump also said that 'the United States would put significant new pressure on Pakistan to crack down on the terrorist sanctuaries that line its border with Afghanistan'⁽⁷²⁾.

In 2016 and 2017 Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan were tense⁽⁷³⁾. Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists and border tensions have escalated⁽⁷⁴⁾. In 2016, nearly 600,000 Afghan refugees returned from Pakistan, many of them under pressure from the Pakistani authorities⁽⁷⁵⁾. Pakistan also temporarily closed the border-crossing in Torkham and Spin Boldak several times in the year⁽⁷⁶⁾ and started building the border fence

⁽⁶³⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ DW, Ashraf Ghani offers Taliban 'last chance' for peace, 6 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Diplomat (The), Kabul Process Falters as Taliban Support Rises, 10 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Osman, B., Peace With Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?, 29 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017, p. 1 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁾ New York Times (The), Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁾ New York Times (The), U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁾ NATO, Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures, May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁾ New York Times (The), Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Daily Pakistan, Pakistan desires peace, stability in Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif, 2 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁵⁾ HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

(⁷⁷). In May and June 2017, there were deadly clashes between border forces of the two countries at the main Torkham crossing. The fighting left several soldiers dead and dozens more wounded on both sides (⁷⁸). Regular ‘cross border shelling’ from both sides caused displacement from villages near the border in the east and south eastern Afghan provinces that border Pakistan (⁷⁹).

Border tensions with Pakistan have also cut off trade, caused damages of up to \$90 million (⁸⁰), and decreased access to health care for Afghans who cross the border to obtain it in Pakistan (⁸¹).

In 2017, there were several accounts of Russia and Iran actively supporting the Taliban (⁸²).

1.5 Actors in the conflict

1.5.1 Pro-Government Forces (PGF)

The Pro-Government Forces (PGF) consist of: the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); Pro-Government Militias (PGM); and the International Military Forces (IMF) (⁸³).

In 2016, UNAMA attributed 24 % of civilian casualties to Pro-Government Forces (⁸⁴); in the first nine months of 2017, PGF were responsible for 20 % of all civilian casualties in the conflict (⁸⁵).

1.5.1.1 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are ‘umbrella’ terms that include Afghan Border Police (ABP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Special Forces and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) (⁸⁶). The ANSF was set up with an anticipated recruitment of 352,000 (soldiers and police) but

(⁷⁸) BBC News, Clash erupts on Afghan-Pakistan border, 5 May 2017 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan-Pakistan border clashes kill two soldiers, 14 June 2017 ([url](#)); The Express Tribune, Torkham border reopens after five days of clashes, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁷⁹) Pajhwok Afghan News, Cross border shelling: Kabul complains to UN, 8 March 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Afghan villagers flee Pakistani cross-border firing: aid group, 20 February 2017 ([url](#)); Nation (The), Pakistan lodges protest with Afghanistan after cross-border shelling leaves 11 dead at Chaman, 5 May 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁰) First Post, Pakistan closes Durand Line, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸¹) Pajhwok, Patients, hospitals suffering due to cross-border tension, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸²) 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 December 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Afghan Governor Accuses Iran Of Supporting Taliban, 31 July 2017 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9. Some observers are more sceptical about Russian direct involvement. See: Atlantic (the), Is Russia Really Arming the Taliban?, 25 August 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸³) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 109-110.

(⁸⁴) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

(⁸⁵) UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

(⁸⁶) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 105.

never reached that goal ⁽⁸⁷⁾. In 2017, ANSF saw an modest increase in force strength and reached the number of 330,000 ⁽⁸⁸⁾. 'Although recruiting has generally kept pace with attrition, retention has not. As attrition levels remain high, the ANDSF becomes younger and less experienced as new personnel replace those with combat experience' ⁽⁸⁹⁾.

The attrition rate over the last three years is on average 2.20 %, with drop-out (soldiers not returning after leave) representing 70 % of the attrition ⁽⁹⁰⁾. However, acknowledging problems with the accuracy of these numbers, SIGAR cites the following ANSF casualty rates: between 1 January 2017 and 8 May 2017, 2,531 ANSF members were killed in action, and 4,238 wounded ⁽⁹¹⁾. Afghan soldiers are killed at a rate of 140 per week, up from 130 per week in the beginning of 2017 ⁽⁹²⁾. According to the US Department of State (USDOS), ANSF casualty rates have steadily increased since 2015 ⁽⁹³⁾.

Often, the names of the dead, as well as defectors, are not taken off personnel lists, allowing for their pay cheques to continue to be remitted ⁽⁹⁴⁾. This results in an unknown number of 'ghost personnel' ⁽⁹⁵⁾. As from January 2017, measures were undertaken to correctly register and validate ANSF personnel ⁽⁹⁶⁾. As a result, in early 2017, the US military stopped in payment of salaries to 30,000 soldiers believed to be 'ghost soldiers' ⁽⁹⁷⁾.

In 2017, the Afghan government started implementing a four year 'Road Map' to streamline and bolster the ANSF. The aim of the plan is to ensure the government's control over population centers by tackling leadership issues, resource management and rampant corruption, and by doubling the size and combat power of the Special Forces, strengthening the air component, and moving the police away from a combat missions to civil policing ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

Afghan National Army (ANA)

The ANA reports to the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and is part of the armed forces of Afghanistan ⁽⁹⁹⁾. As of May 2017, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported a total of 180,031 ANA staff ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. ANA strength (including the Afghan Air Force (AAF) but not civilians) has steadily increased two quarters in a row in 2017 and the attrition rate has slightly decreased but still remains the problem. To decrease the potential for local influence, the ANA does not allow soldiers to serve in their home areas.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 99.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽⁹¹⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 100.

⁽⁹²⁾ Bureau of Investigative Journalism (The), How "ghost soldiers" could frustrate Trump's plans for Afghanistan, 25 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³⁾ USDOD; Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 25.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Bureau of Investigative Journalism (The), How "ghost soldiers" could frustrate Trump's plans for Afghanistan, 25 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 102.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 102-103.

⁽⁹⁷⁾ Tolo News, U.S Stops Salaries Of 30,000 Ghost Soldiers, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 94; USDOD; Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 2-3; Marty, F. J., Expanding Afghanistan's Special Operations Forces: Doubling their success or further diluting their mission?, 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 41.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 100.

The policy has resulted in increased transportation costs and obstacles for soldiers attempting to take leave, contributing to absences without leave ⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

The ANA is organised into one division and six regional corps, plus Special Forces units and the Air Force. Each corps typically comprises three to four infantry brigades and various specialty battalions. In addition, two Mobile Strike Force brigades (with wheeled medium-armored vehicles) provide an additional seven Mobile Strike Force battalions based in Kabul and Kandahar ⁽¹⁰²⁾.

As part of the government's 'Road Map' the army will be strengthened by incorporating the Afghan Border Police and Afghan National Civil Order Police into the ANA, a transfer of in total 40,000 personnel. The number of Special Forces (ANA Special Operations Command or ANASOC) will be doubled. ANASOC will be upgraded from a division to a corps and its manpower raised from 11,300 to 23,300 ⁽¹⁰³⁾. Besides these initiatives, the Afghan government and US officials are courting the idea of establishing a new paramilitary force under the command of the Ministry of Defense, creating an 'Afghan Territorial Army', comparable to the ALP under the Ministry of Interior ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾.

The Afghan Air Force (AAF) is increasingly operational, acquiring ever more aircraft and increasingly being deployed in the battlefield ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. However, this growing capability comes at an increasing civilian cost: civilian casualties from airstrikes rose from 41 in 2014 to 232 in 2017 (first six months) ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. In the first nine months of 2017, UNAMA documented a 52 % increase in civilian casualties from airstrikes ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾. Co-founder and director at the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) Kate Clark, stated that 'many more Afghan civilians have been killed and injured in air strikes', however, she notes that

'it is impossible to determine whether, proportionate to the number of strikes, more civilians are being killed and injured (which would indicate poorer efforts to protect civilian casualties) or not. In calculating the overall calculus of civilian harm from air strikes, the decrease in casualties from ground engagements, which may partly be a result of the increased air deterrent on the Taliban, would also need to be factored in. Nevertheless, there are elements of the US and Afghan strategy to increase the use of air strikes which already ring alarm bells' ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.

Afghan National Police (ANP)

The ANP is the police force under the Ministry of Interior (MoI). As of April 2017, SIGAR reported it had 156,011 staff, 2% of it women ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾. It has several specialised divisions: the

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 106.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ USIP, Afghanistan national Defense and Security Forces, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽¹⁰³⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 94, 106-107; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 2-3; Marty, F. J., Expanding Afghanistan's Special Operations Forces: Doubling their success or further diluting their mission?, 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Clark, K., More Militias? Part 1: Déjà vu double plus with the proposed 'Afghan Territorial Army', 21 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 111-115; Reuters, New U.S. helicopters mark major change for Afghan air force, 3 October 2017 ([url](#)); Foreign Policy, Building the Afghan Air Force Will Take Years, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 52-53.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 100, 115, 119.

Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP – more than 110,000 personnel), the Afghan Border Police (ABP), the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and MoI Headquarters and Institutional Support (MoI HQ & IS) ⁽¹¹⁰⁾. The ANP can undertake law enforcement, public protection, civil order, and criminal investigation efforts. However, because of the ongoing insurgency and ANA's low force concentration, most ANP units are employed as counterinsurgency forces complementing the ANA ⁽¹¹¹⁾. As part of the 'ANSF Road Map', however, paramilitary police elements such as the Afghan Border Police and the Afghan National Civil Order police are being transferred from the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Defense, and thus incorporated into the army ⁽¹¹²⁾.

The Afghan National Police's geographical zones approximately match those of the ANA Corps boundaries, but not entirely ⁽¹¹³⁾.

Afghan Local Police (ALP)

In August 2010, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was created as a security initiative led by the Ministry of Interior and funded by the US government. Officially, the ALP reports to the MoI at national level but, in practice, since June 2015, it has been subordinated to the Afghan Uniformed Police, however it is not counted as part of the ANSF's authorised end strength ⁽¹¹⁴⁾. SIGAR states that the ALP members are selected by village elders or local power brokers to protect their communities against Taliban attack, to guard facilities and to conduct local counterinsurgency missions ⁽¹¹⁵⁾. According to SIGAR, ALP district leaders and checkpoint leaders coordinate the ALP's daily activities. The guardians, the lowest rank, make up the overwhelming majority of ALP personnel ⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

As of May 2017, the ALP had almost 30,000 personnel in 199 districts of 31 provinces, of whom 25,000 were fully trained ⁽¹¹⁷⁾. ALP members often supply their own weapons and are paid salaries of about \$100 or more per month, a smaller amount than what soldiers and police make. Some are not paid on time and according to allegations, some ALP units supplement its income through illegal means. ALP members have sustained disproportionately heavy casualties because they are often deployed in remote areas ⁽¹¹⁸⁾ and are particularly targeted by the Taliban which, according to Kate Clark, 'suggests that in some places at least, they are a difficult enemy for the insurgents to deal with' ⁽¹¹⁹⁾.

Based on an overview of different studies on the ALP, some ALP-groups are considered to have brought stability and security and welcomed by communities. Other ALP units, especially those who are imposed on communities, were more problematic. This is especially the case

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 115.

⁽¹¹¹⁾ Jalali, A. A., Afghanistan national Defense and Security Forces, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹¹²⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 106-107; UN, p.5

⁽¹¹³⁾ SIGAR, Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan, September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 121.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 107; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 104; LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)); Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 103.

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 107, SIGAR, A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction, October 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 1,2, 9.

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 100; Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP Forces Keep Security in 40pc of Afghanistan: Official, 10 July 2016 ([url](#)); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 104; Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

in the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Baghlan and Kunduz and in certain districts in Uruzgan, Ghazni and Wardak ⁽¹²⁰⁾.

Several difficulties concerning the ALP were reported, including low-morale, problems with supplying needed equipment and allegations of selling ammunition to the Taliban, serious misconduct and human-rights violations ⁽¹²¹⁾. In 2016, UNAMA reported on serious abuses by ALP. The MOI declared that ALP has been largely cleared of influence from local warlords and some 240 ALP members were prosecuted because of human-rights violations ⁽¹²²⁾. Yet, in the first six months of 2017, UNAMA documented, compared to the same period in 2016,

- an increase in incidents,
- an increase of the number of the civilian casualties targeted by ALP from 11 to 28 (although, most casualties occurred from one incident),
- an increase in the number civilian casualties from ground engagements, where ALP responded to an AGE attack, from 10 to 24 ⁽¹²³⁾.

1.5.1.2 Pro-Government Militias (PGM)

UNAMA defines a pro-government armed group as:

‘an organized armed non-State actor engaged in conflict and distinct from Government Forces, rebels 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. Armed groups have the capacity to employ arms in the use of force to achieve political, ideological or other objectives; are not within the formal military structures of States, State-alliances or intergovernmental organizations; and are not under the control of the State(s) in which they operate. In some cases, armed groups receive direct/indirect support of the host Government 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 (when such groups are clearly not under State control)’ ⁽¹²⁴⁾.

A specific local security structure that has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years is the *arbaki*, community or tribal armies ⁽¹²⁵⁾. 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

⁽¹²⁰⁾ Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁾ ICG, The Future of the Afghan Local Police ([url](#)), 4 June 2015, page I; LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Midyear Report 2015, August 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 69-72; Daily Outlook, ALP in Kunduz Demand Heavy Weapons Against Taliban, 17 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP Forces Keep Security in 40pc of Afghanistan: Official, 10 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 59.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 69-70.

⁽¹²⁵⁾ 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.

paramilitary initiatives have all ceased except for the ALP (see [section on ALP](#)), now operating within the official security structures ⁽¹²⁶⁾.

In 2015, the government developed a ‘National Uprising Support Strategy’ to cover areas in Afghanistan where it had little military presence. The NDS reportedly approached village or tribal elders to support uprisings against the AGEs, by urging group members to form armed groups varying from 22 to 500 fighters, commanded by NDS or ANP ⁽¹²⁷⁾. 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 Guardian ‘various militias and personal armed groups also battle among themselves over political influence’ ⁽¹²⁸⁾.

Such groups have been accused of serious human-rights abuses, misuse of weapons, having political connections with powerful individuals, and lack of knowledge of humanitarian law. Cases of extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, threats, intimidation and harassment, theft, assaults and even indiscriminate attacks on civilians were documented, especially in the North and North-East of Afghanistan ⁽¹²⁹⁾. In the first half of 2017, UNAMA documented abuses by pro-Government armed groups especially in Faryab, but also in Jawzjan, Samangan, Daikundi, Khost, Kunduz, and Balkh provinces ⁽¹³⁰⁾. Because of the links these local militia often have to local or national powerbrokers, their human rights abuses often occur in an atmosphere of impunity ⁽¹³¹⁾. According to a report by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), an independent US institute working on conflicts and security, the main reason for Taliban inroads in the northern provinces since 2010 is attributed to the abusive behavior of local commanders formed under the anti-Taliban uprising movement ⁽¹³²⁾.

1.5.1.3 International Military Forces (IMF)

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

‘International Military Forces’ include all foreign troops forming part of NATO-led Operation Resolute Support (formerly International Security Assistance Force, ISAF) and other US Forces in Afghanistan (including Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, which replaced Operation Enduring Freedom on 1 January 2015) who are under the Commander of Resolute Support (COM-RS), who is also Commander of the US Forces in Afghanistan. The term also encompasses Special Operations Forces and other foreign intelligence and security forces’ ⁽¹³³⁾.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, September 2011 ([url](#)); Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, 2 April 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 65-66.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ Guardian; Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military ignores situation, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)); LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60; HRW, Afghanistan: Forces Linked to Vice President Terrorize Villagers, 31 July 2016 ([url](#)); HRW, Today we shall all die, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)), p. 73; Irinnews, Abuses rise along with pro-Afghan government militias, 7 September 2015 ([url](#)); Guardian (The), Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military ignores situation, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Takhar residents complain on illegal armed group’s tyranny 14 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽¹³¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 94; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 60-61.

⁽¹³²⁾ Jalali, A. A., Afghanistan national Defense and Security Forces, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽¹³³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 69.

Transition and Operation Resolute Support

From 2010, the process of gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF was implemented, to be completed by the end of 2014⁽¹³⁴⁾. From 2012, countries started withdrawing troops from combat missions in Afghanistan and ending military operations in Afghanistan⁽¹³⁵⁾. 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 (RS), with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF⁽¹³⁶⁾.

According to NATO, the total Resolute Support Mission strength was almost 13,500 in March 2017, of which just under 7,000 were US troops⁽¹³⁷⁾, down from a peak of about 100,000 in 2011⁽¹³⁸⁾. The second largest contributing country to RS is Italy, with over 1,000 troops in Afghanistan. In total, 39 countries contribute to RS⁽¹³⁹⁾. However, the US is the only country that continues to operate combat missions in Afghanistan⁽¹⁴⁰⁾.

The exact number of US troops, however is unclear. According to the US Department of State in June 2017, the US maintains approximately 8,400 military personnel in Afghanistan as part of Operation Freedom's Sentinel while the New York Times also mentions an additional 2,000 'to help local forces conduct counterterrorism missions'. US troops amount to approximately 11,000 in different functions⁽¹⁴¹⁾.

In August 2017, President Donald Trump promised to deploy more American troops to Afghanistan to continue to train Afghan forces, however, he refused to provide an estimated number⁽¹⁴²⁾. The number of additional US troops to be deployed in Afghanistan is assumed to be around 3,500 to 4,000⁽¹⁴³⁾. US forces rely ever more on airstrikes, at a rate not seen since 2012, at the height of the US 'surge'⁽¹⁴⁴⁾, in what the US and NATO commander called 'a tidal wave of air power'⁽¹⁴⁵⁾. According to Kate Clark, the US Airforce is also said to have

⁽¹³⁴⁾ NATO, *Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead*, updated on: 7 January 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁵⁾ CNN, *France pulls last troops from combat roles in Afghanistan*, 20 December 2012 ([url](#)); Canada, *Canadian Armed Forces completes military mission in Afghanistan*, 12 March 2014 ([url](#)); CNN, *UK formally ends combat mission in Afghanistan*, 26 October 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁶⁾ NATO, *Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan*, updated on: 27 February 2015 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan*, 15 May 2015 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹³⁷⁾ NATO, *Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures*, March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁾ SIGAR, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 70.

⁽¹³⁹⁾ NATO, *Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures*, March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Clark, K., *UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war*, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁾ *New York Times (The)*, *U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed*, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²⁾ *New York Times (The)*, *Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details*, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); CNN, *Five key pieces of Trump's Afghanistan plan*, 22 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴³⁾ *New York Times (The)*, *U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed*, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)); *Washington Post (The)*, *Trump announces new strategy for Afghanistan that calls for a troop increase*, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); Clark, K., *UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war*, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ US Air Forces Central Command – Combined Air Operations Center, *Combined Forces Air Component Commander - 2012-2017 Airpower Statistics*, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ *Times (The)*, *US bombing missions in Afghanistan are the heaviest since 2010*, 13 October 2017 ([url](#)).

loosened its restrictions on when airstrikes can be ordered in, resulting in a steep rise in civilian casualties from airstrikes ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

1.5.2 Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

UNAMA defines ‘Anti-Government Elements’ (also referred to as insurgents) as ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾:

‘All individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with, or armed opposition against, the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as “Taliban” as well as individuals and non-State organized armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels including the Haqqani Network, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as “Daesh” and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict’ ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾.

Besides the main AGE forces (Taliban, including the Haqqani network), several smaller groups have (re)appeared that are often even more radical than the Taliban. Examples of such groups are: the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾, The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Jundullah ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾, Feday-e Mahaz (suicide brigade); Mullah Dadullah Front; Jihadi Shura of Mujahidin for Unity and Understanding ⁽¹⁵¹⁾; Tora Bora Front; Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia and the Latif Mansur Network ⁽¹⁵²⁾. According to the USDOS ‘[t]he presence of as many as 20 terrorist organizations creates the largest concentration of terrorist and extremist organizations in the world and a complex threat environment’ ⁽¹⁵³⁾.

According to an article in the International Business Times, IS and the Taliban share the goal of overthrowing the Afghan government, although ‘the former views itself as part of a global movement, while the latter confines its operations to Afghanistan’ ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾.

According to UNAMA, ‘Anti-Government Elements caused the majority - 64 % - of civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2017 of which it attributed 66 % to the Taliban and 10 % to Daesh/ISKP. The remainder was attributed to unidentified Anti-Government Elements, including self-proclaimed ISKP groups ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.

Most of the groups mentioned in this chapter were set up in prior phases of Afghanistan’s recent conflict history, even dating back to the first mujahideen period in the 1970s ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 99.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 66.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ RFE/RL, Taliban Splinter Groups Add To Election Fears In Afghanistan, 13 March 2014.

⁽¹⁵²⁾ UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 3, 6.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ IBT, ISIS letter reveals tribal rifts in Afganistan faction amid war with Taliban and US, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 3-5.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Gopal, A. and Strick van Linschoten, A., Ideology in the Afghan Taliban, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)); Sanderson, T, Kimmage, D. and Gordon, D., From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan: The Evolving Threat of Central Asian Jihadists, March 2010 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., How it all began, 19 January 2013 ([url](#)).

However, more details about their respective backgrounds do not fall within the scope of this report.

Taliban

Thomas Ruttig, co-founder and director of the AAN, stated in August 2017 that ‘the Taliban remain the strongest component among the insurgents by far’ ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾.

The Taliban leadership ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 and regrouped after it was ousted from power. The different groups have varying operational autonomy but there is a governing system under the Leadership Council with several regional and local layers. They have a military council and a command structure with, at the lowest level, front commanders overseeing a group of fighters ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾. The governing structure and military command is defined in the Taliban’s *Lahya* or Code of Conduct ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾.

The present leader of Taliban movement is Haibatullah Akhunzada, the Taliban’s former chief justice. He is believed to be a member of the Noorzai tribe from Kandahar. Serajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, son of Mullah Omar, were announced as deputies ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾. They refer to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan ⁽¹⁶¹⁾.

There is a dissident group of Taliban around Mullah Mohammad Rasool that do not recognise the leadership of Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada ⁽¹⁶²⁾. They are referred to as ‘The High Council of the Islamic Emirate’ ⁽¹⁶³⁾.

Sources of the Norwegian Country of Origin service, LandInfo, describe the Taliban fighters in two types: full time professional fighters, often recruited in the *madrassas*, and part-time local fighters, loyal to a local commander and embedded in the local society ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾. According to Dr. Antonio Giustozzi ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ in 2017, the total Taliban manpower exceeds 200,000, of which 150,000 are fighters. These fighters are to be divided in around 60,000 members of full time mobile units, the rest being local militias ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾. Researcher Matt Waldman quoted by Voice of America (VOA), also estimated the core Taliban force to be over 60,000 in 2014 ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾. The militias hail from local communities that support the Taliban, the mobile units are composed of full time fighters and bear the brunt of the fighting ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾. Since 2015, the Taliban deploy their own ‘special forces’ called Red Units, or Red Brigades. These units have access to better training, better equipment and newer weapons and are generally used as ‘rapid reaction force’ for

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Recruitment by armed groups, September 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 13-14; EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 13-15.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Clark, K., The *Lahya*. Calling the Taleban to Account, 4 July 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Osman, B., Taleban in Transition: How Mansur’s death and Haibatullah’s ascension may affect the war (and peace), 27 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ See: <https://alemarah-english.com/>

⁽¹⁶²⁾ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A. and Mangal, S., An Interview with Mullah Rasool on Reconciliation Between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, 16 March 2016 ([url](#)); CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6; IBT, Afghan Taliban Faction Names Mullah Mohammad Rasool As Rival Leader, 11 February 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 8-9.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ Antonio Giustozzi is an independent researcher and visiting professor at King’s College London, and author of several articles, papers and books on the Taliban.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12-13.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ VOA, Despite Massive Taliban Death Toll No Drop in Insurgency, 6 March 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12-13.

quick interventions and special operations ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. Dr. Giustozzi puts their number at ‘approximately 7,500’ ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾.

The large majority of the members of Taliban are still Pashtuns, although there is a growing minority of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Baluchis, and even several hundred Hazara members (including Shias). In some areas in the North the Taliban are already predominantly non-Pashtuns, as they draw recruits from the local population ⁽¹⁷¹⁾.

For further information on the structure, leadership, force strength and aims and objectives of the Taliban, please refer to the *EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽¹⁷²⁾. For more information on the local Taliban fronts and recruitment practices, please refer to the *EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups* from September 2016 ⁽¹⁷³⁾ and Landinfo’s *Report Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban*, dated 29 June 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾.

In 2017 Taliban’s spring offensive was named ‘Operation Mansouri’ ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾. Pro-government forces were attacked in Badakhshan, Kunduz, Farah, Ghor, Faryab, Kandahar, Paktiya, Baghlan, Helmand and Uruzgan ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾. Confronted with ANSF increasingly retreating from the rural areas ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ and relying much more on air power (see [Afghan National Army](#)), the Taliban has, according to UNAMA, engaged in less ground engagements in 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾. Also, the Taliban did not take any effort to overrun a major population centre in the first nine months of 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾. In contrast, UNAMA documented a ‘disturbing trend of intentional killings targeting religious leaders, civilians perceived to support the Government or Afghan national security forces, and continued attacks against civilian Government workers and judicial and prosecutorial figures’ ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾. See *EASO COI Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽¹⁸¹⁾ for more details on the Taliban targeting campaign.

According to Dr. Giustozzi, the Taliban’s governance system tends to follow the spread of the Taliban’s military forces: it was originally installed in remote areas, but has in recent years been extended to more heavily populated areas as the territory controlled by the Afghan

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ RFE/RL, *Explainer: Taliban ‘Special Forces Unit’ Bursts Into Spotlight With Deadly Attacks*, 4 December 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, *Taliban touts “Special Forces Unit”*, 6 November 2017 ([url](#)); Times (The), *Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics*, 21 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., *The Red Brigade: the Taliban’s special forces play growing role in conflict*, 5 December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., *Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure*, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13; Ali, O., *The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan*, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)); Ali, O., *Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul*, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)); Ali, O., *The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study*, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)); Ali, O., *Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan*, 18 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷²⁾ EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict*, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³⁾ EASO, *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Recruitment by armed groups*, September 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 14-16.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ Landinfo, *Report Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban*, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 8-11.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), *Statement of the Islamic Emirate regarding the Inauguration of the Spring Offensive ‘Operation Mansouri’*, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ Indian Defence Review, *‘OP Mansouri’ gains momentum in Afghanistan*, 13 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the US Congress*, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p.101; USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ UNAMA, *Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017*, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ Clark, K., *UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war*, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ UNAMA, *Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017*, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict*, December 2017 ([url](#)).

government has been shrinking after 2015 ⁽¹⁸²⁾. See [1.9.3 Government versus Taliban control](#) for a further discussion on the extent of Taliban control. According to Antonio Giustozzi, in August 2017, ‘over 20 district centres are administered by the Taliban, who have taken over the town administrations with the officials who stayed in places and replacing those who fled with their own appointees, under a Taliban mayor. Among the most important towns and bazaars controlled by the Taliban are Musa Qala and Sangin in Helmand’ ⁽¹⁸³⁾. Still according to Dr. Giustozzi, criminal policing and jurisdiction carried out by the shadow judges is ‘arguably an important aspect of Taliban governance’ ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾. In the areas Taliban hold, the Taliban are said to have brought ‘some security - albeit with limited freedoms’ ⁽¹⁸⁵⁾. For more information on the Taliban parallel courts system, see EASO COI Report *Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ and EASO COI Report *Afghanistan - Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* ⁽¹⁸⁷⁾.

Haqqani network

The Haqqani network is an insurgent network in the south-east of Afghanistan, with its origins in the 1970s mujahideen groups. Its leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, has attacked Afghan government officials since 1971 ⁽¹⁸⁸⁾. It is believed he fled to Pakistan in late 2001. Due to his age, he handed over the de facto leadership of the group to his son, Serajuddin Haqqani. Although the network has maintained an autonomous position, structure and its own modus operandi, it is considered part of the Taliban ⁽¹⁸⁹⁾. Serajuddin Haqqani was appointed as a deputy leader of the Taliban in July 2015 ⁽¹⁹⁰⁾.

The USDOS believes the Haqqani Network has ‘several hundred core members, but it is estimated that the organization is able to draw upon a pool of upwards of 10,000 fighters’ ⁽¹⁹¹⁾. ‘The Haqqani Network is active along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and across much of southeastern Afghanistan, particularly in Loya Paktia (which consists of Paktia, Paktika, and Khost provinces, and includes parts of Logar and Ghazni), and has repeatedly targeted Kabul in its attacks’ ⁽¹⁹²⁾. The group's leadership has historically maintained a power base around Pakistan's tribal areas ⁽¹⁹³⁾.

⁽¹⁸²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Taliban’s organization and structure 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁸³⁾ Giustozzi, A., Taliban’s organization and structure 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ Giustozzi, A., Taliban’s organization and structure 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 15-16.

⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ BBC, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants, 8 June 2017 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Taliban’s organization and structure 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ Ruttig, T., Talking Haqqani, 1 July 2010 ([url](#)); USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Haqqani Network (HQN), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 399-400.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ LWJ, Taliban again affirms Haqqani Network is an integral part of group, 2 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ Ruttig, T., The New Taleban Deputy Leaders: Is there an obvious successor to Akhtar Mansur?, 10 February 2016 ([url](#)); USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Haqqani Network (HQN), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 399-400.

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Haqqani Network (HQN), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 400.

⁽¹⁹²⁾ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Haqqani Network (HQN), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 400.

⁽¹⁹³⁾ VOA, What is the Haqqani Network? 1 June 2017 ([url](#)).

Al Qaeda and affiliated groups

In June 2014, the UN Secretary-General reported for the last time on incidents linked to al Qaeda in the east of Afghanistan and its affiliated groups mainly operating from Pakistan⁽¹⁹⁴⁾. Al Qaeda-related groups were reportedly not organised under a coordinated leadership but they contribute to security problems in border regions with Pakistan⁽¹⁹⁵⁾. In August 2015, the leader of al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, pledged allegiance to the Taliban⁽¹⁹⁶⁾. In October 2015, the US military bombed large al Qaeda training camps in Kandahar province⁽¹⁹⁷⁾.

Terrorism watch blog Long War Journal (LWJ) stated in December 2017 that Al Qaeda remains loyal to the Taliban and continues to train Taliban fighters and fight along Taliban in Afghanistan⁽¹⁹⁸⁾. According to the US Department of Defense, the threat of al Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2017 has decreased and the organisation is 'primarily focused on its own survival and its efforts to regenerate'⁽¹⁹⁹⁾. Still, the US asserts that its 'counterterrorism efforts remain focused on defeating al Qaeda and its associates'⁽²⁰⁰⁾. In November 2016, a US drone strike killed a senior al Qaeda leader in Kunar province⁽²⁰¹⁾. In January 2017 the NDS claimed to have killed a top Pakistani al Qaeda leader in Ghazni province⁽²⁰²⁾ and in March 2017, a US airstrike killed an al Qaeda leader in Paktika province⁽²⁰³⁾.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) / Jundullah

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is an insurgent network consisting of fighters who fled government oppression in Uzbekistan. IMU pledged allegiance to and became an ally of the Taliban regime (1996-2001)⁽²⁰⁴⁾. It also followed the defeated Taliban into exile in Pakistan (in its case to a new base in Waziristan) in 2001⁽²⁰⁵⁾. Until 2014, IMU fought alongside the Taliban in northern Afghanistan. After publicly admitting Mullah Omar's death, IMU switched allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015⁽²⁰⁶⁾. This resulted in fierce clashes between the IMU and Taliban, notably in the province of Zabul in 2015⁽²⁰⁷⁾. According to researcher and analyst Borhan Osman 'the then leader of the Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur ordered his fighters to crush a group of Taliban dissidents that had aligned with the IMU'⁽²⁰⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 10-11.

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ LWJ, US military strikes large al Qaeda training camps in southern Afghanistan, 13 October 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ LWJ, US and Afghan forces target al Qaeda operatives in 3 provinces, 5 December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 23.

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽²⁰¹⁾ BBC News, Al-Qaeda leader killed in US drone strike in Afghanistan, 5 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁾ LWJ, Afghan intelligence confirms top al Qaeda leader killed in raid, 19 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁾ Telegraph, US airstrike in Afghanistan killed Al Qaida leader, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴⁾ CSIS, From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan, March 2010 ([url](#)), pp. 5-7.

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ CSIS, From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan, March 2010 ([url](#)), p. 8; Ali, O., The 2016 insurgency in the North, 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ LWJ, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan faction emerges after group's collapse, 14 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2015 ([url](#)) p. 5; USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 407.

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ Ali, O., The 2016 insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

In October 2015, the Taliban established a special unit, comprised of highly skilled and experienced militants, to combat IMU/ISKP and by December 2015 had killed hundreds of IMU fighters in Zabul, including its emir, Usman Ghazi ⁽²⁰⁹⁾. According to the USDOS, ‘in June 2016, a faction of IMU announced its continued commitment to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, marking a split with the rest of the group, which announced its loyalty to the IS in 2015’ ⁽²¹⁰⁾. RFE/RL reported fractures in the ranks of IMU. Alliances and motives of different dispersed IMU groups became hard to assess and some of its fighters are even active in Syria and Iraq ⁽²¹¹⁾.

A northern group, called Jundullah, separated from the IMU and was said to operate under the umbrella of the Taliban in the North as of 2016. This group previously attempted to establish a base in the name of the Islamic State in north eastern Afghanistan ⁽²¹²⁾, but according to other sources remained loyal to the Taliban and al Qaeda ⁽²¹³⁾.

According to co-director of the Afghanistan Analyst Network, Obaid Ali, in northern Afghanistan the Pashtun Taliban found it ‘a challenge to bring the non-Taliban militant groups (IMU and Jundullah) under their banner. When they managed to, temporarily, both groups continued to run autonomous fronts and kept separate command structures’ ⁽²¹⁴⁾.

The USDOS estimates IMU’s strength at 200-300 members ⁽²¹⁵⁾ and its ranks consist primarily of ethnic Uzbeks, and ex-Soviet Muslim nationalities, Uyghurs and Arabs ⁽²¹⁶⁾. Jundullah and IMU are mainly active in Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Balkh, Baghlan, Sar-e Pol, as well as Faryab and Jawzjan ⁽²¹⁷⁾.

Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)

The first reports about IS (also called ISIS, ISIL or *Daesh*) appearing in Afghanistan date back to the summer of 2014 ⁽²¹⁸⁾. Initially the recruited commanders, groups or fighters often included discontented Afghan and Pakistani Taliban ⁽²¹⁹⁾. According to AAN-researchers, they were ‘quickly decimated in five of the six provinces where they emerged and most of their leaders were killed – mainly by the Taliban who tried to prevent a home-grown rival insurgency group from gaining a foothold on what they considered their own battleground’ ⁽²²⁰⁾. Eventually, the group based in Nangarhar won recognition as the head of IS’ ‘provincial’

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ OSW, Exporting Jihad, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)); ICT, Central Asian Jihadists in the Front Line, 4 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁰⁾ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 407.

⁽²¹¹⁾ RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 25 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²⁾ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹³⁾ LWJ, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan faction emerges after group’s collapse, 14 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁴⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁵⁾ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), 19 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 408.

⁽²¹⁶⁾ ICT, Central Asian Jihadists in the Front Line, 4 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁷⁾ BBC Monitoring South Asia, Afghan MP says Uzbek rebel group recruiting fighters in Afghan north, 10 April 2017, available via ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁸⁾ Osman, B., Messages in Chalk: ‘Islamic State’ haunting Afghanistan?, 17 November 2014 ([url](#)); LWJ, Mapping the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹⁾ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, Taliban touts defection of Islamic State ‘deputy’, 4 December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁰⁾ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017 ([url](#)).

chapter for Khorasan in Afghanistan ⁽²²¹⁾. IS envisages global expansion of the caliphate and designates the region of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and central-Asian republics, *Wilayat Khorasan* (ISKP – Islamic State Khorasan Province) ⁽²²²⁾.

ISKP's stronghold is based in certain southern districts of Nangarhar ⁽²²³⁾, where they are fighting over control with the Taliban ⁽²²⁴⁾. At its peak in 2015, ISKP was the dominant insurgent group in eight districts of Nangarhar; however, in early 2017 this was reduced to parts of Achin, Kot, Deh Bala and Nazyan districts ⁽²²⁵⁾. Their presence in eastern Afghanistan spreads to neighbouring provinces Kunar ⁽²²⁶⁾ and, according to government sources, Laghman ⁽²²⁷⁾.

Besides their presence in the city of Kabul ⁽²²⁸⁾, Borhan Osman explained that the assassination of an ANA soldier in the Khalis Family Colony in September 2017 is an indication of ISKP's growing presence in the outskirts of Jalalabad ⁽²²⁹⁾. In 2017, ISKP made 'considerable advances' in Chaparhar district, adjacent to Jalalabad, and was able to carry out attacks in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad ⁽²³⁰⁾.

Disgruntled or ex-communicated Taliban commanders in other provinces such as Herat, Ghor, Sar-e Pul and Jawzjan have also pledged allegiance to the ISKP group, although the level of coordination and cooperation between these groups and the ISKP core in Nangarhar remains unclear ⁽²³¹⁾. Thomas Ruttig labeled these groups as 'opportunistic pro-IS' ⁽²³²⁾. Without further elaborating, UNAMA makes a difference between casualties from ISKP and 'self-proclaimed ISKP' ⁽²³³⁾. Depending on the source and without clarifying this apparent distinction, ISKP has activities in five to seven provinces ⁽²³⁴⁾.

⁽²²¹⁾ Osman, B., The Shadows of 'Islamic State' in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?, 12 February 2015 ([url](#)); Osman, B., The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)); AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²²⁾ Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²²³⁾ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, 27 September 2017 ([url](#)); Clark, K., and Osman, B., More Militias? Part 2: The proposed Afghan Territorial Army in the fight against ISKP, 23 September 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Islamic State beheads 15 of its own fighters: Afghan official, 23 November 2017 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 21 September 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²²⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Taliban, IS Face Off In Afghanistan, 30 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁵⁾ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5; Reuters, Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan flee to Kunar province, 24 March 2016 ([url](#)); Roggio, B., US military kills Islamic State Khorasan province leader in Kunar, 13 August 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians in Kunar decapitated by Daesh fighters, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 militants killed in Laghman-Nangarhar offensives, 20 September 2017 ([url](#)); Khaama Press, Taliban and ISIS clashes spread to Laghman as both sides suffer heavy casualties, 29 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁸⁾ Osman, B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring Sectarianism to the Afghan War, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁹⁾ Osman, B., [Twitter], posted on: 6 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁰⁾ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³¹⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 18 September 2017 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5; Ali, O., The Assault in Sayad: Did Taleban and Daesh really collaborate?, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)); Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, 23 November 2016 ([url](#)); Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, 11 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³²⁾ Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³³⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽²³⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 67 | 1 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2; Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

The group has been under attack from the Taliban, the ANSF and IMF. They are engaged in battles with both the Taliban and government forces ⁽²³⁵⁾. Fighters for the ISKP have suffered heavy casualties in recent months, losing 497 members in the final quarter of 2016, according to one report ⁽²³⁶⁾. The US military waged a heavy military campaign, mainly through air strikes, against the group in Nangarhar ⁽²³⁷⁾. Three subsequent leaders have been killed by US airstrikes in July 2016 ⁽²³⁸⁾, May 2017 and July 2017 ⁽²³⁹⁾. In April 2017, the US military dropped a Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, or MOAB in Achin district, targeting a tunnel complex in which ISKP was believed to hide. The impact of it was assessed by researchers from the AAN as largely ineffective ⁽²⁴⁰⁾.

Depending on the source, ISKP had an estimated 1,000 to 6,000 fighters in Afghanistan ⁽²⁴¹⁾. Anatol Lieven, a regional expert at Georgetown University's Qatar campus, claimed in June 2017 that central Asian fighters form 'a key pillar of support for the ISKP' ⁽²⁴²⁾.

Where occasionally ISKP-affiliated groups are believed to cooperate with Taliban ⁽²⁴³⁾ – like in the attack on Mirza Olang village in Sar-e Pul in early August 2017 – the two insurgent groups are also fighting amongst each other over control of areas, notably in Nangarhar and Jawzjan ⁽²⁴⁴⁾.

The AAN stated in August 2017: 'However, in the face of all these pressures, ISKP has so far shown its resilience. Recruits continue to travel to Nangarhar, from various provinces of Afghanistan as well as from Pakistan, as the group's appeal to the radicalised sectors of society does not seem to be fading' ⁽²⁴⁵⁾. ISKP in 2017 claimed responsibility for attacks nationwide ⁽²⁴⁶⁾.

ISKP claimed a series of deadly attacks in Kabul and Herat aimed at the Hazara minority and other targets in 2016-2017 ⁽²⁴⁷⁾. The AAN stated in August 2016 that ISKP, 'which has recently suffered significant loss of territory and the killing of three consecutive amirs in coalition air strikes, and has failed to profit from the Taleban split in 2015, appears to increasingly use urban terrorism as a means to show its continued presence' ⁽²⁴⁸⁾. Please refer to the EASO COI

⁽²³⁵⁾ Johnson C.G., e.a., The Islamic State in Afghanistan assessing the Threat, April 2016 ([url](#)); Eurasia Review, Rising Influence Of Islamic State In Afghanistan: Dangerous Phenomena For Region And World – Analysis, 8 April 2016 ([url](#)); IBT, ISIS letter reveals tribal rifts in Afganistan faction amid war with Taliban and US, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)); Jamestown Foundation (The), To Afghanistan Not Syria?, 15 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁶⁾ Jamestown Foundation (The), To Afghanistan Not Syria?, 15 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁷⁾ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁸⁾ LWJ, US military confirms air strike killed Islamic State's emir for Khorasan province, 13 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁹⁾ New York Times (The), Leader of Afghanistan Branch of ISIS Killed in Special Forces Raid, 7 May 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, US: Emir of Islamic State's Khorasan province killed in Apr. 27 raid, 7 May 2017 ([url](#)); Osman, B., Another ISKP leader "dead": Where is the group headed after losing so many amirs?, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); VoA, US Confirms Killing of Additional IS Leaders in July 11 Airstrike, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁰⁾ Osman, B., Clark, K., and van Bijlert, M., 'Mother of All Bombs' Dropped on ISKP: Assessing the aftermath, 15 April 2017 ([url](#)); AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴¹⁾ Johnson C.G., e.a., The Islamic State in Afghanistan assessing the Threat, April 2016 ([url](#)); Eurasia Review, Rising Influence Of Islamic State In Afghanistan: Dangerous Phenomena For Region And World – Analysis, 8 April 2016 ([url](#)); IBT, ISIS letter reveals tribal rifts in Afganistan faction amid war with Taliban and US, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)); Jamestown Foundation (The), To Afghanistan Not Syria?, 15 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴²⁾ AP, ISIS letter reveals tribal rifts in Afganistan faction amid war with Taliban and US, 7 June 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴³⁾ Tolo News, Taliban-Daesh Cooperation "Has Complicated Afghanistan's Case", 1 December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 67 | 1 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2; Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, 11 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁵⁾ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²⁴⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 5-6.

⁽²⁴⁸⁾ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

Report *Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽²⁴⁹⁾ for more information on the targeting of Hazara and other Shia by ISKP in Afghanistan.

UNAMA attributed 10 % of civilian casualties by AGEs in the first nine months of 2017 to ISKP ⁽²⁵⁰⁾. AAN co-director Kate Clark commented on this figure: 'The figure for ISKP is huge, considering their limited territorial footprint, but is a consequence of their willingness to attack unprotected gatherings of civilians for sectarian reasons' ⁽²⁵¹⁾.

1.5.3 Other forces

Hezb-e Islami (HIG)

Hezb-e Islami is a former insurgent group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, therefore often referred to as HIG (Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). It once was the second largest insurgent group in Afghanistan ⁽²⁵²⁾. In 2016 the armed group signed the peace agreement with the government. However, the deal met with heavy criticism in certain sections of Afghan society due to Hekmatyar's notorious past and the proposed amnesty for his insurgency group's activities of the past 14 years. The agreement also provides for "sustainable and dignified repatriation" of families of HIG members, and the release of rebels, who are in prison but have been not charged with any crime. The HIG signed the National Constitution of Afghanistan, agreed to disband all its armed formations, and pledged to cut ties with all terrorist and extremist groups. In February 2017, the UN Security Council lifted sanctions against Hekmatyar ⁽²⁵³⁾. However, according to HIG officials, handing over the weapons was not discussed in the peace deal but instead they confirmed the dissolution of the armed wing. Out of fear for retaliation, Hezb-e Islami fighters have refused to lay down their arms ⁽²⁵⁴⁾. Hizb-e-Islami so far has not declared the exact number of its fighters in the country, but according to the reports, group members are still operating in some regions across the nation. In addition, some Hizb-e-Islami commanders have urged the Afghan government to integrate its armed members into the ranks of the ANSF ⁽²⁵⁵⁾.

⁽²⁴⁹⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵⁰⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽²⁵¹⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵²⁾ Diplomat (The), What Gulbuddin Hekmatya's Return Means for Afghanistan, 3 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵³⁾ Agencia EFE, HIA leader Hekmatyar tells Taliban the Afghan war must end, 29 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Hekmatyar's Fighters Refuse To Lay Down Arms In Afghanistan, 11 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵⁵⁾ Tolo News; Hizb-e-Islami Will Not Disarm Under Peace Deal: Karim, 5 February 2017 ([url](#)).

1.6 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

Several sources consider the situation in Afghanistan to be a non-international armed conflict ⁽²⁵⁶⁾.

UNOCHA reported in December 2017 on 'growing signs that what was once a low intensity conflict has now escalated into a war' ⁽²⁵⁷⁾. The report of the UN Secretary General on the strategic review of UNAMA qualified 'Afghanistan is not in a post-conflict situation [...], but a country undergoing a conflict that shows few signs of abating' ⁽²⁵⁸⁾.

The number of security incidents, as documented by the UN, has increased more than fivefold in the period 2008-2017 ⁽²⁵⁹⁾.

The UN stated in September 2017 that

'The security situation remained highly volatile, as the Government and the Taliban exchanged control of several district centres during the reporting period, with casualties on both sides. A number of high - profile security incidents [...] drew widespread condemnation while prompting fears of rising sectarian tension and further intensifying public criticism of the Government for not being able to provide security. Civilians continued to suffer disproportionately from the conflict, with continuing high levels of civilian casualties and displacement' ⁽²⁶⁰⁾.

In 2017, the ANSF 'embarked on their first yearlong campaign [...]. Previous operations covered periods of less than one year, and were tied to traditional fighting season timelines and winter reset periods' ⁽²⁶¹⁾. Following a strategic government decision and as a result of Taliban gains in rural areas, government forces have focussed their resources 'on defending population centres and disrupting the consolidation of Taliban control over strategic areas. This change has led to an increasing number of clashes for control over lines of communication and vital infrastructure. In addition, the more secure Taliban hold over some rural areas has allowed them to undertake more frequent attacks in the north of Afghanistan' ⁽²⁶²⁾.

The Afghan government retains control of Kabul, major population centers, most key transit routes, provincial capitals, and a majority of district centers; however, the Taliban continues to contest district centers, threaten provincial capitals, and temporarily seize main lines of communication throughout the country, especially in high-priority areas like Kunduz and Helmand provinces ⁽²⁶³⁾. The Taliban assault on Kunduz in October 2016, almost a year to the day after it previously fell into AGE hands, followed successive efforts throughout the year to

⁽²⁵⁶⁾ Gross, R., ICRC, Expert Meeting: The Use of Force in Armed Conflicts, 15 November 2013 ([url](#)), p. 85; Geiß, R. and Siegrist, M., Has the armed conflict in Afghanistan affected the rules on the conduct of hostilities?, March 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 13-16; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2017, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 62; UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽²⁵⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²⁵⁸⁾ UN Secretary-General, Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 10 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽²⁵⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽²⁶⁰⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽²⁶¹⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽²⁶²⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 4-5.

⁽²⁶³⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 19.

take other key provincial capitals, including Lashkar Gah, Farah and Maimana, underlining the tenuous security situation across many parts of the country and the precariousness of the safety and livelihoods of populations inhabiting these areas ⁽²⁶⁴⁾. In the first nine months of 2017, however, the Taliban had not undertaken a similar effort to overrun a major population centre of provincial capital. Nevertheless, the Taliban were able to overrun and temporarily hold several district centres, in Ghor, in Badghis, in Faryab and in Paktiya. The ANSF managed to recapture some within a week, while other changed hands several times. In the north-east, the Taliban put intense pressure on several districts along the Maimana-Andkhoy highway in Faryab Province. In the south, the Taliban intensified their attacks on districts adjacent to the provincial capitals of Kandahar and Lashkar Gah, as well as on the Kabul-Kandahar highway ⁽²⁶⁵⁾.

In June 2017, the UN reported an increase of security-related incidents in the first half of 2017, especially in the winter period ⁽²⁶⁶⁾. On 17 July 2017, Afghan forces recaptured a district in Helmand, which had been under Taliban control since October 2016 ⁽²⁶⁷⁾. In August 2017, UNOCHA reports that insurgents have ‘attacked or fought over control of at least eight district centres in seven provinces’, in what it calls a ‘starkly intensified conflict’ ⁽²⁶⁸⁾. District centres usually host displaced families fleeing conflict and violence in rural villages. UNOCHA observes that ‘when district centres come under attack, the direction of displacement changes and families chose to leave the centres: in August 2017, more than 50,000 people were reportedly temporarily displaced from district centres, often finding shelter with relatives in neighbouring villages’ ⁽²⁶⁹⁾.

According to Philip Schweers, a security advisor in international development cooperation cited by Deutsche Welle (DW), the

‘[c]onflict in Afghanistan is not open like in Syria. It's a low-intensity conflict – the situation escalates sporadically and there are occasional incidents in individual provinces. Overall, the situation is in no way homogeneous or coherent. There are regions, like the provinces Panjshir, Daykundi, Bamiyan or the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif which are relatively less affected by conflict-driven violence. There is clearly more tension in hotspots like northern Kunduz, southern Helmand or eastern Nangahar. There is hardly any continuous open fighting. It's a latent instability that dominates the picture. In many parts of the country, everyday life and trade go their normal course, though interrupted again and again with isolated incidents’ ⁽²⁷⁰⁾.

In October 2017, UNAMA noted for the first nine months of 2017 a drop in civilian casualties of 6 %. However, there was an increase by 1 % of civilians killed in the conflict. UNAMA noted ‘a substantial decline in the number of civilians killed and injured by Pro-Government Forces during ground fighting with Anti-Government Elements’ ⁽²⁷¹⁾. Analyst Kate Clark explained this by stating that, especially in the north-east, the government has committed to efforts in mitigating civilian casualties. In the south, frontlines remained relatively static and there were

⁽²⁶⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of Dec 2016) ([url](#)).

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²⁶⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽²⁶⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²⁶⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 67 | 1 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽²⁶⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 67 | 1 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽²⁷⁰⁾ DW, Afghanistan: A latent instability dominates the picture, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷¹⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

less ground engagements by pro-government forces ⁽²⁷²⁾. Sources indicate that a strategic decision to focus on defending population centres and resulted in an increase in number of clashes over lines of communication and vital infrastructure and in the Taliban holding firmly over rural areas and creating an environment of persistent insecurity ⁽²⁷³⁾.

1.6.1 Armed clashes and assaults

Since the start of the withdrawal of foreign troops (2012), closure of IMF bases and transition of security responsibilities into the hands of the ANSF (2013), the dynamics in the conflict have changed. AGEs have increasingly attacked and challenged ANSF, operating in larger units (up to several hundreds of fighters, using small arms fire, rockets, mortars and grenades). They increasingly took control over larger territories outside the urban centres and became more successful in capturing district administrative centres. Mostly, the ANSF has been able to regain control quickly but certain district centres fell under the sustained control of Taliban forces ⁽²⁷⁴⁾. These developments triggered a number of ANSF counter-offensives and clearance operations in several provinces ⁽²⁷⁵⁾. Since 2015, fighting intensified. Direct armed clashes have become one of the main cause of civilian deaths in the period 2015-2017 ⁽²⁷⁶⁾. According to the UN Secretary General, more than half of the recorded security incidents in 2016 and 2017 were armed clashes ⁽²⁷⁷⁾.

In the first nine months of 2017, ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties: 2,807 killed or injured civilians or 35 % of all civilian casualties ⁽²⁷⁸⁾, following record levels of civilian casualties from ground engagements in 2016 (11,418) ⁽²⁷⁹⁾. While civilian casualties from ground engagements initiated by PGF decreased by 37 %, civilian casualties

⁽²⁷²⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷³⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4; US DoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Afghanistan, 19 July 2017 ([url](#)); Indian Defence Review, 'OP Mansouri' gains momentum in Afghanistan, 13 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷⁴⁾ Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency, 2014 ([url](#)), p. 28; LWJ, Taliban controls or contests scores of districts in Afghanistan, 5 October 2015 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Taliban Captures District Center In Afghan Opium Heartland, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); ISW, Militant Attack and Support Zones in Afghanistan: April - September 2015, 18 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, MPs fear Kunduz-style attacks in other provinces, 5 October 2015 ([url](#)); ICG, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 1, 11-13, 19-21, 27-28, 36-37; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 7 March 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 4-5; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽²⁷⁵⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015 ([url](#)), p. 5; RFE/RL, Kabul Says 88 Militants Killed Across Afghanistan, 9 October 2015 ([url](#)); UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)), p. 5; Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); Guardian (The), Afghanistan's warlord vice-president spoiling for a fight with the Taliban, 4 August 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 57 Taliban insurgents killed in nationwide ANSF operations, 2 May 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 34 Taliban insurgents killed in ANSF operations, 11 May 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 19 insurgents killed in afghan forces operations, 3 February 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 29; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 34-36; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 23.

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽²⁷⁸⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽²⁷⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

from ground engagements initiated by insurgents increased by 6 %. UNAMA attributes this latter increase to an increase of small arms fire ⁽²⁸⁰⁾. Kate Clark explained this increase by the increased threat from the air. Contrary to 2015-2016, the Taliban are less likely to amass large numbers of fighters to engage in big offensives, including heavy weapons, because of the increased risk of being attacked from the air ⁽²⁸¹⁾. Increases of civilian casualties by ground fighting were ‘significant’ in Laghman, Faryab and Farah, according to UNAMA ⁽²⁸²⁾.

Additionally, between 1 January and 30 June 2017, UNAMA documented ‘a substantial increase’ of civilian casualties from cross-border shelling. In 12 incidents of cross-border shelling from Pakistan into Afghanistan, 10 civilians were killed and 24 were injured ⁽²⁸³⁾.

1.6.2 Improvised Explosive Devices

An IED can be initiated by the victim or by the attacker. Victim-initiated IEDs are very often pressure plate IEDs (PP-IED) which are prohibited in Afghanistan, being party to the Ottawa Convention which is a treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. The use of this weapon is most often a violation of international humanitarian law, as it cannot make a distinction between civilian and military targets. Attacker-initiated IEDs can either be with a timer or remote-controlled (mobile phone, radio, wire). One specific kind of IED is the magnetic IED, which is placed against vehicles ⁽²⁸⁴⁾. Suicide IEDs are not time- or distance-controlled and can be body-borne or vehicle-borne (BBIED or SVBIED) ⁽²⁸⁵⁾. IEDs and landmines are a danger on roads and adjacent lands throughout Afghanistan ⁽²⁸⁶⁾.

Between 1 January and 30 September 2017, UNAMA documented 1,403 civilian casualties from IED detonations without suicide triggers ⁽²⁸⁷⁾. The provinces where the most people were affected by IEDs in the first six months of 2017 were provinces on south, south-east and west of the country. UNAMA observed a sharp rise in pressure-plate IED civilian casualties in Helmand province. The number almost doubled in the first part of 2017. As insurgents gained increased territorial control, they turned to pressure-plate IEDs as a tactic to prevent the advancement of Pro-Government Forces during clearing operations, often placing the devices on roads used by civilians and around areas inhabited by civilians ⁽²⁸⁸⁾. In the first nine months of 2017, the number of civilian deaths by, what UNAMA calls ‘indiscriminate and unlawful’ pressure-plate IEDs, rose by 11 % compared to the same period in 2016, to 371 deaths ⁽²⁸⁹⁾.

⁽²⁸⁰⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽²⁸¹⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁸²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽²⁸²⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽²⁸³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽²⁸⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 68.

⁽²⁸⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 68-69.

⁽²⁸⁶⁾ Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan, 23 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁸⁷⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽²⁸⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 36, 37.

⁽²⁸⁹⁾ Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan ([url](#)), 23 May 2016.

⁽²⁸⁹⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

1.6.3 High-profile attacks

High-profile attacks, such as suicide bombings, complex attacks ⁽²⁹⁰⁾, and IED attacks, take place in Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul City, and the southern and eastern provinces Helmand, Khost and Nangarhar ⁽²⁹¹⁾. Insurgents were also able to conduct attacks in cities, such as the cities of Herat and Mazar-e Sharif province ⁽²⁹²⁾. In 2016, UNAMA indicated that 70 % of all civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks occurred in Kabul City ⁽²⁹³⁾.

Looking at 2016-2017, such attacks are mainly aimed at government or international presence but the highest numbers of casualties inflicted concern civilians ⁽²⁹⁴⁾. Complex and suicide attacks continued to affect civilians in 2017, causing 1,151 civilian casualties (259 deaths and 892 injured) in the first half of 2017, a 15 % increase compared to the same period in 2016 ⁽²⁹⁵⁾.

UNAMA stated that

‘The impact of such attacks on civilians and the larger civilian population is particularly devastating. Typically occurring in urban and civilian-populated areas, such attacks – when not directed against civilian targets in violation of international humanitarian law – are frequently indiscriminate in nature and commonly cause high numbers of civilian casualties, in addition to contributing to an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among the population’ ⁽²⁹⁶⁾.

In May 2017, Afghanistan saw its worst attack so far ⁽²⁹⁷⁾. A water tanker full of explosives detonated during rush hour in a busy civilian populated area of Kabul, resulting in several hundred civilian casualties: 92 deaths and 492 injured, according to UNAMA ⁽²⁹⁸⁾, or, 150 killed and over 450 wounded, according to SIGAR ⁽²⁹⁹⁾. Other high profile attacks during the reporting period include

- the attack on the German consulate in Mazar-e Sharif on 10 November 2016, resulting in 135 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰⁰⁾;
- an attack on a mosque in Kabul on 21 November 2016, resulting in 114 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰¹⁾;

⁽²⁹⁰⁾ UNAMA definition: A deliberate and coordinated attack that includes a suicide device (i.e. BBIED, VBIED), more than one attacker and more than one type of device (i.e. BBIED + mortars). All three elements must be used for an attack to be considered complex. See [url](#).

⁽²⁹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 60-61; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 33-34

⁽²⁹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 60-62; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 33-34.

⁽²⁹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 4; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 36, 37; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 86.

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 41.

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 61.

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 86; Independent (The), Kabul bombing now officially Afghanistan’s deadliest since US invasion as death toll rises above 150, 6 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 86.

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 61.

⁽³⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 61.

- an attack on the Parliament building in January 2017 in Kabul, resulting in 109 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰²⁾;
- the attack on the Supreme Court in Kabul in February 2017, resulting in 63 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰³⁾;
- the attack on an ANSF compound in Kabul in February 2017, resulting in 81 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰⁴⁾;
- the complex attack on a military hospital in Kabul in March 2017, resulting in 48 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰⁵⁾;
- the attack on the funeral of a victim of the May 31st bombing in June 2017, resulting in 53 civilian casualties according to UNAMA ⁽³⁰⁶⁾ or more than 119 civilian casualties according to SIGAR ⁽³⁰⁷⁾;
- two attacks on the Kabul New Bank in Lashkar Gah resulting in 72 civilian casualties ⁽³⁰⁸⁾;
- the attacks on Shia mosques in Herat and Kabul both in August 2017, resulting in over 90 and 28 civilian deaths respectively ⁽³⁰⁹⁾.

In 2016, 70 % of all civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks occurred in Kabul City: 14 incidents resulted in 1,381 casualties (262 deaths and 1,119 injured) ⁽³¹⁰⁾. The number of civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks, according to UNAMA, almost doubled from 2014 to 2017 (first six months) ⁽³¹¹⁾.

1.6.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

Between 1 January and 30 June 2017, UNAMA documented 542 civilian casualties (320 deaths and 222 injured) from 284 incidents of targeted killings perpetrated by AGEs, accounting for 10 % of all civilian casualties. ⁽³¹²⁾ In October 2017, UNAMA documented 'disturbing trends of intentional killings targeting religious leaders, civilians perceived to support the Government or Afghan national security forces, and continued attacks against civilian Government workers and judicial and prosecutorial figures' ⁽³¹³⁾.

Between 1 January and 30 June 2017, UNAMA documented 131 cases of abduction of civilians by AGEs resulting in 42 civilian casualties (34 deaths and eight injured) and the abduction of 467 civilians. During the same period in 2016, UNAMA recorded 198 incidents of abduction resulting in 86 civilian casualties (46 deaths and 40 injured) and the abduction of 1,141 civilians. Taliban claimed responsibility for three abductions. According to UNAMA, 'most incidents of abduction resulted in the release of the abducted civilians following mediation of local elders or payment of a ransom. Civilian deaths and injury during incidents

⁽³⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽³⁰³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽³⁰⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽³⁰⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽³⁰⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽³⁰⁷⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 86.

⁽³⁰⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽³⁰⁹⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 4-5.

⁽³¹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽³¹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽³¹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 57-58.

⁽³¹³⁾ Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan, 23 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹³⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

of abduction mostly occurred from the use of violence during the abduction or escape attempts' ⁽³¹⁴⁾.

For more information on the rationale and modus operandi of the Taliban targeting campaign, please refer to the EASO COI Report: *Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽³¹⁵⁾.

1.6.5 Aerial attacks and bombings

In 2015, a trend of declining civilian casualties by airstrikes was reversed and the number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes rose again ⁽³¹⁶⁾. According to UNAMA, the growing activity of Afghan Air Force has contributed to this new trend ⁽³¹⁷⁾ (see [Afghan National Army](#)). During the first 9 months of 2017, UNAMA documented 466 civilian casualties from aerial strikes (205 deaths and 261 injured), a 52 % increase in civilian casualties from aerial strikes compared to the same period in 2016 ⁽³¹⁸⁾. Most incidents causing civilian casualties during the first six months of 2017 took place in Farah, Helmand, Kunduz, Nangarhar, and Uruzgan provinces. Airstrikes continued to be conducted in areas populated by civilians and UNAMA documented increases in women and child casualties from aerial operations ⁽³¹⁹⁾.

In the last week of August 2017 alone, at least 28 women and children were killed and an additional 16 injured in air strikes in Herat and Logar province. The air strikes reportedly targeted AGEs who had used a civilian compound to attack aircraft ⁽³²⁰⁾.

Human Rights Watch described the use of aerial attacks by ANSF in 2016 as 'indiscriminate' ⁽³²¹⁾.

⁽³¹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 43.

⁽³¹⁵⁾ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 59-60.

⁽³¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 52-53.

⁽³¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽³¹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽³²⁰⁾ UN News Service, Afghanistan: UN mission confirms at least 44 civilians killed, injured in latest airstrikes, 1 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³²¹⁾ Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan. Events of 2016 ([url](#)).

1.7 State ability to secure law and order

The Afghan Central Statistics Office noted an annual rise in crime statistics from 6,768 in 2008 to 28,026 in 2015-2016 ⁽³²²⁾, although the UNODC stated in 2012 that there are no reliable crime statistics in Afghanistan ⁽³²³⁾. Crime, kidnapping and robberies are reportedly on the rise ⁽³²⁴⁾, specifically in all major cities, including Kabul ⁽³²⁵⁾, Kunduz ⁽³²⁶⁾, Herat ⁽³²⁷⁾, Mazar-e Sharif ⁽³²⁸⁾ and Jalalabad ⁽³²⁹⁾. On the rise of kidnappings and extortion in Kabul, AAN commented that this phenomenon is ‘underreported’ and ‘underrated’ because it ‘undermines the security of Kabulis probably as much as terrorism’ ⁽³³⁰⁾.

The US Department of State noted in its report by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security that criminal activity is widespread in Afghanistan. Further, on the state's ability to respond:

‘The local law enforcement authorities are generally ineffective in deterring crime and responding to distress calls and alarms. Response times are significantly longer than Western norms, resulting in many criminals being able to carry out their crimes and a mediocre record in apprehending suspects. Further, bribery is openly solicited at all levels of local law enforcement. In some cases, officers carry out crimes themselves, resulting in a lack of confidence of the civilian population in local law enforcement’ ⁽³³¹⁾.

UNHCR stated in its eligibility guidelines (April 2016) the following on the Afghan state's ability to protect civilians ⁽³³²⁾:

‘Even where the legal framework provides for the protection of human rights, the implementation of Afghanistan's commitments under national and international law to promote and protect these rights in practice frequently remains a challenge. Afghan governance and the adherence to the rule of law are perceived as particularly weak, while public satisfaction with government performance and confidence in public institutions reportedly decreased sharply in 2015.

The capability of the Government to protect human rights is undermined in many districts by insecurity and the high number of attacks by AGEs. Rural and unstable areas reportedly suffer from a generally weak formal justice system that is unable to effectively and reliably adjudicate civil and criminal disputes. Government-appointed judges and prosecutors are reportedly frequently unable to remain in such communities, due to insecurity. High levels of corruption, challenges to effective governance and a climate of impunity are all reported by observers as

⁽³²²⁾ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – CSO, Crimes, Public Libraries, Radios and TV Broadcast, 2008 -2015-2016, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³²³⁾ UNODC and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, UNODC Country Programme for Afghanistan 2012-2014, 28 May 2012 ([url](#)), pp. 16-17.

⁽³²⁴⁾ France24, Video: Afghans live in fear as kidnappings soar, 21 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³²⁵⁾ Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 56; Tolonews, Residents Protest Against ‘Rise’ In Crime In Kabul City, 17 May 2017; AFP, Kidnappings blight war-scarred Kabul city, 10 March 2017, available at: ([url](#))

⁽³²⁶⁾ RFE/RL, Crime, Casualties Undermine U.S. Battlefield Gains In Afghanistan, 4 December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³²⁷⁾ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, 2 April 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 34-35; Rasmussen, S.E., Afghanistan's model city is also its kidnapping capital, 27 July 2015 ([url](#)); Kazemi, S.R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³²⁸⁾ Western Security analyst, briefing, 23 November 2017.

⁽³²⁹⁾ Western Security analyst, briefing, 23 November 2017.

⁽³³⁰⁾ AAN, Afghan capital plagued by kidnapping and extortion of locals, 10 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³¹⁾ USDOS, OSAC, Afghanistan 2017 Crime & Safety Report, 3 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³²⁾ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 24-25.

factors that weaken the rule of law and undermine the ability of the State to provide protection from human rights violations’

Law enforcers are themselves often the victim of attacks ⁽³³³⁾.

Based on a household and expert survey to measure how the rule of law is experienced in practical, everyday situations in Kabul, Kandahar and Herat, the World Justice Project’s 2016 Rule of Law Index, Afghanistan ranked 111 on a list of 113 countries in the world on overall rule-of-law scores ⁽³³⁴⁾.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), ‘Afghanistan faces tremendous drugs and crime challenges [...]. While around 80% of the world's opiates comes from Afghanistan, only around 2% is sized in country’ ⁽³³⁵⁾.

For more information on the different segments of the Afghan security apparatus and their ability to act as an actor of protection, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽³³⁶⁾. For more information on the Afghan state as a possible actor of persecution, please refer to the EASO COI Report *Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽³³⁷⁾.

1.8 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.8.1 Civilian casualties

The number of civilian casualties has been rising since UNAMA started to document conflict related civilian casualties in 2009 ⁽³³⁸⁾:

Year	Civilians killed	Civilians injured	Total civilian casualties
2016	3,498	7,920	11,418
2015	3,545	7,457	11,002
2014	3,699	6,849	10,548
2013	2,959	5,656	8,615
2012	2,754	4,805	7,559
2011	3,021	4,507	7,528
2010	2,777	4,343	7,120
2009	2,412	3,566	5,978

⁽³³³⁾ LA Times, A young corruption investigator is killed in Afghanistan. Why didn't his U.S.-trained agency do more to protect him?, 4 December 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul crime branch chief survives gun attack, 21 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁴⁾ World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁵⁾ UNODC, Law Enforcement, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁶⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 71-114.

⁽³³⁷⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁸⁾ UNAMA, Report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, n.d. ([url](#)).

In July 2017, UNAMA stated that ‘during the first half of 2017, armed conflict continued to cause severe harm to civilians across Afghanistan, killing and injuring civilians at levels similar to the same period last year’ ⁽³³⁹⁾. In October 2017, UNAMA added that ‘from 1 January to 30 September 2017, UNAMA documented 8,019 civilian casualties (2,640 deaths and 5,379 injured), representing an overall decrease in civilian casualties of six per cent compared to the same period in 2016. Civilian deaths increased by one per cent while the number of injured civilians reduced by nine per cent’ ⁽³⁴⁰⁾. Kate Clark indicated that ‘it was a slight decrease and masked a one per cent increase in civilian deaths. It was also only a reduction from a record high for civilian casualties in 2016. Such fluctuations in quarterly reporting have been seen before without annual reductions’ ⁽³⁴¹⁾.

The increase in civilian deaths in 2017 was particularly due to suicide and complex attacks, targeted and deliberate killings, pressure—plate IEDs and aerial attacks ⁽³⁴²⁾.

1.8.2 Socio-economic life

UNOCHA reported in December 2017 that ‘after four decades of conflict, there are huge economic and development challenges in the country, which cannot be remedied by humanitarian aid’ ⁽³⁴³⁾. The problems UNOCHA lists include:

- approximately 39 % of the population live below the poverty line;
- an estimated 10 million people have limited or no access to essential health services;
- as many as 3.5 million children are out of school;
- infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world at 70 per 1,000 live births;
- Afghanistan remains one of only two countries globally where polio is endemic;
- Some 1.9 million people are severely food insecure, predominantly due to a lack of or limited access to sustainable job opportunities;
- 40 % of all children under the age of five are stunted.

In total, UNOCHA stated, ‘the humanitarian community has identified that 8.7 million people have chronic needs which require longer-term systemic actions to address’ ⁽³⁴⁴⁾. In 2018, 3.3 million people will need lifesaving assistance’ ⁽³⁴⁵⁾.

Although DW reports international aid for Afghanistan ‘helps to set positive impulses and it keeps the country from drifting into an open conflict’ ⁽³⁴⁶⁾ UNOCHA states that due to the protracted nature of the crisis, humanitarian financing and actions are increasingly ‘used to bridge gaps in public services such as basic health care and education’, a situation UNOCHA calls ‘unsustainable’ ⁽³⁴⁷⁾.

⁽³³⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3 .

⁽³⁴⁰⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽³⁴¹⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 2012 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁴²⁾ UNAMA, Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in Armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2017, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽³⁴³⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽³⁴⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽³⁴⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽³⁴⁶⁾ DW, Afghanistan: ‘A latent instability dominates the picture’, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁴⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

For a more extensive assessment of key socio-economic issues at stake in Afghanistan, such as economic growth, employment, poverty and food security, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan. Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽³⁴⁸⁾.

1.8.3 Refugees, IDPs and returnees

Migration is an important risk management strategy for Afghan households in a society faced with demographic pressure, conflict and insecurity, and a lack employment opportunities ⁽³⁴⁹⁾.

Afghanistan has a long history of protracted international displacement. Reportedly a third of the population were displaced in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of 1979. Of the millions that fled to Iran and Pakistan, some returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Afghanistan's civil war and the advent of the Taliban reignited a new exodus to neighboring countries. The toppling of the Taliban regime in 2001 marked the beginning of a massive wave of returning Afghans. Between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted the return of 4.8 million Afghans, and many more returned without official assistance. The World Bank estimates one in five currently residing in Afghanistan is a returnee ⁽³⁵⁰⁾.

The net emigration rate is 0.9 migrant per 1,000 population ⁽³⁵¹⁾. Afghanistan is the source country of the second largest group of refugees in the world, around 2.5 million, the vast majority of which are hosted by neighbouring Pakistan and Iran ⁽³⁵²⁾. Afghan asylum seekers form the second largest group of asylum seekers worldwide, with an estimated 237,763 claims in 2016 ⁽³⁵³⁾. In 2016, more than 190,000 Afghans applied for asylum in EU+ states ⁽³⁵⁴⁾. In 2016, 620,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan following a deterioration in the 'protection environment' in Pakistan ⁽³⁵⁵⁾. In the first eight months of 2017, 'over 329,000 undocumented Afghans have returned due to diverse push factors, including deteriorating protection space in Pakistan and Iran. This figure represents a significantly higher rate of return than in previous years' ⁽³⁵⁶⁾. IOM estimates that approximately 500,000 undocumented Afghans could return from Pakistan and Iran in 2017 ⁽³⁵⁷⁾. In July 2017, one in six people is either a returnee or an internally displaced person (IDP) in the nine provinces surveyed by IOM (Baghlan, Balkh, Kabul, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktia, and Takhar) ⁽³⁵⁸⁾.

According to UNHCR, however, 'UNHCR monitoring indicates a significant improvement in the protection environment for registered refugees in both Pakistan (PoR card-holders) and Iran (Amayesh card-holders). The governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan are collaborating to register undocumented Afghans and facilitate regularisation of their legal status in Pakistan, and government authorities in Iran have indicated a similar intention' ⁽³⁵⁹⁾.

⁽³⁴⁸⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-70.

⁽³⁴⁹⁾ World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽³⁵⁰⁾ Middle East Research and Information Project, Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis, 24 September 2001 ([url](#)); World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽³⁵¹⁾ CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, People and Society, 6 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵²⁾ UNHCR, Global Trends. Forced displacement in 2016, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵³⁾ UNHCR, Global Trends. Forced displacement in 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), p. 42.

⁽³⁵⁴⁾ EASO, Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽³⁵⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of 31 Dec 2016), 31 December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵⁶⁾ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, 3 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽³⁵⁷⁾ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, 3 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵⁸⁾ IOM, Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad Soar to Over 2.4 Million in Nine Afghan Provinces: IOM Survey, 7 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵⁹⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

Internal displacements

Internal displacements affect all areas of the country, although not to the same extent. In 2016 UNOCHA reported around 654,000 newly displaced people ⁽³⁶⁰⁾ and from 1 January to 16 September 2017 an additional 257,900 ⁽³⁶¹⁾. UNOCHA reported in December 2017 that in the previous 18 months, nearly a million Afghans have been internally displaced, at an average rate of 1,100 per day in 2017 ⁽³⁶²⁾.

A total 30 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement ⁽³⁶³⁾. Some IDPs are not registered if they settle in urban areas and some of them also can get stuck in areas inaccessible to humanitarian aid. Inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions ⁽³⁶⁴⁾. The biggest displacement was observed in October 2016 when more than 230,000 people were displaced throughout Afghanistan, compounded by 192,000 returnees from Pakistan ⁽³⁶⁵⁾.

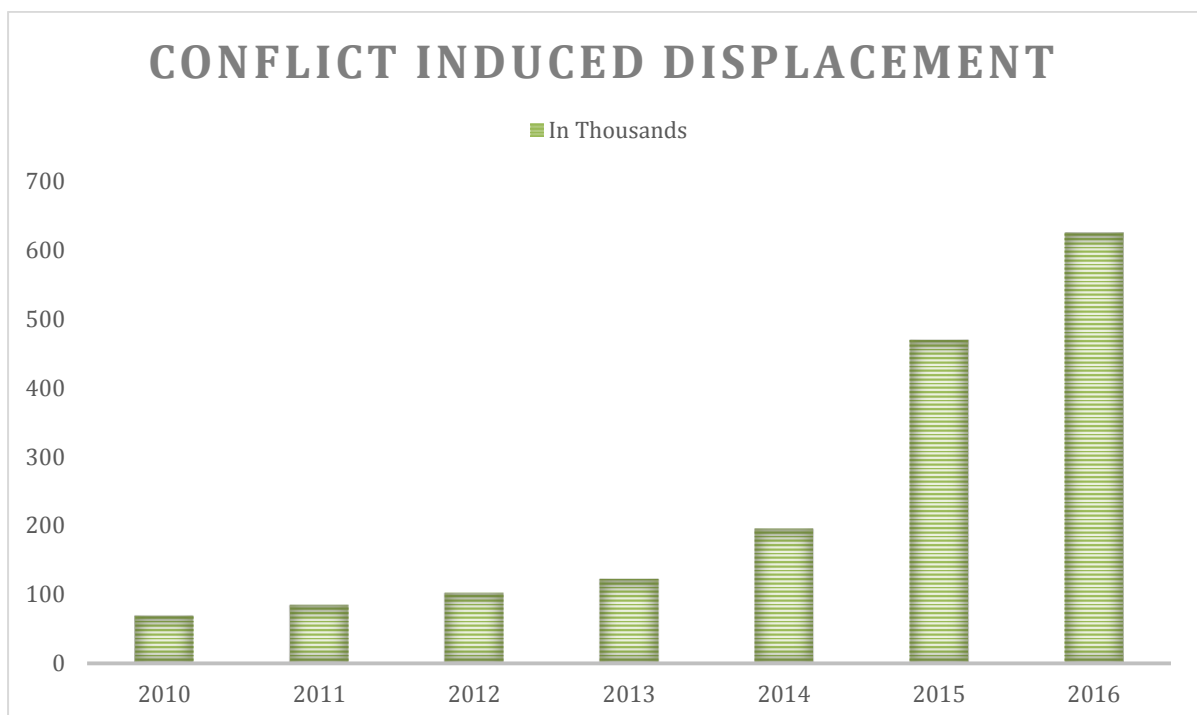


Figure 1: Number of conflict induced displaced persons in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2016, source: UNOCHA ⁽³⁶⁶⁾

⁽³⁶⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard, 31 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017 – Snapshot, 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

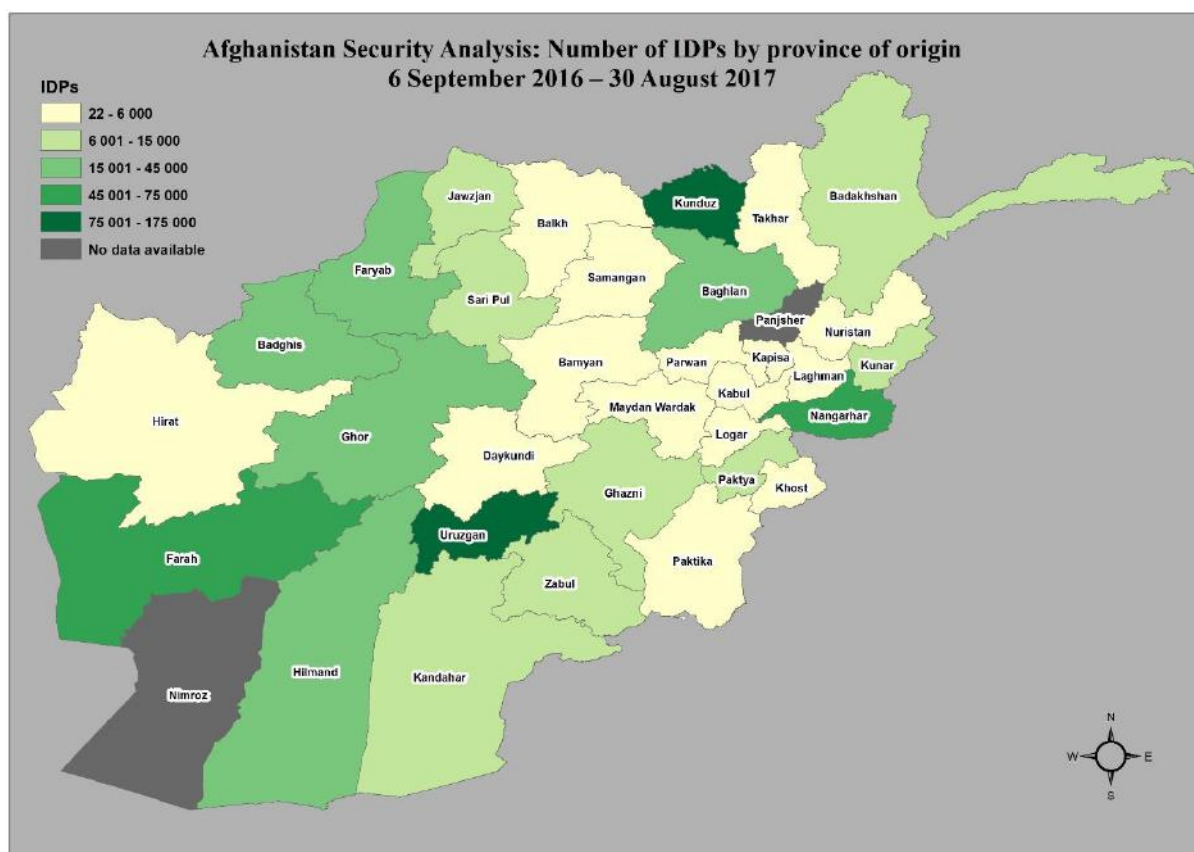
⁽³⁶²⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽³⁶³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017 – Snapshot, 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶⁴⁾ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 28-30; AI, "My Children Will Die This Winter" - Afghanistan's Broken Promise To The Displaced, 31 May 2016 ([url](#)); AI, The Millions Left Behind in Afghanistan, 1 June 2016 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 18 September 2017), ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10-13.

⁽³⁶⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2016, 16 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.



Map 2: Number of IDPs by province of origin, source: UNOCHA ⁽³⁶⁷⁾

For more information on the socio-economic status of IDPs and returnees in Afghanistan's major cities, please refer to the EASO *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽³⁶⁸⁾.

Deportations and voluntary returns

By end of 2016, **Pakistan** hosted 1.4 million Afghan refugees, the second largest refugee populations in the world ⁽³⁶⁹⁾. Since early 2007, Pakistan has not registered any new Afghan refugees, although registered refugees may modify their PoR card to add newborn children or record a change of household composition, e.g. resulting from marriage ⁽³⁷⁰⁾. UNHCR in Pakistan reportedly does not have the capacity to register and process the claims of tens or hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers. Therefore only a limited number of Afghans have been able to seek protection with UNHCR, leaving the rest of those who arrived after 2007 without a secure legal status ⁽³⁷¹⁾. In July 2017, the Pakistan government launched a six month programme to register undocumented Afghans living in the country, currently estimated to range between 600,000 to one million people ⁽³⁷²⁾. As of 23 September 2017, the Pakistani

⁽³⁶⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Internal Displacement due to Conflict, n.d. ([url](#))

⁽³⁶⁸⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 71-114.

⁽³⁶⁹⁾ UNHCR, Global Trends. Forced displacement in 2016, n.d., ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽³⁷⁰⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

⁽³⁷¹⁾ HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity, 13 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽³⁷²⁾ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR welcomes registration of a million undocumented Afghans in Pakistan, 21 July 2017 ([url](#)).

authorities, in collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan ⁽³⁷³⁾, received over 146,000 applications from undocumented Afghans for Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC). ACC cards grant undocumented Afghans temporary stay in Pakistan, pending their return to Afghanistan, to regularise their legal status by acquiring a passport and visa ⁽³⁷⁴⁾.

In response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, HRW stated that the Pakistani authorities mounted a concerted campaign in 2016 to drive Afghans out of the country ⁽³⁷⁵⁾. In the second half of 2016, a combination of deportation threats and police abuses, including detention, forced evictions, police raids and harassment pushed out nearly 365,000 of the country's 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, as well as just over 200,000 undocumented Afghans ⁽³⁷⁶⁾. In total, in 2016, 620,000 Afghans had returned from Pakistan ⁽³⁷⁷⁾.

UNHCR noted that the factors which influenced the decision of Afghan refugees to return were complex and diverse. Apart from the behaviour of Pakistani authorities, they could also include stricter border controls that separated family members. As a consequence, many Afghans have returned because it is increasingly difficult to cross back and forth to visit relatives. Incentives offered by Government of Afghanistan, including the unfulfilled promises of land, also influenced the decision of some refugees to return ⁽³⁷⁸⁾.

IOM is responding to what it called 'a substantial increase' in the return of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan and Iran. The total number of undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan from 1 January to 3 September 2017 is 84,151. IOM provided post-arrival assistance to 84 % of them. The assistance provided includes meals, accommodation, basic medical screening, non-food items, onward transportation, cash grants and referral services, as well as support from partners. Contrary to the returnees from Iran, the number of deported Afghan nationals from Pakistan is relatively low ⁽³⁷⁹⁾.

The total number of undocumented returnees from **Iran** from 1 January to 3 September 2017 is 244,999 persons. IOM provided post-arrival humanitarian assistance to only 5 % of the undocumented Afghans deported from Iran at its Transit Centers in Nimroz and Herat, including unaccompanied migrant children, 18 medical cases, unaccompanied elderly and drug addicts ⁽³⁸⁰⁾. The majority of these returnees are forcibly deported by the Iranian authorities ⁽³⁸¹⁾.

In 2016, around 30,000 Afghan nationals received an order to leave the **EU** ⁽³⁸²⁾. The number of Afghan nationals returned to Afghanistan by EU members states has increased 'considerably', according to Eurostat ⁽³⁸³⁾. Some Afghans decided to voluntarily return from Europe, mainly from Germany, Greece, Turkey and Austria ⁽³⁸⁴⁾. Amnesty International questions the use of the terminology 'voluntary', as these returnees usually have no choice

⁽³⁷³⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

⁽³⁷⁴⁾ IOM, Return of undocumented Afghans. Weekly situation report, OCT 01—07 2017, 7 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁵⁾ HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity 13 February 2017 ([url](#)) p. 1.

⁽³⁷⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Flash Appeal: One Million People on the Move (Covering Sep-Dec 2016), 7 September 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3; HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity 13 February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 1-3.

⁽³⁷⁷⁾ Humanitarian Response, OCHA Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of 31 Dec 2016), 22 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁸⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

⁽³⁷⁹⁾ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, 3 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁰⁾ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, 3 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸¹⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 68 | 01 - 30 September 2017, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽³⁸²⁾ Eurostat, File:Top 20 citizenships of non-EU citizens ordered to leave EU-28 territories, 2015-2016.png, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸³⁾ Eurostat, Statistics on enforcement of immigration legislation, May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁴⁾ IOM, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Quarterly Statistical Report, April-June 2017 ([url](#)).

and are obliged to leave the country ⁽³⁸⁵⁾. The peak of the voluntary return from Europe was reported in 2016. In the second quarter of 2017, IOM observed a significant decrease in both the overall number of returns as well as the number of returning families. From April to June 2017, more than 1,000 persons decided to return to Afghanistan. In these three months of 2017, the preferred destination of return was Herat, Balkh, Kabul, Kunduz and Nangarhar ⁽³⁸⁶⁾.

Many returned to extreme poverty and in July 2017, IOM estimated that some 73,850 returnees were living in tents or open air holes dug into the ground and covered by tarpaulins. Many others rent or live in semi-ruined, abandoned houses. With 518,066 individuals returning between 2012 and 2017, Nangarhar has the highest number of returnees ⁽³⁸⁷⁾. According to UNHCR, Kabul hosted the most documented refugee returnees ⁽³⁸⁸⁾.

1.8.4 Children

More than 40 % of the Afghan society is made up of children younger than 14 years old, another 22 % are youth between 15 and 24 years old. The median age in Afghanistan is 18.6, and is therefore one of the youngest societies in the world ⁽³⁸⁹⁾.

Children belong to the most vulnerable groups of society suffering from the prolonged conflict. The number of child casualties has been steadily growing since 2009. In 2016, UNAMA reported 3,512 child casualties, a 24 % increase from 2,829 in 2015 ⁽³⁹⁰⁾. In the first half of 2017, UNAMA registered a further 1% percent increase of overall child casualties, and a 9 % increase in child deaths ⁽³⁹¹⁾. The increase in 2016 is mainly due to a steep rise in child victims of ground engagements. Child casualties from ground engagements increased at a higher rate than adult victims of ground engagements, reflecting, according to UNAMA the increased fighting in civilian populated areas ⁽³⁹²⁾. Children were also disproportionately victims of explosive remnants of war. This is linked to poverty, lack of education and awareness about the dangers ⁽³⁹³⁾. Landmines and IEDs are particularly threatening for children and are the second highest cause of death and injury. Some of the mines are constructed in such a way that children think they may be toys ⁽³⁹⁴⁾.

UNAMA documented eight incidents involving the abduction of 17 boys by AGEs during the first half of 2017. UNAMA documented two incidents of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated against children, one by ANSF and another by AGEs. Such incidents are, according to UNAMA, likely under-reported as a result of prevailing social norms, such as stigma associated with being a victim of sexual violence that may result in marginalisation or

⁽³⁸⁵⁾ AI, Forced Back to Danger: Asylum-seekers Returned from Europe to Afghanistan, 5 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 30.

⁽³⁸⁶⁾ IOM, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Quarterly Statistical Report, April-June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁷⁾ IOM, Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad Soar to Over 2.4 Million in Nine Afghan Provinces: IOM Survey, 7 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁸⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

⁽³⁸⁹⁾ CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, People and Society, 6 September 2017 ([url](#)); CIA, The World Factbook. Country comparison: median age, n.d ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽³⁹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽³⁹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽³⁹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽³⁹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict , July 2016, p. 21; Rasad News Agency, Landmine Explosion Kill 4 Children in Kandahar Province, 9 August 2016 ([url](#)); Daily Mail, The harrowing plight of children maimed in Afghanistan by the thousands of mines, 21 August 2015.

exclusion from society⁽³⁹⁵⁾. Media sources quoted by USDOS reported that children have been used as ‘personal servants, support staff, or for sexual purposes’⁽³⁹⁶⁾.

The recruitment of children by military groups is still a problem. Both Taliban and IS but also ALP and PGM use children as soldiers⁽³⁹⁷⁾. The Taliban claims it does not deploy ‘boys with no beards’. However, there were reports of training and deploying children for various military actions including the production and planting of IEDs. Some children recruited from *madrasas* in Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan provinces were 13 or younger⁽³⁹⁸⁾. AIHRC, quoted by the USDOS, reported 21 cases of child recruitment by the MoI security forces in 2016⁽³⁹⁹⁾. The government reportedly took steps that included the criminalisation of the use and recruitment of children, training staff on age-assessment procedures, launching an awareness campaign on underage recruitment, investigating alleged cases of underage recruitment, and establishing centres in some provincial recruitment centres to document cases of attempted enlistment of children⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾.

According to several sources, children were detained and tortured on the allegation of being Taliban fighters⁽⁴⁰¹⁾.

For more child specific issues in the context of the conflict of Afghanistan, such as the harmful practice of *Bacha Bazi* and the recruitment of children by the armed actors in the conflict, please refer to the EASO *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms*⁽⁴⁰²⁾ and the EASO *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups* from September 2016⁽⁴⁰³⁾

The conflict limited access to education. The status of girls in education is considerably lower than boys with more cases of threats and intimidation for female students. Difficulties accessing school, especially lack of schools and teachers, long walking distances and general security fears, are reasons for the low enrolment levels⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾. UNAMA documented 16 incidents of threats, intimidation, and harassment targeted girls’ schools in 2016⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾. In January 2017, more than 1,000 schools were closed because of security reasons⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾. In 2016, UNAMA reported 94 conflict-related incidents targeting education and its personnel, a 20 %

⁽³⁹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽³⁹⁶⁾ USDOS, 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽³⁹⁷⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽³⁹⁸⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016 ([url](#)); USDOS, 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 17-18.

⁽³⁹⁹⁾ USDOS, 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016 ([url](#)), p. 1; USDOS, 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽⁴⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 29, 35; HRW, Detention of Children as National Security Threats [interactive map], 28 July 2016 ([url](#)); HRW, Afghanistan: Reject Indefinite Detention Without Trial, 15 November 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁰²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁰³⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Recruitment by armed groups, September 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 14-16.

⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾ UNICEF Afghanistan, Gender education and gender equality, n.d. ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾ Tolo News, More Than 1,000 Schools Closed Across Afghanistan, 2 January 2017, ([url](#)); Their World, 1000 schools in Afghanistan closed as Taliban strike at education, 30 November 2016, ([url](#)).

decrease compared to 2015, causing 91 civilian casualties ⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾. School buildings were also used for military purposes, both by ANSF and AGEs. Schools continued being used as bases during military operations in Taliban-held areas, putting children at risk and depriving thousands of an education, Human Rights Watch reported in 2016 ⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾.

According to HRW,

‘Fighting between Taliban and government forces has driven thousands of families from their homes, and more than a million Afghans are internally displaced. In areas under Taliban control, the Taliban often limits girls to only a few years of schooling, or bans them from education altogether. In contested areas, girls seeking to attend school face heightened security threats. The conflict has been accompanied by lawlessness, as militias and criminal gangs have proliferated, and girls face threats including sexual harassment, kidnapping, and acid attacks, as well as targeted attacks and threats against girls’ education. In this environment, education is increasingly affected, and girls are disproportionately harmed’ ⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾.

For more information on the Taliban’s attitude towards education and in particular girls’ education, please refer to the *EASO COI Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽⁴¹⁰⁾.

1.8.5 Health facilities

During the first half of 2017, ‘UNAMA documented 32 incidents targeting or impacting healthcare facilities and healthcare workers, resulting in 58 civilian casualties (27 deaths and 31 injured). It also reported the abduction of 18 civilians compared to 67 incidents during the same period in 2016 that caused 11 civilian casualties (five deaths and six injured). Most civilian casualties from incidents targeting healthcare facilities occurred during the complex attack on the Mohammad Sardar Daud Khan Hospital on 8 March 2017 that caused 48 civilian casualties (26 deaths and 22 injured) ⁽⁴¹¹⁾.

Medical personnel were intimidated and threatened, sometimes even abducted and killed. Some clinics were temporarily closed. AGE also targeted ambulances and destroyed medical equipment. Security forces blocked the medical supplies destined for Taliban-controlled areas. Threats caused the closure of health facilities and some women doctors had to resign from work ⁽⁴¹²⁾.

In 2017, ICRC announced it had ‘no other choice but to drastically reduce its presence and activities in Afghanistan, in particular in the north of the country’, after a number of attacks on its personnel and facilities, including on what they considered one of their safest facilities in Mazar-i Sharif ⁽⁴¹³⁾.

⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 22. UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 23; VOA, Afghan Schools Used as Military Bases By Government, Taliban, 26 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Rise in Military Use of Schools, 17 August 2016 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 23.

⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Girls Struggle for an Education, 17 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁰⁾ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 37-42.

⁽⁴¹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽⁴¹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17; IWPR, Afghanistan: Medical Facilities Targeted, 17 August 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹³⁾ ICRC, Afghanistan: ICRC reduces its presence in the country, 9 October 2017 ([url](#)).

For more information on issues pertaining access to health care in Afghanistan, please refer to EASO *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽⁴¹⁴⁾. For more information on the situation of healthcare workers in Afghanistan, please refer to the EASO COI Report *Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽⁴¹⁵⁾.

1.9 Geographical overview of the security situation

1.9.1 Urban/rural divide

Afghanistan's history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide. Urban centres have been hubs for administration, market-driven methods of production, taxation, education, judiciary and reforms. This helped to create resentment among the rural population, which did not benefit from these developments ⁽⁴¹⁶⁾.

In 2015 the Taliban set as an objective to 'capture and hold towns and provincial capitals' ⁽⁴¹⁷⁾. The Taliban managed to seize some towns and control them for a certain period. The ANSF has also proven its ability to recover some district centers lost to the Taliban. In October 2015, Taliban temporarily captured the administrative centre of Kunduz – the first provincial capital seized by the Taliban since 2001 ⁽⁴¹⁸⁾. In 2016 Taliban attacked or threatened several provincial capitals including Kunduz, Lashkar-Gah (Helmand), Pul-i-Khumri (Baghlan), Farah, Tarin Kot (Uruzgan), Maimana (Faryab), however without being able to completely taking them over ⁽⁴¹⁹⁾.

Despite an attack on Ghazni City in May 2017 ⁽⁴²⁰⁾, AAN reported in October 2017 that 'there have been no major Taliban offensives against any large population centres' in 2017 ⁽⁴²¹⁾. According to UNOCHA, district capitals are 'increasingly' being attacked. In August 2017 alone, UNOCHA reports that insurgents have 'attacked or fought over control of at least eight district centres in seven provinces', in what it calls a 'starkly intensified conflict': Ghormach (Badghis/Faryab), Janikhel (Paktia), Taywara (Ghor), Balamurghab (Badghis); Khamyab (Jawzjan), Zanakhan (Ghazni), Gomal (Paktika), Baraki Barak (Logar) ⁽⁴²²⁾. A Western security official explained during a briefing held in Malta that the Taliban 'continued' to overrun district

⁽⁴¹⁴⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 49-58.

⁽⁴¹⁵⁾ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012 ([url](#)), pp. 7-8.

⁽⁴¹⁷⁾ BBC News, Why are the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan?, 5 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016, p. 6 ([url](#)); Frontier Post (The), MoD rejects fears of Lashkargah collapse, 30 May 2016 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: More than 50 police killed in Helmand, 30 May 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Taliban Focusing in Provincial Capitals, 2 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁹⁾ LWJ, Taliban threatens another provincial capital in Afghan north, 21 October 2016 ([url](#)); LWJ, Taliban Assaults Provincial Capital in Southeastern Afghanistan, 22 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²⁰⁾ Reuters, Afghan Taliban launch three-pronged assault on Ghazni city, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, Taliban Assaults Provincial Capital in Southeastern Afghanistan, 22 May 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²¹⁾ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, 12 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²²⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 67 | 1 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1-2.

administrative centres in 2017. However, the insurgents were not able to hold the centres as long as they were in the period 2015-2016 ⁽⁴²³⁾.

District centres usually host displaced families fleeing conflict and persecution in rural villages. 'When district centres come under attack, the direction of displacement changes and families chose to leave the centres: in August, more than 50,000 people were reportedly temporarily displaced from district centres, often finding shelter with relatives in neighbouring villages' ⁽⁴²⁴⁾.

Reporting on a relatively new trend, the Asia Foundation found a growing trend among the Afghan population to consider the urban areas 'dangerous' in 2016. In Jalalabad, for example, 87 % of people fear for their safety – more than in the districts outside that provincial capital (81,7 %) ⁽⁴²⁵⁾.

The main security problems in big cities are still predominantly high-profile attacks, target killings and kidnappings. In spite of the visible military presence in Kabul and other big cities, government, police and army are not able to prevent insurgent infiltration. Kabul, which experiences high-profile attacks on a regular basis, is now divided by security walls and road barriers but still AGEs, including ISKP, can move through the city ⁽⁴²⁶⁾.

Some urban centres suffer more security problems than others. Kabul has witnessed several high-profile attacks resulting in numerous civil casualties. Kabul alone accounted for 70 % of all civilian casualties by complex and suicide attacks in 2016 ⁽⁴²⁷⁾. The number of civilian casualties has risen more than tenfold from 141 in 2012 to 1,562 in 2016 ⁽⁴²⁸⁾. Some administrative centres in Kunduz, Helmand, Ghazni, Uruzgan and Baghlan Province are threatened and surrounded by Taliban forces ⁽⁴²⁹⁾.

In some rural areas, the Taliban, according to US military sources, have 'made gains' ⁽⁴³⁰⁾ and 'have experienced success in controlling' these areas ⁽⁴³¹⁾. According to SIGAR, 'The Taliban's control of some rural areas has enabled insurgent forces to launch more frequent attacks in formerly less-targeted areas, mainly in northern Afghanistan' ⁽⁴³²⁾.

1.9.2 Regional differences

There are differences in the security situation in various regions of Afghanistan. In the first eight months of 2017, at least 30 of 34 Afghan provinces are affected by the conflict and

⁽⁴²³⁾ Western Security analyst, briefing, 23 November 2017.

⁽⁴²⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin. Afghanistan. Issue 67 | 1 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁴²⁵⁾ Asia Foundation, A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2016, December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 39.

⁽⁴²⁶⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017, pp. 1, 22 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Increasing Security Walls Irks Kabul Residents, 26 March 2016 ([url](#)); Wytrykowska M., Afganistan sytuacja ludności cywilnej na terenach kontrolowanych przez Talibów, May 2013 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 48; Osman, B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring Sectarianism to the Afghan War, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)); Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., The New Kabul 'Green Belt' Security Plan: More Security for Whom?, 25 September 2017 ([url](#)); Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 55-57.

⁽⁴²⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽⁴²⁸⁾ Clark, K., More Horrific Records Set: UNAMA documents another peak year of civilian casualties, AAN, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 48; LWJ, Taliban Assaults Provincial Capital in Southeastern Afghanistan, 22 May 2017, ([url](#)); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 17-21.

⁽⁴³⁰⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 October 2017 ([url](#)) p. 101.

⁽⁴³¹⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁴³²⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 October 2017 ([url](#)), p. 102.

displacement ⁽⁴³³⁾. UNOCHA, considers 120 of the more than 400 districts 'highly conflict affected', an increase of 50 % by 2015 ⁽⁴³⁴⁾. According to Philipp Schweers, a security advisor with many years experience in Afghanistan among other places, quoted by Deutsche Welle, 'the situation is in no way homogeneous or coherent. There are regions, like the provinces Panjshir, Daykundi, Bamiyan or the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif which are relatively less affected by conflict-driven violence. There is clearly more tension in hotspots like northern Kunduz, southern Helmand or eastern Nangarhar' ⁽⁴³⁵⁾.

Based on casualty-figures documented by UNAMA, the armed conflict since 2009 has systematically most affected the southern region in terms of civilian casualties. Since 2015, there has been a steep increase of civilian casualties in the central provinces of Afghanistan, and a simultaneous decrease in civilian casualty numbers in the Eastern and South Eastern regions. There was a spike in the North Eastern region in 2015 and a systematic rise in civilian casualties in the the North. Only in the Central Highlands, the numbers have been systematically low ⁽⁴³⁶⁾. However, UNHCR notes that the roads leading in and out of the Central Highlands region including Bamiyan-Kabul and Bamiyan-Mazar are particularly insecure. This contributes to the isolation of residents in these areas, with many surrounding areas controlled or contested by AGEs. The Central Highlands is one of the most under-serviced and under-developed regions of the country ⁽⁴³⁷⁾.

In terms of displacement, UNHCR notes that the North Eastern region saw a sustained series of new displacements over the past 2 years. The largest proportion of newly displaced IDPs in 2016 and 2017 originate from North Eastern provinces ⁽⁴³⁸⁾.

⁽⁴³³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 18 September 2017), ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018, 1 December 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

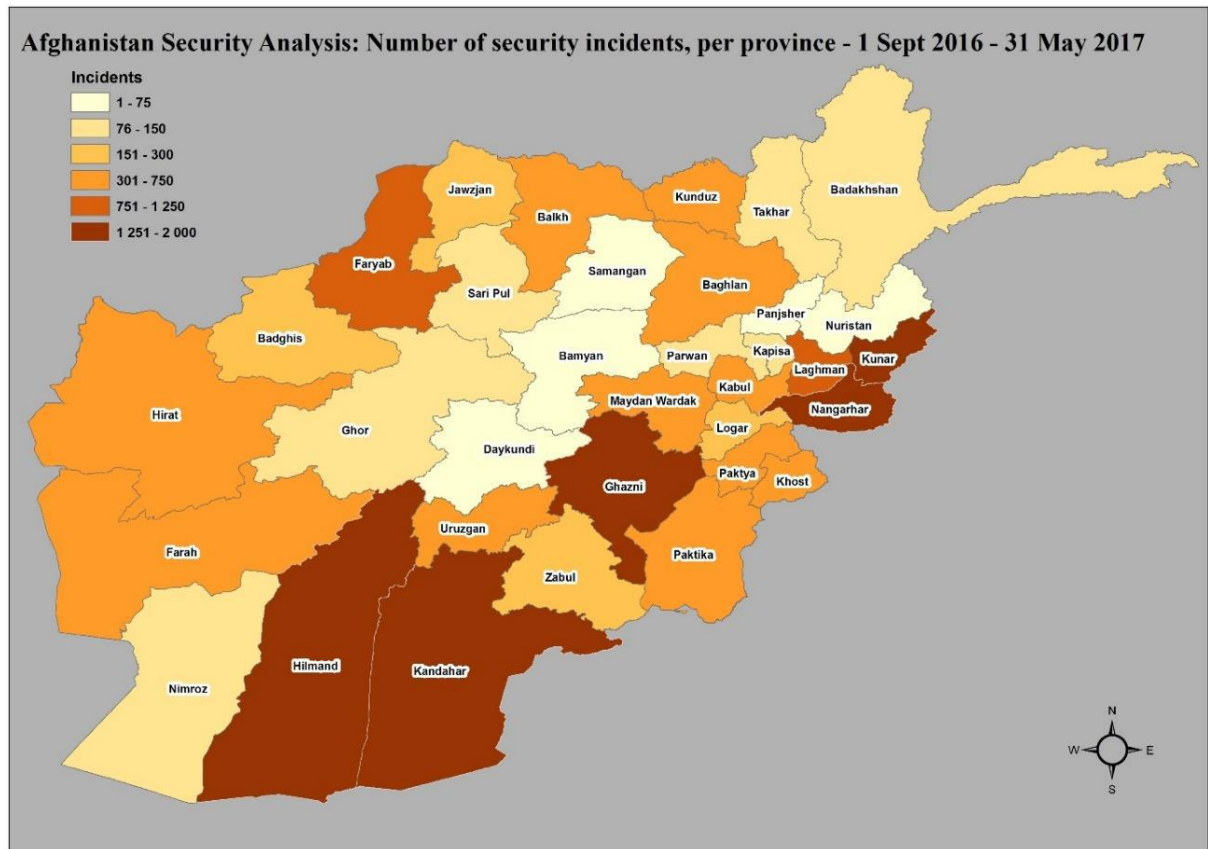
⁽⁴³⁵⁾ DW, Afghanistan: 'A latent instability dominates the picture', 14 March 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017, p. 14 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁴³⁷⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

⁽⁴³⁸⁾ UNHCR, e-mail 6 November 2017. UNHCR made this addition during review of this report.

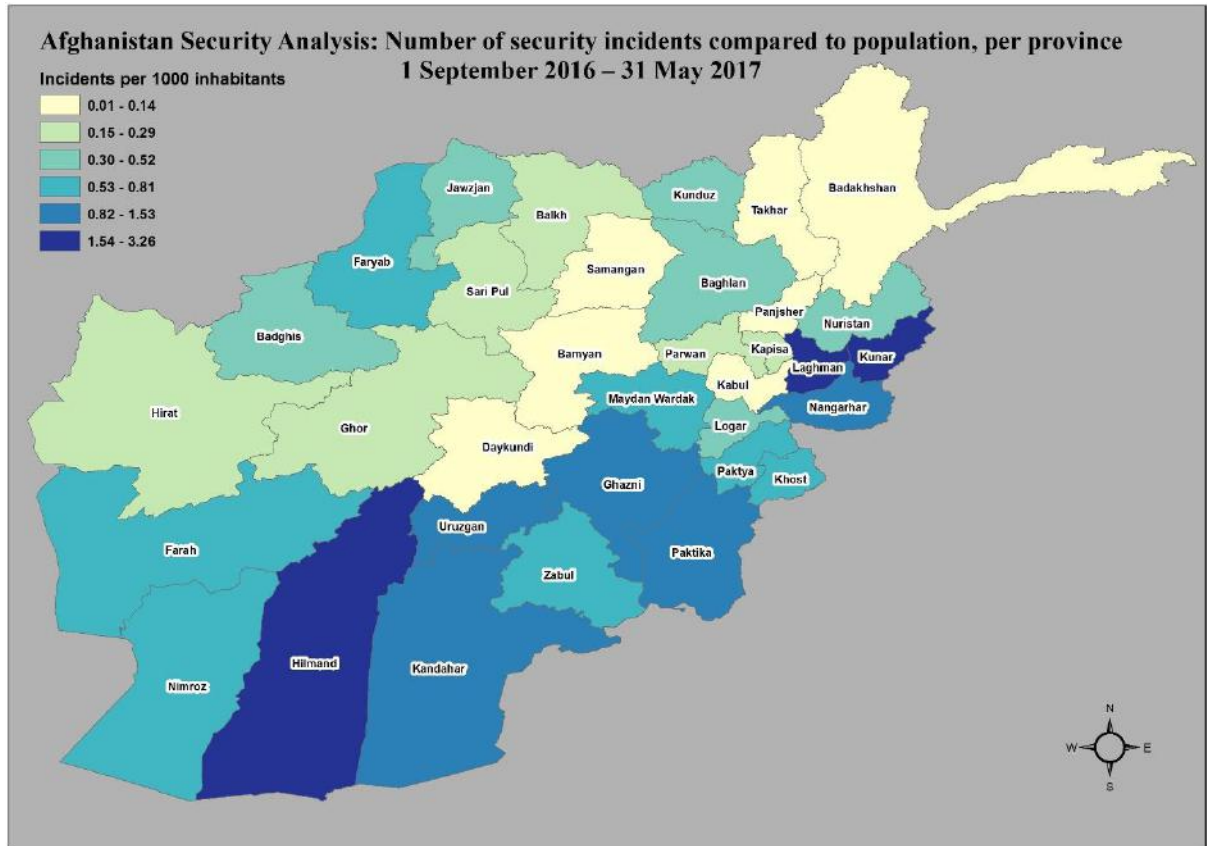
In Figure 3, an overview of the security incidents from September 2016 to May 2017 per province is shown on a map ⁽⁴³⁹⁾.



Map 3: Afghanistan: Security incidents per province (1 Sep 2016 – 31 May 2017)

⁽⁴³⁹⁾ Map created by EASO: data on incidents provided by Western security official (see [introduction](#)). The boundaries, colors, denominations and any other information shown on this map do not imply, on the part of EASO, any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

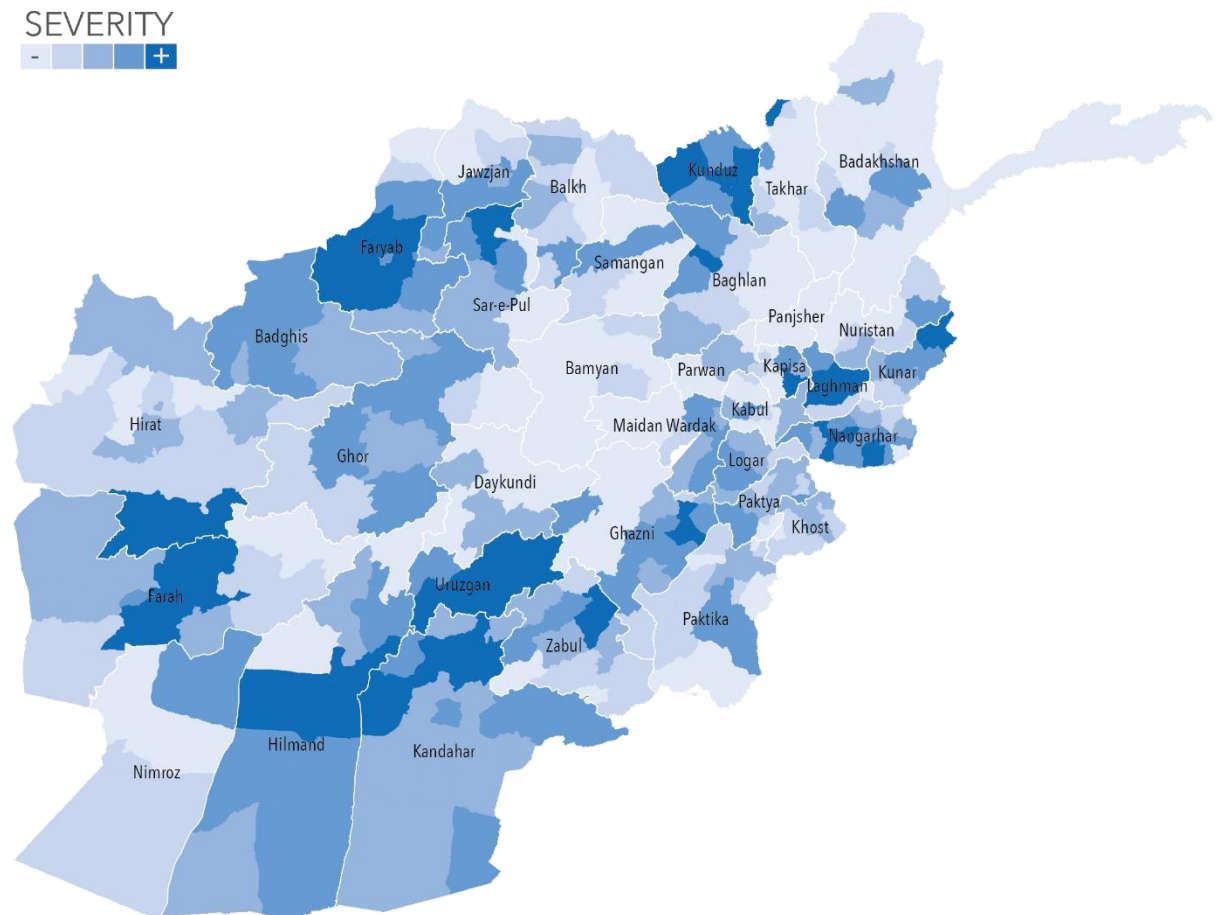
In Map 4, an overview is given per province of how the number of violent incidents relates to the number of inhabitants ⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾. The reference period for security incidents is also 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017. Further information on the violent incidents can be found in each provincial part of this report under [Regional description of the security situation](#).



Map 4 Afghanistan: Number of security incidents compared to population (1 Sep 2016 - 31 May 2017)

⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾ Map created by EASO, sources: UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015; data on incidents provided by Western security official (see [introduction](#)). The boundaries, colors, denominations and any other information shown on this map do not imply, on the part of The EASO, any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

Included below is the conflict severity map, produced by UNOCHA. The conflict severity is characterized by three indicators: security incidents; civilian casualties, and conflict induced displacement, which are representative of 1 January to 30 September 2017. The shading on the map is based on an average of the ranking of all districts on these indicators ⁽⁴⁴¹⁾.



Map 5: Conflict severity 1 Jan 2017 – 30 September 2017; source: UNOCHA ⁽⁴⁴²⁾.

1.9.3 Government versus Taliban control

Analyst for the Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kate Clark, stated in May 2017:

‘Various assessments of who controls how much territory and how much has been lost to the Taliban in the last two years have been made [...] There have also been disputes not only over figures, but what “control” means, as well as assertions that loss of government territory is partly deliberate withdrawals to “areas of more strategic importance”’ ⁽⁴⁴³⁾.

This security analysis looks at four different assessments, without endorsing either one of them: an assessment by the US military, by the Taliban, by the Institute for the Study of War

⁽⁴⁴¹⁾ UNOCHA, e-mail, 12 October 2017.

⁽⁴⁴²⁾ UNOCHA, e-mail, 12 October 2017.

⁽⁴⁴³⁾ Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, 24 May 2017 ([url](#)).

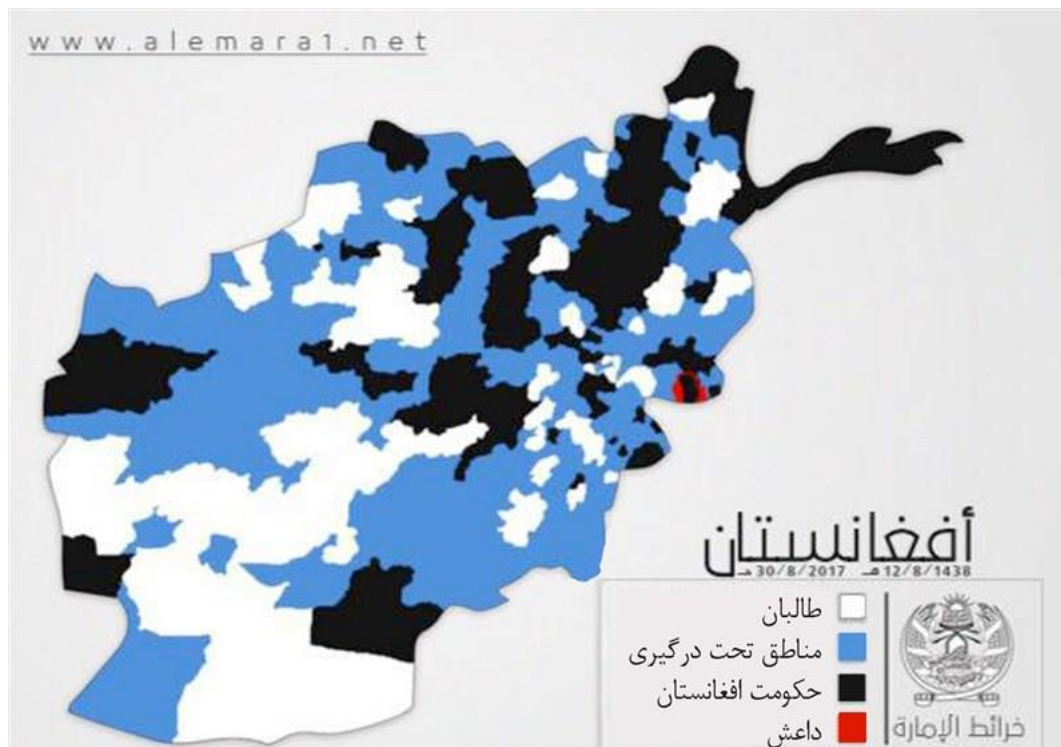
and finally by the Long War Journal. The US Military and the Taliban have their own assessment of who's in control over what area. Taken into account that these are actors in the conflict, one can expect a certain degree of propaganda and 'information operations' involved from both sides⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾. Therefore, also the assessment by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), and the by the terrorism watchblog Long War Journal (LWJ) are added.

According to the **US military**, quoted by SIGAR,

'approximately 59.7% of the country's 407 districts are under Afghan government control or influence as of May 15, 2017, the same as last quarter, but a six-point decline from the same period last year. As of May 2017, there were 45 districts (in 15 provinces) under insurgent control (11 districts) or influence (34 districts). Therefore, 11.1% of the country's total districts are still under insurgent control or influence, more than a two percentage-point increase from the same period in 2016'⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾.

The remaining 119 districts, almost 30 % of the districts where 25% of the population lives, are contested⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾.

The **Taliban** regularly publishes control maps:



Map 6: Taliban control map 30/8/2017; source: @ZabihullahM4⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾

According to the source, the legend says: 'White - Mujahidin control; Black - Regime control; Blue - Areas of fighting; Red - Daesh presence'⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾. The source of this information and the methodology used are unclear. However, assessing a previous report by the Taliban, the Long War Journal stated that

⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾ Munoz, A. and Dick, E., Information Operations: The Imperative of Doctrine Harmonization and Measures of Effectiveness, RAND Corporation, 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p.88.

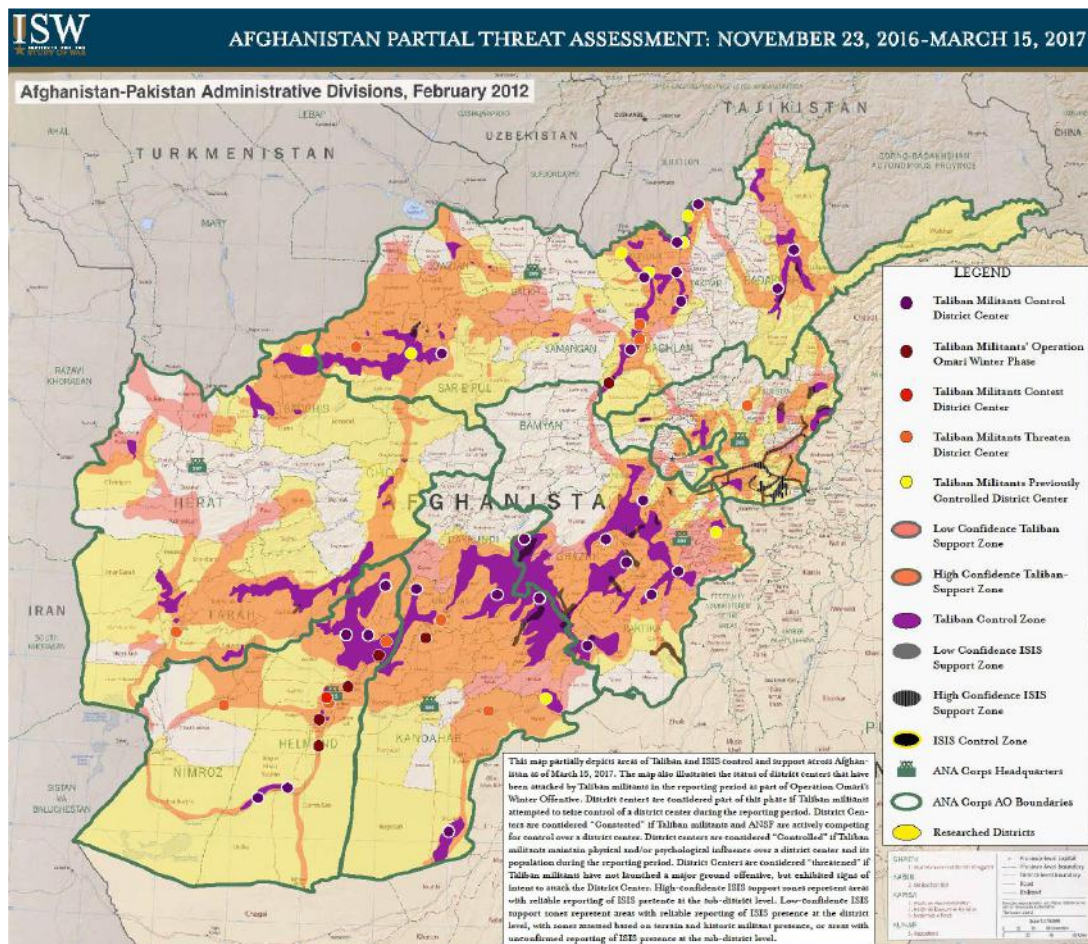
⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p.88.

⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾ Zabihulla-M [Twitter], posted on 5 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾ Zabihulla-M [Twitter], posted on 5 September 2017 ([url](#)).

‘it does not inflate or exaggerate the Taliban’s control of districts centers and contested areas throughout the country [...] The report was actually a rather conservative estimate, painting a dire but realistic picture of the security situation in Afghanistan. The Taliban also admits that there are large areas in Afghanistan where it has only a minimal presence’ (449).

In map 7, the **Institute for the Study of War (ISW)** reports on Taliban and Islamic State control zones (March 2017) (450).



Map 7: Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: November 23, 2016 - March 15, 2017; source: Institute for the Study of War

The map clarifies:

‘This map partially depicts areas of Taliban and ISIS control and support across Afghanistan as of March 15, 2017. The map also illustrates the status of district centers that have been attacked by Taliban militants in the reporting period as part of Operation Omari’s Winter Offensive. District centers are considered part of this phase if Taliban militants attempted to seize control of a district center during the reporting period. District Centers are considered “Contested” if Taliban militants and ANSF are actively competing for control over a district center. District centers are considered “Controlled” if Taliban militants maintain physical and/or psychological influence over a district center and its population during the reporting period. District

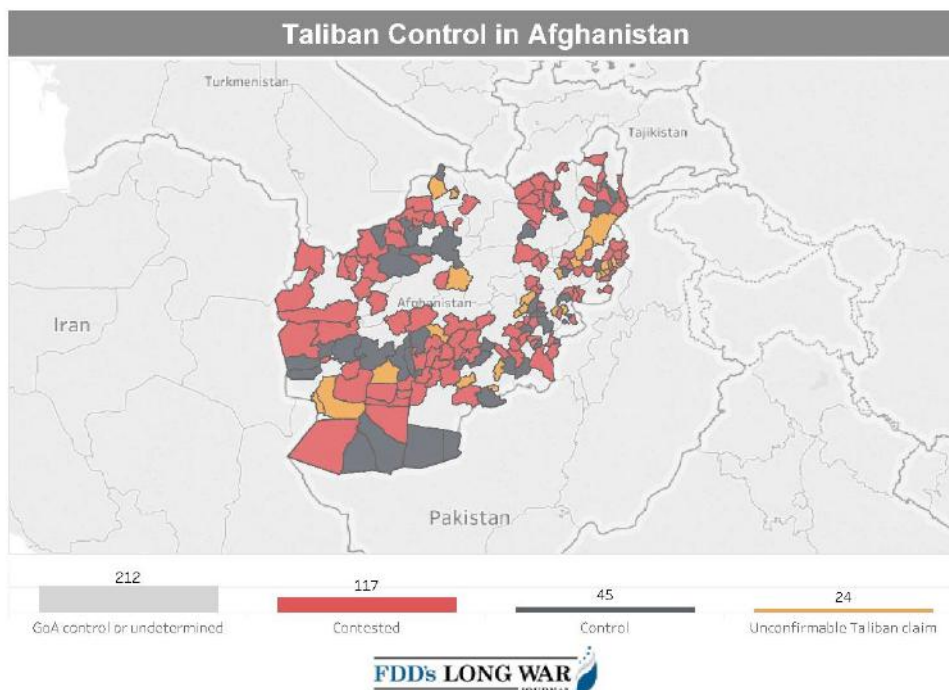
(449) LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists ‘Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen’, 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

(450) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: November 23, 2016 - March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

Centers are considered “threatened” if Taliban militants have not launched a major ground offensive, but exhibited signs of intent to attack the District Center. High-confidence ISIS support zones represent areas with reliable reporting of ISIS presence at the sub-district level. Low-confidence ISIS support zones represent areas with reliable reporting of ISIS presence at the district level, with zones assessed based on terrain and historic militant presence, or areas with unconfirmed reporting of ISIS presence at the sub-district level’⁽⁴⁵¹⁾.

However, it is unclear what ISW’s sources are and what their methodology is⁽⁴⁵²⁾.

The terrorism monitoring blog Long War Journal⁽⁴⁵³⁾ produces their own maps of Taliban control:



Map 8: Taliban Control in Afghanistan. Source: Long War Journal

The methodology is described as follows:

‘The data and research behind this map are entirely open-source. This is a living map that FDD’s Long War Journal frequently updates as verifiable research is conducted to support control changes. Any “Unconfirmed” district colored orange has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or can not be— independently verified by FDD’s Long War Journal research. A “Contested” district means 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 “Control” district means the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts’⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾.

⁽⁴⁵¹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: November 23, 2016 - March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵²⁾ The Institute for the Study of War did not respond on questions from EASO regarding their methodology.

⁽⁴⁵³⁾ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d. ([url](#)).

According to Kate Clark, ‘[r]egardless of all [these differences in assessment of Taliban versus government control], the trend is clear – and not good: the government has been steadily losing territory since the end of 2014’⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾.

1.9.4 Road security

In November 2017, analyst, co-founder and co-director of the Afghanistan Analyst Network, Thomas Ruttig, stated that important overland roads were regularly interrupted⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾. It was reported that, since early 2013, AGEs increasingly contested government control over main transport and access routes such as the major highway from Kabul to Kandahar⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾. From September 2016, it was still one of the most important Taliban strategies, especially in the North and North-East. Taliban tried to take control on the Baghlan-Balkh highway, which links Kabul to the North. According to researcher and co-director of the Afghanistan Analyst Network, Obaid Ali, ‘the Taliban know that by blocking highways, they can effectively undermine the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), both psychologically and physically’⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾. According to Baghlan residents, quoted by the local press in 2017, the highway and other roads in the province remained closed several times in 2017⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾ and militants tried to harm passengers on highways near the Pul-e Khumri⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾. In March 2017, the police claimed that the Taliban controlled the Kunduz-Takhar highway at night, as security personnel patrolled the highway from 8 am to 4 pm⁽⁴⁶¹⁾.

According to Public Works Director, quoted by Pajhwok in August 2017, 400 kilometers of asphalted roads had been destroyed in the conflict in the provinces, leaving the highway connecting Helmand and Kandahar for example in a ‘terrible condition’⁽⁴⁶²⁾. In 2017, the UN reported on an ‘increase of clashes for the control over lines of communications and vital infrastructure’⁽⁴⁶³⁾.

Insecurity is also caused by IEDs and landmines explosions on Afghan roads⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾. Kidnappings, hostage-taking and summary executions of civilians on roads are also reported⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾. For more

⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾ Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, 24 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾ Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾ Osman, B., The Road to Ghazni: Bombs, battles and blockades, 13 July 2013 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Kabul Kandahar highway remains closed off, 12 October 2015 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Afghan travellers stranded after Taliban blocks highway, 14 October 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Kabul-Kandahar Highway Closed to Traffic, Clashes Ongoing, 1 August 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign military experts aiding Taliban, 17 May 2017, ([url](#)); Tolo News, Ongoing Clashes Close Baghlan Roads To Traffic, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Two ANA Bases Under One-Month Taliban Siege In Baghlan, 12 March 2017 ([url](#)), LWJ, Another northern Afghan district falls to the Taliban, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾ Indian Express, Afghanistan: Taliban attack provincial town, cut highway linking Kabul to Kandahar, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News / BBC SAP, Heavy clashes continue between Afghan forces, Taliban in north, 15 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control Kunduz – Takhar highway at night, 9 March 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Conflict leaves Helmand – Kandahar road in ruins, 14 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶³⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 37; Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾ DW, Taliban carry out mass kidnapping in Afghanistan’s Kandahar province, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban take 7 passengers hostage in Farah City, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)); USDOS, 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 3, 4, 16, 47; New York Times (the), Gunmen Attack Hazara Miners in Afghanistan, 6 January 2017 ([url](#)).

information on the Taliban targeting at checkpoints, please refer to the EASO COI Report *Afghanistan. Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict* ⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾.

The spike in kidnappings and killings on the roads in 2016 was blamed on a reduction of ANSF checkpoints on the roads, allowing the Taliban more freedom ⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾. As part of the 2017 ANSF Road Map, SIGAR reports, the number of static checkpoints are being decreased in order to reduce the vulnerability of the ANSF personnel manning them ⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾. According to the US Department of State, 'President Ghani instructed [...] to reduce the number of permanent fixed checkpoints in order to increase the available combat power of the ANSF to support combined arms operations' ⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾.

According to the US Department of State, 'taxi, truck, and bus drivers reported security forces or insurgents sometimes operated illegal checkpoints and extorted money and goods from travellers' ⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾. Farmers report that the insecurity and lawlessness at checkpoints on the roads run by government and anti-government actors alike, results in losses ⁽⁴⁷¹⁾.

⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict, December 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 25-26.

⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾ Reuters, Facing fewer checkpoints, Taliban make Afghan road trips more risky, 13 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 100-101.

⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾ USDOS, 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 25.

⁽⁴⁷¹⁾ New York Times, (The), Abundant Afghan Harvest Wilts Amid Violence and Extortion, 4 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

In the following sections, security trends are explained in greater detail, per geographic subdivision (Kabul City and 34 provinces). In each provincial section a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population, on the background of the conflict, including the actors in the conflict in the province. A second part describes recent trends in the security situation, including the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims within a timeframe from 1 September 2016 until 31 August 2017. Finally, a separate part is dedicated to displacements.

Under the sub-sections several incidents are described. These should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents.

2.1 Kabul City

General description of the city

The city of Kabul is a separate district in the province of Kabul, alongside 14 other districts. In this report, Kabul City is highlighted because of its prominent position as Afghanistan's capital. Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic compounds and international and national security forces, the city has a different security outlook than most of Afghanistan's other districts and provinces⁽⁴⁷²⁾. According to a 2011 PhD dissertation on urban planning in Kabul by Pietro Anders Calogero and quoted by Fabrizio Foschini in his 2017 AAN report, the city of Kabul expanded from 12 districts or wards to 22 districts, which spread out to include neighbouring districts such as Chaharasyab or Musayi of Kabul province⁽⁴⁷³⁾. A UNOCHA map dated 4 January 2016, shows 22 police districts⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾.

Kabul is by far the biggest city in Afghanistan and certainly the fastest growing. Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred rapid growth in Kabul⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾. According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, there is no consensus about the current population living in Kabul due to differing estimates of population and growth rates. Estimates range from 3.5 million to more than 5 million people⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾. According to the UNHCR quoted by EASO, 'informal estimates suggests more than 7 million [are] living in the city [...] with 75 % of

⁽⁴⁷²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Human Rights and Security situation, 9 September 2011 ([url](#)); Foschini, F., Striking at Kabul, in 2013: the attack on the traffic police HQ, 21 January 2013 ([url](#)); Lifos, Rapport från utredningsresa till Afghanistan den 5 – 8 oktober 2013, 28 November 2013 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., Some things got better – how much got good? A review of 12 years of international intervention in Afghanistan, 30 December 2013 ([url](#)); Clark, K., The triple attack in Kabul: A message? If so, to whom?, 10 August 2015 ([url](#)); Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁴⁷³⁾ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾ Metcalfe, V., Haysom, S. and Martin, E., Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012 ([url](#)), pp. 6-8; APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012 ([url](#)), pp. 6-8.

⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

informal settlements’⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾. More than three-quarters of Kabul Province’s population lives in the city of Kabul⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾.

Kabul is an ethnically diverse city with communities of almost all ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, Sikhs and Hindus all reside there⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾ with no group clearly dominating. 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 neighborhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾ especially in the outer ring of the city where are the most recent settlements and where these new residents rely on their networks to find housing and jobs⁽⁴⁸¹⁾.

According to the Kabul City Master Plan, the employment structure of Kabul province is 79.4 % agriculture, 5.7 % industry, and 14.9 % services. Even if the population of Kabul province is 80 % urban, most inhabitants depend on agriculture for a living, either directly or indirectly. Since sellers of agricultural produce are also counted among those employed in the agriculture sector, the services sector is largely underestimated⁽⁴⁸²⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kabul City

In March 2015, the ISW stated that⁽⁴⁸³⁾:

‘[t]he escalation of violence in Kabul is likely linked to the increase of Taliban activity in the periphery. As ISAF troops closed their forward operating bases and pulled back to provincial capitals in the transition to Resolute Support, the insurgency was able to operate with greater freedom of movement and consolidate pre-existing strongholds in areas around Kabul. The insurgency maintains safe-havens in areas abutting three major highways leading into Kabul. The Taliban can funnel weapons, funds, and fighters from these areas and along the highways in order to support operations in Kabul.’

In Kabul, ISW and Long War Journal analysis referred to a ‘Kabul Attack Network’ involved in many of the high-profile attacks. This is described as a network of combatants from the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e Islami, Taliban, al Qaeda and Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT)⁽⁴⁸⁴⁾. Following the bomb attacks of 31 May and 3 June 2017 which were not claimed by any group, AAN analyst, Borhan Osman stated that ‘[t]here are two main possible perpetrators, based on other recent attacks in Kabul: the Taleban (all elements, including the Haqqani network, taken as a collective whole), who have been responsible for most of the previous attacks in the city, and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which is a relatively minor but growing actor’⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾.

⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾ ACSO, Kabul Province Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Highlights, 13 January 2015 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾ APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽⁴⁸¹⁾ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6, p.58.

⁽⁴⁸²⁾ RECS International Inc. Yachiyo Engineering Co., Draft Kabul City Master Plan, June 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 2-21.

⁽⁴⁸³⁾ ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan’s Security, March 2015 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽⁴⁸⁴⁾ Roggio, B., Taliban continue to launch suicide assaults in Kabul, 29 March 2014 ([url](#)); ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan’s Security, March 2015 ([url](#)), p. 18; Roggio, B., US military searches for Kabul Attack Network members, 27 April 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who are the most likely perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

In fact, during 2016, the ISKP emerged as a new actor in Kabul City. The organisation claimed responsibility for several attacks in the Afghan capital, including large-scale attacks targeting members of the Shia Muslim religious minority ⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾. According to UNAMA, ‘the nature of attacks perpetrated by Daesh/ISKP is indicative of attempts to expand the conflict along sectarian lines’ ⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾. The Taliban issued statements condemning these attacks targeting the Shia Muslim religious minority in Kabul City ⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾. According to Borhan Osman, writing in October 2016,

‘the group [ISKP] has an operational presence in Kabul that is beyond the ‘nascent’ stage. The group seems to have gained the capability of carrying out fatal attacks on an occasional basis in the capital, although not at a sophisticated level yet. These attacks are also an indicator that the group has recruited a certain number of dedicated and experienced fighters in the capital. [...] there are probably at least three cells based in different major neighbourhoods of the city’. ⁽⁴⁸⁹⁾

Apart from conflict-related violence, Kabul City has seen a rising crime rate; between 2013 and 2016, criminal activity increased by 38 %. Transport gangs operate at the gates of the city and target people coming out of the city, robbing and sometimes killing outbound travellers; while others gangs, linked to former jihadi chiefs or politicians, are active in central and peripheral areas of Kabul City that are more ‘ethnically homogenous’ ⁽⁴⁹⁰⁾.

Recent security trends in Kabul City

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Kabul City counted 290 security incidents ⁽⁴⁹¹⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	24
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	23
Explosions	63
Security enforcement	49
Non-conflict related incidents	112
Other incidents	19
Total security incidents	290

UNAMA casualty figures show an increase in civilian casualties in Kabul since 2015. UNAMA stated that in the first 6 months of 2017, in Kabul City, suicide and complex attacks caused

⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan 2016 Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 34-35; Engel Rasmussen, S., Isis claims responsibility for Kabul mosque suicide bomb blast, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)); BBC News, Kabul explosion: IS 'claims attack on Hazara protest', 23 July 2016 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Deaths as suicide bomber attacks Shia mosque in Kabul, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 78.

⁽⁴⁸⁹⁾ Osman, B., With an active cell in Kabul, ISKP tries to bring Sectarianism to the Afghan war, AAN, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁹⁰⁾ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 10 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 58.

⁽⁴⁹¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

986 civilian casualties (209 deaths and 777 injured) ⁽⁴⁹²⁾ which represents 19 % of all civilian casualties ⁽⁴⁹³⁾. The total civilian casualties for the first six months of 2017 (986) represents more than all civilian casualties for Kabul in 2015: 939 (145 deaths and 794 injured), and more than the half of all casualties for 2016: 1562 (305 deaths and 1257 injured) ⁽⁴⁹⁴⁾. In 2016, according to UNAMA, '70 % of all civilian casualties arising from suicide and complex attacks occurred in Kabul city' ⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾.

According to figures compiled by Pajhwok Afghan News, in May 2017, 1,449 people were killed and 1,550 others wounded in 205 attacks across Afghanistan; with 20% of attacks occurring in Kabul ⁽⁴⁹⁶⁾.

Shia Muslims were deliberately attacked by ISKP which claimed the following attacks in Kabul: on 11 October 2016, the day of Ashura, 19 civilians were killed and 60 harmed by an attacker wearing a ANSF uniform who opened fire in the Karte Sakhi Mosque; 40 days after, for the celebration of Arbaeen, a suicide bomber entered the Baqer-ul Ulum mosque killing 40 civilians and injuring 74 others including many children ⁽⁴⁹⁷⁾; on 15 June 2017, the attack of the Al Zahra mosque killed 5 people and injured 7 others ⁽⁴⁹⁸⁾; and in August 2017, the Imam Zaman Mosque was attacked ⁽⁴⁹⁹⁾ causing the deaths of 20 civilians and injuring more than 30 people ⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾.

Between September 2016 and August 2017, the use of magnetic IEDs was reported in attacks against government vehicles: on a vehicle belonging to the Ministry of Defense ⁽⁵⁰¹⁾, on shuttles of governmental employees ⁽⁵⁰²⁾, police vehicles ⁽⁵⁰³⁾ or ANA vehicles ⁽⁵⁰⁴⁾. Pajhwok Afghan News reported the use of a magnetic IED on a private vehicle killing the driver without giving specific information about the target ⁽⁵⁰⁵⁾.

Body and vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIED) were used against government buildings such as the Supreme Court, Parliamentary Administration, Ministry of Defense, and an NDS office; these attacks caused civilian victims ⁽⁵⁰⁶⁾. Complex attacks organized by the Taliban or ISKP against

⁽⁴⁹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁴⁹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴⁹⁴⁾ Clark, K., More Horrific Records Set: UNAMA documents another peak year of civilian casualties, 6 February 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾ Afghanistan, Annual Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽⁴⁹⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, June attacks leave over 1,600 killed & wounded in Afghanistan, 4 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 34-35.

⁽⁴⁹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽⁴⁹⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 dead, 30 injured in Kabul mosque attack, 25 August 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Graves Fill an Afghan Mosque's Garden After a Terrorist Attack, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, UNAMA condemns killing of civilians in Kabul mosque attack, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰¹⁾ KP, Explosion in defence ministry in Kabul, no casualties reported, 11 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12

⁽⁵⁰³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Five people hurt in Kabul magnetic bomb blast, 25 August 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Sticky bomb injures 2 police officers in Kabul, 18 January 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Magnetic bomb explosion leaves 3 wounded in Kabul city, 2 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 dead, 3 wounded in Kabul explosion, 14 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Policeman dead, 2 civilians hurt in Kabul bombing, 14 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁴⁾ KP, Explosion in Kabul leaves 2 soldiers, 3 civilians wounded, 29 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Magnetic bomb hits ANA vehicle; no casualties, 9 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul magnetic bomb blast kills one person, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁶⁾ Guardian (the), Afghanistan bomb attacks leave dozens dead and scores injured, 6 September 2016 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General 13 December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.33; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security; Report of the Secretary-General, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6; Pajhwok Afghan News, 24 people killed, 42 injured in Kabul suicide bombing, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, Taliban kill dozens in double suicide attack in Kabul, 10 January 2017 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

ANSF targets, respectively on a ANP and ANA compound and on a ANA military hospital facility resulted in several civilian casualties ⁽⁵⁰⁷⁾.

On 31 May 2017 a VBIED attack occurred in the central Kabul area of Wazir Akbar Khan during rush hour, though it was not claimed by any group and the target was not clear ⁽⁵⁰⁸⁾. The attack is ‘the deadliest incident documented by UNAMA since 2001’ ⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾, causing 583 civilian casualties: 92 deaths and 491 injured ⁽⁵¹⁰⁾. The Afghan government blamed the Haqqani Network and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate for the operation ⁽⁵¹¹⁾.

Pajhwok Afghan News also reported that two civilians were killed and one injured due to rockets hitting an area of Kabul in July 2017 ⁽⁵¹²⁾.

Displacement

In June 2017, UNHCR and the Norwegian refugee Council assessed that

‘Kabul province has received the highest number of returnees in 2017, and historically since 2002. Its capacity to absorb and reintegrate refugees returning to Afghanistan, as well as IDPs from other provinces is minimal. IDPs and returnees are mostly settling in the outskirts of the capital (eg. PD 21, Bagrami, PD 8, PD 12, PD 16) where basic services are lacking’ ⁽⁵¹³⁾.

In the period 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017, 16,366 individuals were displaced to Kabul district. The majority of them, 11,018 people, came from the province of Kunduz in October 2016 ⁽⁵¹⁴⁾.

The total number of IDPs in Kabul is unknown. There are different categories of IDPs: those fleeing armed conflict and security problems, returnees who could not return to their place of origin and live in secondary displacement, people fleeing natural disaster and nomads such as Kuchi and Jogi. Of the total, 40 % of returnees do not or cannot return to their place of origin. IDPs in Kabul do not necessarily live separated from the other urban dwellers and often mingle with other vulnerable groups such as the urban poor, returnees and economic migrants. Most IDPs settle in informal and illegal settlements around the city. They are often referred to ‘Kabul Informal Settlements’ or KIS, which include some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city ⁽⁵¹⁵⁾. As of January 2016, UNOCHA counted 48 such settlements with almost 55,000 inhabitants ⁽⁵¹⁶⁾.

Apart from internal displacement due to the conflict in Afghanistan, Kabul City saw large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, putting further strain on the city’s

Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 77-78.; Roggio, B., Taliban suicide bomber strikes in Kabul, LWJ, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 18, 19, 33.

⁽⁵⁰⁸⁾ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who are the most likely perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁵¹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12, 33.

⁽⁵¹¹⁾ LWJ, Bomb blast rocks Kabul during rush hour, killing dozens of civilians, 31 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians killed, 1 injured as rockets hit Kabul, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹³⁾ UNHCR and NRC, Afghanistan: Central Region Protection Cluster Factsheet - MAY 2017, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹⁵⁾ Metcalfe, V., Haysom, S. and Martin, E., Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012 ([url](#)), p. 6; Bjelica, J., Afghanistan’s Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016 ([url](#)).

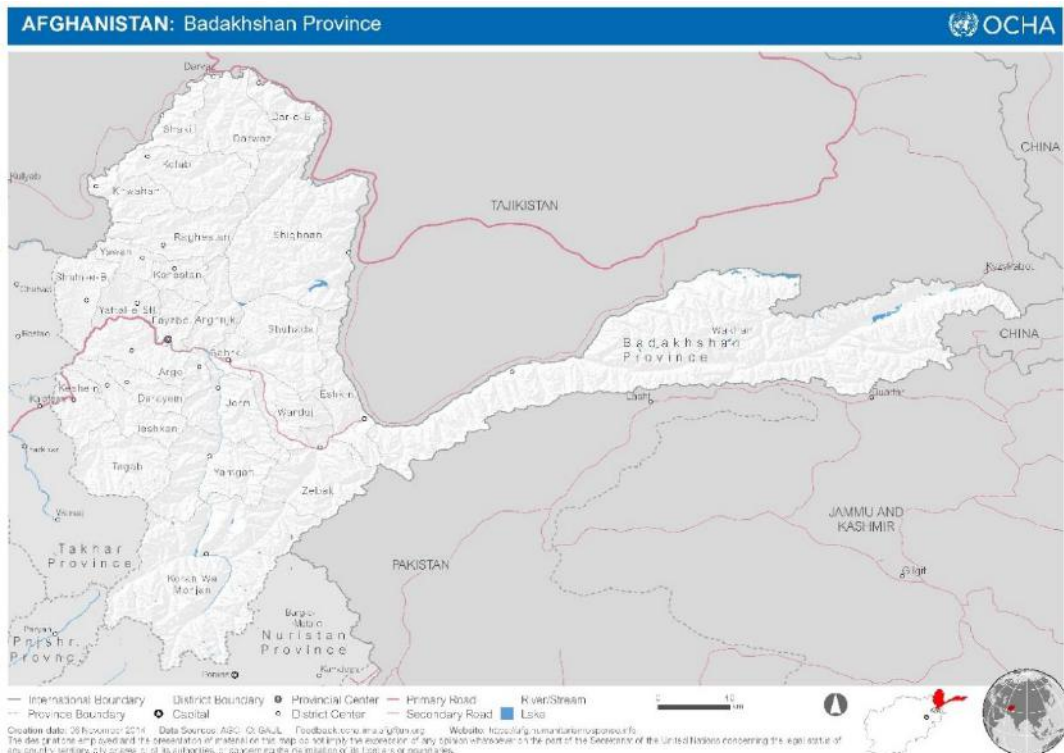
⁽⁵¹⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016 ([url](#)).

services. In April 2017, UNOCHA estimated that Kabul province had received 147,000 Afghan returnees from Pakistan since 1 January 2016, based on the returnees 'intended region of return' upon arrival at the border ⁽⁵¹⁷⁾.

For more information on Kabul City, see EASO *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽⁵¹⁸⁾.

2.2 Badakhshan

General description of the province



The Badakhshan province is located in the Northeastern region with international borders with Tajikistan, China and Pakistan ⁽⁵¹⁹⁾. It is divided into the following districts: Arghanjkhwa, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz, Darwaz-e-Balla, Eshkmesh, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, Koran Wa Monjan, Raghestan, Shahr-e-Buzorg, Shaki, Shighnan, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, Yaftal-e-Sufla, Yawan, Yamgan, Zebak ⁽⁵²⁰⁾. Nearly 90% of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain while one-tenth of the area is made up of flat or semi-flat land. The provincial capital is Fayzabad ⁽⁵²¹⁾.

⁽⁵¹⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Returnee crisis situation report no 9, 20 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹⁸⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹⁹⁾ Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁵²⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Badakhshan Province – District Atlas, April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²¹⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Badakhshan Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)).

According to Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO), the population of Badakhshan is 966,780 ⁽⁵²²⁾, composed mainly of Tajiks (about 70% ⁽⁵²³⁾), some Uzbeks, Wakhis, Kyrgyz and other distinct ethnic groups are also present. Some inhabitants are Ismaili believers, living mainly in the districts bordering Tajikistan ⁽⁵²⁴⁾.

Economically, residents of Badakhshan rely on agriculture although there is very little arable land ⁽⁵²⁵⁾. It is considered to be an important region for poppy cultivation and a transit zone for drug trafficking ⁽⁵²⁶⁾. The villages are isolated, dispersed and highly self-reliant with limited access to markets because of long distances and lack of road networks. Large part of the roads are closed from December to April due to harsh winters and spring floods ⁽⁵²⁷⁾. The province is rich in minerals including gold, lapis, salt, mica, limestone and coal ⁽⁵²⁸⁾. According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 96 % of Badakhshan' population live in rural areas and 43.6 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁵²⁹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Badakhshan

Security in Badakhshan province is threatened by different actors. The lack of good governance has led to clashes between security forces and AGEs, roadside bomb incidents and increasing violence by criminal organisations ⁽⁵³⁰⁾. Badakhshan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corp ⁽⁵³¹⁾.

Badakhshan was one of the only provinces to escape Taliban rule when they held power in Afghanistan until 2001. However, in recent years the AGEs, including foreign fighters, have taken root in several districts. In May 2016, the Afghan Foreign Minister confirmed the presence of foreign rebels in the province ⁽⁵³²⁾. They were mainly from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan or with Uyghur background, with some from Russia and Turkmenistan. Their families settled in this province after they escaped from North Waziristan (Pakistan) in 2014 following Pakistani military action in the region. The Central Asian fighters of IMU and Jamaat Asurullah were reported to be present in the province ⁽⁵³³⁾. It is unclear to what extent foreign fighters pledged allegiance to IS or whether they tried to subvert the local Taliban leadership ⁽⁵³⁴⁾.

⁽⁵²²⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Badakhshan Population (2016-2017) ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²³⁾ AREU, The political economy of education and health service delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 44.

⁽⁵²⁴⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Badakhshan Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)); Samuel Hall Consulting, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁵²⁵⁾ Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 5, 6; Afghanaid and MEDAIR, Dryness Impact Survey Report Badakhshan, Afghanistan 17 July 2011 ([url](#)), p. 1, 2.

⁽⁵²⁶⁾ AREU, Evolving Terrain: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2013, April 2014 ([url](#)); UNODC/ Afghanistan, Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁵²⁷⁾ Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 46; Afghanaid and MEDAIR, Dryness Impact Survey Report Badakhshan, Afghanistan 17 July 2011 ([url](#)), p. 1, 2.

⁽⁵²⁸⁾ Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁵²⁹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 3-4.

⁽⁵³⁰⁾ Tolo News, Badakhshan Residents Blame Government, MPs for Deteriorating Security, 14 May 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³¹⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 108.

⁽⁵³²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Presence of foreign rebels in Badakhshan a big concern: Rabbani, 5 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³³⁾ Ali, O., The 2015 Insurgency in the North (2): Badakhshan's Jurm district under siege, 14 September 2015 ([url](#)); Mielke K. & Misak N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan : A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 26; Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, The curious case of Chinese troops on Afghan soil, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)) ; KP, Leader of Tajik terrorist movement Jamaat Ansarullah killed in Afghanistan, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁴⁾ Mielke K. & Misak N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 26-27.

The Taliban is also present and is suspected of trying to thwart Afghanistan's foreign trade (⁵³⁵). The Taliban has changed its recruitment policy and now their divisions contain mainly non-Pashtun fighters, including in key provincial positions. They established administrative and military structures and appointed the shadow governors of province and districts (⁵³⁶).

Armed groups controlled by influential people and AGEs controlled illegal extraction of lapis lazuli and gold mines in Karan-o-Manjan and Raghistan districts of the province. Taliban insurgents control two mines — a major source of income for the militant group (⁵³⁷).

The region shares a border with China of approximately 76 kilometers in length. There were reports about China's military engagement in Badakhshan province. Some Chinese patrols were seen in the Little Pamir, probably conducted together with Afghans, however the allegations are not officially confirmed (⁵³⁸).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Badakhshan Province counted 112 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents (⁵³⁹):

Violence targeting individuals	8
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	71
Explosions	10
Security enforcement	5
Non-conflict related incidents	10
Other incidents	8
Total security incidents	112

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Badakhshan province (⁵⁴⁰):

Arghanj Khaw	7	Kuran Wa Munjan	2
Argo	7	Raghistan	6
Baharak	10	Shahri Buzurg	3
Darayim	4	Shaki	1
Darwazi bala	2	Shuhada	6

(⁵³⁵) Tolo News, Badakhshan Residents Blame Government, MPs for Deteriorating Security, 14 May 2015 ([url](#)).

(⁵³⁶) Ali, O., The 2015 Insurgency in the North (2): Badakhshan's Jurm district under siege, 14 September 2015 ([url](#)).

(⁵³⁷) Afghanistan Times, Plunder of natural richness: Illegal mining at peak in Badakhshan, 25 January 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁵³⁸) Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, The curious case of Chinese troops on afghan soil, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, China 'Creating' Consensus In Region To Fight Terrorism, 7 September 2017 ([url](#))

(⁵³⁹) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

(⁵⁴⁰) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Fayzabad	15	Tagab (Kishmi Bala)	7
Ishkashim	1	Warduj	1
Jurm	11	Yaftali Sufla	8
Khash	2	Yamgan (Girwan)	1
Khwahan	2	Yawan	2
Kishim	5	Zebak	9

In the first half of 2017 UNAMA documented 31 civilian victims (14 deaths and 17 injured). Most of them died from ground engagement or IED explosions. Targeted or deliberate killings also took place in the province⁽⁵⁴¹⁾. According to the Chief of Badakhshan's community police, the number of casualties grew; he commented in a local debate that in 2016, there were 40 casualties in total, but that between April and August 2017, already 54 civilians had been killed by parties in the conflict. According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in the province, who was also in the community debate, violations and injustice were widespread both in areas under government control and less secure areas⁽⁵⁴²⁾.

According to analyst Ali Obadi, in January 2017, two out of 28 Badakhshan districts (Yamgan and Warduj) were entirely under Taliban control. At least four more districts (Baharak, Raghistan, Argo and Zebak) have changed hands several times, while four others (Jurm, Shohada, Tagab and Kuran wa Munjan) are contested. Taliban activity has also been reported in Khash, Darayem, Teshkan and the district of the provincial capital, Faizabad. In the district capital, the insurgents reportedly have a 'strong presence' in the village of Spingul, only two kilometres away from Faizabad, from where they threaten the important Baharak-Faizabad road⁽⁵⁴³⁾.

In April and May 2017, heavy clashes took place around one kilometre from the district administrative center in Zebak district. According to ANSF sources, the attacks in Zebak were coordinated by Taliban, Islamic State and foreign fighters. Several airstrikes were conducted⁽⁵⁴⁴⁾.

On 28 June 2017, AGEs abducted and killed two sisters in Argo district, Badakhshan province. Both young women in their twenties worked as police officers, having recently returned from six months of training in Turkey aimed at increasing the representation of women in the Afghan National Police⁽⁵⁴⁵⁾.

In July 2017, militants abducted the deputy governor of Nasai mini-district (Darwaza district) while he was travelling in his car⁽⁵⁴⁶⁾. Also in July 2017, Taliban members ambushed and killed 30 ALP members in Tagab⁽⁵⁴⁷⁾. The imposition of parallel justice structure punishments on civilians continued; the AGEs stoned to death a woman in Badakhshan province for adultery in 2017⁽⁵⁴⁸⁾.

⁽⁵⁴¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)); Guardian (The); Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military ignores situation, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴²⁾ IWPR, Afghan Province Sees Rise In Civilian Casualties, 2 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴³⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁴⁾ KP, Local officials in Badakhshan reject fall of Zebak district, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)); Fox News, One small battle could lead to massive strategic loss in Afghanistan, 2 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁵⁴⁶⁾ Xinhua News Agency, Afghan Taliban abducts deputy district governor in northern Badakhshan province, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 ALP men killed in Badakhshan ambush, 21 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 44.

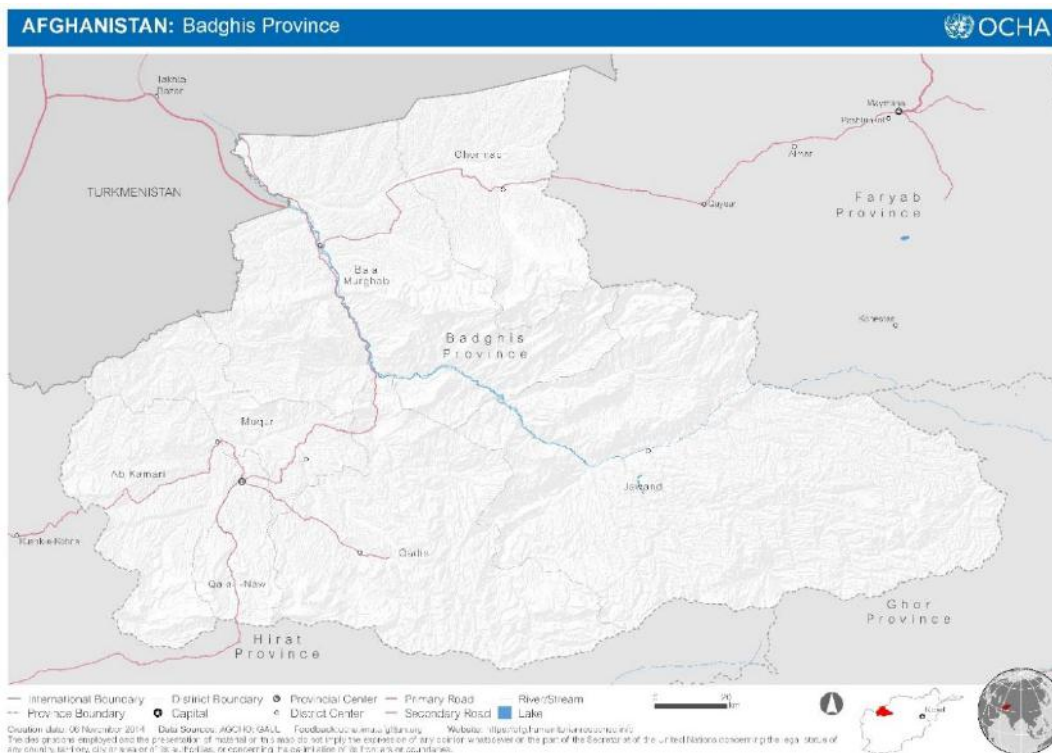
In August 2017, it was reported by the media that the government's anti-polio vaccination campaign was not allowed by Taliban in the districts under its control and more than 5,000 children were not vaccinated in Warduj district alone ⁽⁵⁴⁹⁾.

Displacement

Besides internal displacement due to natural disasters, Badakhshan has experienced significant conflict-induced displacements, especially after the October 2015 clashes in Kunduz ⁽⁵⁵⁰⁾. This trend continues. According to UNOCHA, about 10,000 persons were newly displaced from within the province during the first nine months of 2017. They came from Yaftal-e Sufla, Yawan, Warduj, Jorm and other districts and looked for shelter mainly in Faizabad and Baharak district ⁽⁵⁵¹⁾.

2.3 Badghis

General description of the province



Badghis Province is located in the northwestern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Herat, Ghor and Faryab provinces and with the state of Turkmenistan ⁽⁵⁵²⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 495,958 ⁽⁵⁵³⁾. Badghis province

⁽⁵⁴⁹⁾ Frontier Post; 7,000 Badakhshan kids likely to miss polio drops again, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵⁰⁾ UNHCR, Major situations of conflict-induced displacement in the first months of 2016 - Summary note for Afghanistan Protection Cluster, 24 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 2 October 2017), ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵²⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Badghes Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Badghis Province: Reference Map, 18 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

comprises six or seven administrative units: the provincial capital Qala e Naw (Qala-e-Naw), and the districts Aab Kamri (Ab Kamari), Bala Murghab, Jund (Jawand), Muqur, Qadas (Qadis) ⁽⁵⁵⁴⁾. Ghormach district is either listed as part of Badghis ⁽⁵⁵⁵⁾ or Faryab province ⁽⁵⁵⁶⁾.

According to an international organisation, Tajiks are the predominant ethnic group in the province, while Pashtuns are the second largest group. Other main ethnic groups are Uzbeks, Turkmens, Baluchis and Hazaras. The districts of Bala Murghab and Muqur are mostly inhabited by Pashtuns; Tajiks are the majority in the other districts and in Qala-e-Naw ⁽⁵⁵⁷⁾. Another source lists Ghormach as predominantly Pashtun ⁽⁵⁵⁸⁾.

Economically, residents of Badghis rely on 'rain-fed agriculture, livestock, remittances and handicrafts' ⁽⁵⁵⁹⁾. A 184 % increase in the cultivation of poppy has been reported in the province during the year 2016 ⁽⁵⁶⁰⁾. According to an international organisation, the province lacks essential infrastructure both in its urban and rural areas ⁽⁵⁶¹⁾; in 2016 it was reported that a number of infrastructure projects were completed in Qala e Naw ⁽⁵⁶²⁾. The road infrastructure in Badghis is described by sources as being of 'poor quality' ⁽⁵⁶³⁾ or even as 'non-existing' ⁽⁵⁶⁴⁾. Furthermore, respondents in field research conducted by AREU in 2016 stated that roads were unsafe due to the presence of Taliban and bandits ⁽⁵⁶⁵⁾. The province is also affected by water shortage ⁽⁵⁶⁶⁾. According to local residents, there is a lack of qualified professionals and insufficient supplies in the healthcare sector. Available medicines have been reported as being of poor quality. AREU notes that while the province fares 'much better' in the provision of education services than in the delivery of healthcare, support for education among local elites is limited, and insecurity makes it 'very difficult' to hire qualified teachers ⁽⁵⁶⁷⁾.

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 97 % of Badghis' population live in rural areas and 53.4 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁵⁶⁸⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Badghis

⁽⁵⁵⁴⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Badghes Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to UNOCHA, Badghis Province: Reference Map, 18 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Badghis Province: Reference Map, 18 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵⁶⁾ A discussion of the status of Ghormach district can be found in: Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁵⁷⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁵⁵⁸⁾ Norway, En god alliert – Norge i Afghanistan 2001–2014, 2016 ([url](#)), p. 123.

⁽⁵⁵⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁵⁶⁰⁾ UNODC/ Afghanistan, Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁶¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁵⁶²⁾ Wadsam, 21 development projects completed in Badghis Province, 24 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁶³⁾ UNDP, Regional Rural Economic Regeneration Strategies (RRERS) Provincial Profile for Badghis Province, October 2006 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁵⁶⁴⁾ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁶⁵⁾ AREU, The political economy of education and health service delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽⁵⁶⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Badghis province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁶⁷⁾ AREU, The political economy of education and health service delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 49, 51.

⁽⁵⁶⁸⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 5-6.

According to a December 2016 joint UN and Afghan government report, the security situation in Badghis province deteriorated from 2015 onwards⁽⁵⁶⁹⁾. The conflict situation in Badghis has been characterised by armed fighting between AGEs and security forces and periodic clashes between rivalling warlords⁽⁵⁷⁰⁾. Since 2014, Badghis Province has been a hotbed of fighting driven by Taliban and IMU militants, and the ANSF have launched a number of offensives since then in an attempt to oust the militants from the province⁽⁵⁷¹⁾ (see below). As reported by Spain's El Mundo newspaper end of August 2017, AGEs control nearly 85 % of the province. While the government still has control over the district centres, the surrounding areas are currently almost completely under militant control⁽⁵⁷²⁾. Local strongmen have had 'on-and-off relations with the Taliban' or have at times even disguised their fighters as Taliban. While AGEs have had links with elders and village leaders, it has been emphasized that ethnic and tribal ties remained powerful and that the Taliban were still more firmly rooted among Pashtuns than (Persian-speaking) Aimaqs⁽⁵⁷³⁾.

According to an international source consulted by Landinfo, Badghis remains an insurgent stronghold. Several factors contribute to the province's strategic importance for AGEs, including its network of roads to Turkmenistan, its proximity to insurgent bases in neighbouring Faryab province, and limited operational presence of security forces in the province. Traditionally, the end of the opium harvest coincides with an increase in the level of violent conflict⁽⁵⁷⁴⁾. El Mundo newspaper quotes analysts as saying that the fighting over control of the province may not only be driven by conflicts over territory but also by AGEs' interest in asserting their control over the lucrative opium poppy production and heroin trade in the province⁽⁵⁷⁵⁾. AGE attacks are primarily directed against military interests or other targets linked to the authorities. Insurgents often target security checkpoints along roads. Areas along the route to Turkmenistan, as well as the road between the provincial capital Qala-e-Naw and Maymana in neighbouring Faryab are at particular risk of being targeted⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾.

According to Jelena Bjelica of the AAN, Ghormach district continued to be an AGE stronghold. While the government was able to maintain some control over the district centre after 2014, most of the rest of the district remained beyond the government's reach. In 2015 and 2016, first vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum twice personally commanded ANSF counteroffensives in Ghormach district. However, on both occasions the government only temporarily regained control of the district centre. From their basis in Ghormach, the Taliban are able to partially control the highway between Badghis and Faryab⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾.

According to sources within NATO quoted by El Mundo newspaper, the ISKP currently has a small presence in Bala Murghab district⁽⁵⁷⁸⁾. Fighting between two rivalling Taliban factions erupted in Bala Murghab district in early May 2016, with subsequent clashes in Qadis district, according to an international source⁽⁵⁷⁹⁾. In July, the police chief of Badghis and Bala Murghab district governor claimed that the district had become a 'safe haven' for Taliban. They stated

⁽⁵⁶⁹⁾ UNODC/Afghanistan, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁰⁾ AREU, The political economy of education and health service delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 45.

⁽⁵⁷¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷²⁾ El Mundo, Guerra civil talibán en la 'provincia española' de Afganistán, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷³⁾ AREU, The political economy of education and health service delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 48-49.

⁽⁵⁷⁴⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Badghis, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁵⁷⁵⁾ El Mundo, Guerra civil talibán en la 'provincia española' de Afganistán, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Badghis, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁸⁾ El Mundo, Guerra civil talibán en la 'provincia española' de Afganistán, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Badghis, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

that the districted housed over 20 insurgent groups, including Pakistani Taliban and IMU ⁽⁵⁸⁰⁾. According to an LWJ map based on an evaluation of Taliban claims of control, Ghormach and Jawand districts were assessed to be under full Taliban control as of late March 2017 while all the other administrative units except Qala-e-Naw were heavily contested ⁽⁵⁸¹⁾. According to a map published by the ISW, parts of Ghormach, Bala Murghab, Muqur district and a small part of Ab Kamari district are described as ‘Taliban control zones’, while the rest of Ghormach and Bala Murghab districts and parts of Jawand, Qadis and Ab Kamari districts are marked as ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’. It is also noted that the Ghormach district centre has previously been controlled by Taliban ⁽⁵⁸²⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Badghis Province counted 360 security incidents ⁽⁵⁸³⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	44
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	232
Explosions	34
Security enforcement	16
Non-conflict related incidents	27
Other incidents	7
Total security incidents	360

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Badghis province ⁽⁵⁸⁴⁾:

Ab Kamari	21	Murghab	61
Jawand	13	Qadis	73
Ghormach	105	Qala-e-Naw	21
Muqur	56		

UNAMA noted 67 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 48 injured) during the first half of 2017, a 16 % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by targeted killings ⁽⁵⁸⁵⁾.

⁽⁵⁸⁰⁾ Tolo News, Bala Murghab District in Badghis Province a Safe Haven for Taliban: District Governor, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸¹⁾ LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists ‘Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen’, 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸²⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁵⁸⁴⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁵⁸⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

On 11 October 2016, Ghormach district was captured by Taliban following intense fighting with security forces ⁽⁵⁸⁶⁾. The district was recaptured by government forces on 20 October 2016 in an operation directed by Abdul Rashid Dostum ⁽⁵⁸⁷⁾.

Further fighting between AGEs and ANSF resulting in casualties on either side, including clashes following AGE attacks on security posts and ANSF convoys, have been reported by media with reference to local sources in Qala-e-Naw city in October 2016 ⁽⁵⁸⁸⁾, at an unspecified location in Badghis in October 2016 ⁽⁵⁸⁹⁾, in an area between Ghormach district and Maimana in Faryab Province in February 2017 ⁽⁵⁹⁰⁾, Bala Murghab district in late March 2017 ⁽⁵⁹¹⁾, and Qadis districts in May 2017 ⁽⁵⁹²⁾. In May 2017, AGEs attacked ANSF in Qadis district, and ensuing fighting left 22 AGEs, six members of the security forces and eight civilians dead and another 33 AGEs and 17 civilians injured, a spokesman for the Badghis provincial governor reported ⁽⁵⁹³⁾. Further clashes between AGEs and ANSF with casualties occurred in Ab Kamari district in July 2017 ⁽⁵⁹⁴⁾ and at the district border between Jawand and Qadis in July 2017 ⁽⁵⁹⁵⁾.

Targeted attacks against civilians causing casualties include the shooting and killing of an off duty police officer in Qala-e-Naw city in September 2016 ⁽⁵⁹⁶⁾ and, in the same month, the killing of ten members of a family in Shoaer Langar of Qadis district by an IED implanted by AGEs ⁽⁵⁹⁷⁾. According to local officials, a woman who had divorced her husband and later remarried was shot dead by Taliban in December 2016, although the Taliban have denied responsibility for the killing ⁽⁵⁹⁸⁾. Local officials reported that two doctors were abducted in Qadis district in February 2017 ⁽⁵⁹⁹⁾.

As reported by the UN Secretary-General, between June and August 2017, AGEs forced one or more health facilities to close down temporarily 'in an attempt to coerce non-governmental organizations that are running the facilities to improve service delivery for their combatants' ⁽⁶⁰⁰⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 19,531 individuals from Badghis province displaced by conflict. During this period, 3,963 persons were displaced from

⁽⁵⁸⁶⁾ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Taliban captures Ghormach district, 11 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dostum-led forces recapture Ghormach district, 20 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁸⁾ Bakhtar News, Four Taliban Militants Killed In Badghis, 17 October 2016 ([url](#)); Bakhtar News, Taliban Attacks On ANSF Checkpoints Failed In Badghis, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁹⁾ Xinhua News Agency, Taliban attack kills senior security official in W. Afghanistan, 17 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁰⁾ New York Times (The), In Taliban Attacks, a Reminder That Winter Offers Afghans No Mercy, 28 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹¹⁾ Tolo News, 15 Taliban Killed In Attack On Badghis District, 28 March 2017 ([url](#)); Bakhtar News, Armed Taliban Rebels Killed in 2 Provinces, 30 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 21 to 27 May 2017, 28 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹³⁾ Reuters, Dozens dead in Afghanistan violence as Ramadan begins, 27 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁴⁾ DPA, Police killed, soldiers kidnapped by Taliban in two Afghan provinces, 15 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁵⁾ El Mundo, Guerra civil talibán en la 'provincia española' de Afganistán, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁶⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Badghis, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽⁵⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA, UNAMA condemns killing of 19 civilians in pressure plate IED incidents, 2 October 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban bomb leave 10 Afghan civilians dead in Badghis province, 30 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁸⁾ BBC News, Taliban 'kill woman who divorced husband and remarried', 19 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁹⁾ KP, Militants kidnap 2 doctors in Badghis province of Afghanistan, 2 February 2017 ([url](#)).

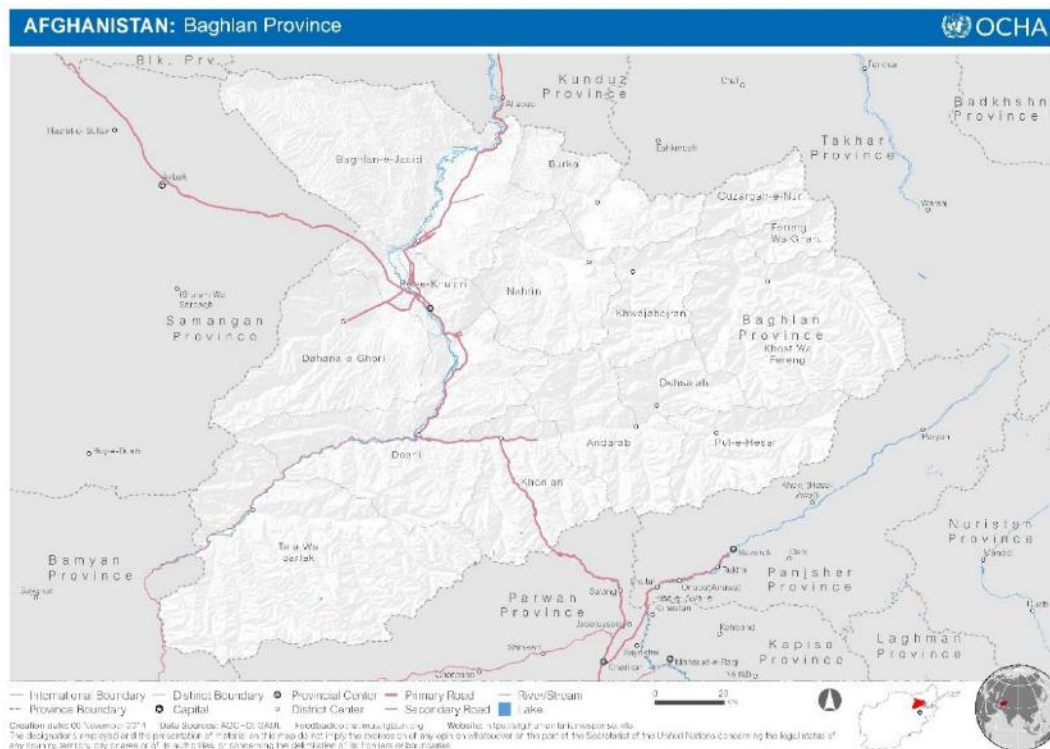
⁽⁶⁰⁰⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

Qadis district, 1,766 from Jawand district, 1,301 from Muqur district, 1,426 from Ab Kamari district, 8,586 from Ghormach district, 532 from Bala Murghab district, and 1,957 from Qala-e-Naw ⁽⁶⁰¹⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 6,104 individuals from Badghis province displaced by conflict. During this period, 1,594 persons were displaced from Qadis district, 630 from Jawand district, 944 from Muqur district, 1,338 from Ab Kamari district, 329 from Ghormach district, 707 from Bala Murghab district, and 562 from Qala-e-Naw ⁽⁶⁰²⁾.

As intense fighting was reported in the province in March 2017, UNOCHA verified 1,184 IDPs in Qala-e-Naw ⁽⁶⁰³⁾. In May 2017, 1,400 persons were displaced from the surroundings of Qala-e-Naw due to fighting between ANSF and AGEs ⁽⁶⁰⁴⁾. Later the same month, 343 persons were displaced when Taliban launched attacks on ANSF outposts in Qadis district ⁽⁶⁰⁵⁾.

2.4 Baghlan

General description of the province



The province of Baghlan (capital: Pul-e Khumri), surrounded by the provinces of Bamyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, and Parwan, lies on the main route to north and northeastern regions of Afghanistan ⁽⁶⁰⁶⁾. This province is made up of the following districts: Andarab, Baghlan-e-Jadid (also known as Baghlan-e Markazi), Burka, Dahana-e-Ghori, Dehsalah, Doshi,

⁽⁶⁰¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report; Week of 19 to 25 March 2017, 25 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁶⁰⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report; Week of 14 to 21 May 2017, 21 May 2017, ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁶⁰⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report; Week of 21 to 27 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁶⁰⁶⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Provincial Profile: Baghlan, n/d ([url](#)).

Fereng Wa Gharu, Guzargah-e-Nur, Khenjan, Khost Wa Fereng, Khwajahejran, Nahrin, Pul-e-Hasar, Pul-e-Khumri ⁽⁶⁰⁷⁾ and Tala Wa Barfak ⁽⁶⁰⁸⁾.

According to Afghanistan's Central Statistics Office (CSO), the population of this province is 926,960 ⁽⁶⁰⁹⁾. The province is ethnically diverse, comprising different ethnic groups, mainly Tajiks, but also Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Turkmens ⁽⁶¹⁰⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 79.9 % of Baghlan population live in rural areas and 28.5 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁶¹¹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Baghlan

Insurgent groups were active in the province and Taliban were recruiting fighters there. Taliban was present in a number of remote districts ⁽⁶¹²⁾. A Jundullah and ISKP presence was reported in the past ⁽⁶¹³⁾. ISKP fighters allegedly settled their families in this area in 2015, notably in Burka district, and were reported to recruit fighters ⁽⁶¹⁴⁾. However local officials give contradictory statements on the presence of ISKP in Baghlan: the police chief denied the presence of ISKP in the province ⁽⁶¹⁵⁾.

The Taliban has increased their insurgency activities in Baghlan province since the last months of 2015. In 2016, a large-scale operation was launched against the Taliban in Dahana-e-Ghori and other key districts. A top Taliban leader who was actively in charge of leading the group's insurgency in northern Baghlan province was killed during clashes with the Afghan security forces late 2016 ⁽⁶¹⁶⁾. According to security officials, Taliban in the province are supported and trained by foreign fighters and led by Quetta Shura ⁽⁶¹⁷⁾.

The ANSF have conducted several military operations against insurgents in Baghlan, beginning in late 2015 ⁽⁶¹⁸⁾. In 2016, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on the weak morale of the ANSF and their lack of military equipment hampering their capacity to effectively battle the Taliban ⁽⁶¹⁹⁾. There are reports that several schools were closed in central Baghlan because ANSF used them as their military base for several months in 2016 ⁽⁶²⁰⁾.

In 2016, heavy fighting between pro-government forces and the Taliban took place in Dand-e Ghori (Pashtun-dominated area) and Surkh Kotal (Hazara-dominated area). These operations in Dand-e Ghori resulted in the displacement of hundreds of families and local communities' distrust of the government. Many Pashtuns reportedly felt neglected by the government which was attributed to the fact that the provincial government is dominated by Tajiks ⁽⁶²¹⁾.

⁽⁶⁰⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Baghlan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Baghlan Province – Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰⁹⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Baghlan = Population Size (000), 2016-2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁰⁾ AAN, Baghlan on the Brink: ANSF weaknesses and Taliban resilience, 31 May 2013, ([url](#)).

⁶¹¹ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 8-9.

⁽⁶¹²⁾ KP, Taliban capture Tala Barfak district in Baghlan province, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)); Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)); LWJ, Another Northern District falls to the Taliban, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)); HRW, Education on the Front Lines, 17 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹³⁾ Tolo News, Daesh 'Deployment' in Baghlan Triggers Alarm Among Residents, 10 December 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁴⁾ Tolo News, Daesh 'Deployment' in Baghlan Triggers Alarm Among Residents, 10 December 2015 ([url1](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁵⁾ New York Times (the), Gunmen Attack Hazara Miners in Afghanistan, 6 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁶⁾ KP, Taliban capture Tala Barfak district in Baghlan province, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign military experts aiding Taliban, 17 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁸⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan police incapable to fight against Taliban: police chief, 14 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁰⁾ VOA, Afghan Schools Used as Military Bases By Government, Taliban, 26 January 2017 ([url](#)); HRW, Education on the Front Lines, 17 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²¹⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

Some pro-government militias were established by local communities (Pashtun, Hazara and others) supported by NDS with weapons, money and logistics. They fought with Taliban in several locations in the province without government support and without great success. They complained that once they started fighting with Taliban, ANSF left the area and they had to fight without any support, ammunition, and even without food and water ⁽⁶²²⁾. According to local elders, ALP and other uprising groups were also not able to protect the threatened area alone due to the shortage of ammunition and the lack of modern weapons, as well as the influence of powerbrokers for personal gains. In the spring of 2016, after a counter-attack on Dand-e Ghorī, many ALP fighters surrendered, some returned home or joined Taliban ⁽⁶²³⁾.

The Taliban occupation of Kunduz City in September and October 2015 demoralised the people of Baghlan and the ANSF, especially in and around Pul-e-Khumri district. In the months following that event, local residents were very anxious and started arming themselves in anticipation of a feared attack in Pul-e-Khumri ⁽⁶²⁴⁾.

In 2016 and 2017, Taliban activities had a negative impact on the infrastructure in the province ⁽⁶²⁵⁾. The Taliban tried to take control of the Baghlan-Balkh highway, which links Kabul to the North. In May 2016 they established a checkpoint on the Baghlan–Balkh highway, near the capital Pul-e Khumri ⁽⁶²⁶⁾. According to a local resident, in May of 2017, when clashes erupted, the highway and other roads remained closed most of that time ⁽⁶²⁷⁾ and militants harassed passengers on highways near Pul-e Khumri ⁽⁶²⁸⁾. According to press reports published in 2016, the Taliban collected taxes from farmers, traders and businessmen in the areas under their control ⁽⁶²⁹⁾ and some civilians were allegedly forced to dig trenches for the Taliban in this province. The AGEs have been reported to recruit dozens of youths for daily labour ⁽⁶³⁰⁾.

Recent Security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Baghlan province counted 300 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽⁶³¹⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	17
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	219
Explosions	20
Security enforcement	29
Non-conflict related incidents	15
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	300

⁽⁶²²⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²³⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁴⁾ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, 21 October 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Baghlan Residents Take Up Arms To Defend Pul-e-Khumri City, 4 October 2016, ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁵⁾ Afghanistan Times, Taliban attempt to block strategic road foiled, 18 September 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Technicians fear Taliban to repair Kabul power supply line, 27 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁶⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign military experts aiding Taliban, 17 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁸⁾ Tolo News, Ongoing Clashes Close Baghlan Roads To Traffic, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁹⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016, ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan residents forced into digging trenches for Taliban, 23 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Baghlan Province ⁽⁶³²⁾:

Andarab	2	Khinjan	2
Baghlani Jadid	104	Khost Wa Firing	5
Burka	22	Khwaja Hijran (Jilga Nahrin)	2
Dahana-I- Ghuri	1	Nahrin	9
Dih Salah	2	Puli Hisar	1
Dushi	27	Puli Khumri	114
Guzargahi Nur	1	Tala Wa Barfak	7

In the first half of 2017, UNAMA documented 105 civilian victims (30 deaths and 75 injured). Most of these casualties died from ground engagement or targeted or deliberate killings. Explosions from explosive remnants of war and mines also took place in the province ⁽⁶³³⁾. In the last days of July 2017 the civil hospital in the province received more than 90 casualties, including civilians, due to heavy fighting in the province ⁽⁶³⁴⁾.

In March 2017, the Taliban claimed to control Dahana-e-Ghori district; another two, including the provincial capital, were contested by them (Pul-e Khumri and Baghlan-i-Jadid)⁶³⁵. Tala Wa Barfak district was captured at the end of February 2017 and retaken after a few days by ANSF ⁽⁶³⁶⁾. The Taliban managed to cut off all roads in the area at that time ⁽⁶³⁷⁾. At the end of July 2017, AGEs claimed to conquer the entire district Guzargahi Nur; however, the district chief stated that the security forces pushed back the attackers ⁽⁶³⁸⁾.

In the first eight months of 2017, fighting was reported in Dand-e Ghori ⁽⁶³⁹⁾, Tala Wa Barfak ⁽⁶⁴⁰⁾, Doshi ⁽⁶⁴¹⁾, Baghlan-e Jadid ⁽⁶⁴²⁾, Burka ⁽⁶⁴³⁾, Guzargahi Nur, Nahrin districts and on the outskirts of Pul-i-Khumri town ⁽⁶⁴⁴⁾. By the end of 2016, Taliban were said to have approached

⁽⁶³²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁶³³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Mid-Year Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)); Guardian (The); Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military ignores situation, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban storm 2 Baghlan districts overnight 21 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁵⁾ LWJ, Another Northern District falls to the Taliban, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces recapture Baghlan's Tala Wa Barfak District from Taliban, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁷⁾ LWJ, Another Northern District falls to the Taliban, 1 March 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban storm 2 Baghlan districts overnight 21 July 2017 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Crushing the enemy throughout the country, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁹⁾ European Affairs, Security Situation in Baghlan Continues to Deteriorate, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁰⁾ LWJ, Another Northern District falls to the Taliban, 1 March 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Kayan valley falls to Mujahideen in Baghlan, 27 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack on Baghlan's Dushi district beaten back, 24 August 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴²⁾ DPA, Seven Afghan troops killed in northern district under Taliban siege, 19 July 2017, available at: ([url](#)); Pakistan Defence, Two ANA Bases under One-Month Taliban Siege, 13 March 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, War Closes In On Baghlan-e-Markazi's Center, 18 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴³⁾ Xinhuanet, Mine blast kills 4 children in N. Afghanistan, 13 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban storm 2 Baghlan districts overnight 21 July 2017 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Crushing the enemy throughout the country, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

Pul-i-Khumri by three kilometers ⁽⁶⁴⁵⁾. Several inhabitants of Pul-i Khumri expressed their concerns for the security situation ⁽⁶⁴⁶⁾.

In October 2016, seven people were killed by mortar fire by the Taliban in Baghlan-e-Jadid district ⁽⁶⁴⁷⁾ and in the spring 2017, the Taliban surrounded military bases in Mangalha and Alavuddin in the same district. They closed all roads and they warned the nearby villagers to leave the area. The property was destroyed, animals died, and farmers were prevented from work on the fields. Civilians claimed that the state of war was the worst for them ⁽⁶⁴⁸⁾. In July 2017, ANSF managed to clear over 20 villages in the district and Taliban suffered heavy casualties. The Afghan Air Force efficiently supported ground forces ⁽⁶⁴⁹⁾. Taliban militants allegedly were using civilian houses in densely populated areas to attack Afghan security forces, which led to civilian casualties and displacement in the province ⁽⁶⁵⁰⁾.

The Taliban planted mines in the outskirts of Pul-e -Khumri and some explosions took place there injuring 6 civilians in July 2017 ⁽⁶⁵¹⁾.

In January 2017, unknown perpetrators killed at least nine Hazara miners. The miners were attacked in Anar Dara area, Tala Wa Barfak district while travelling by bus and returning home. Taliban denied any connection with this incident ⁽⁶⁵²⁾.

Displacement

During the first nine months of 2017, more than 20,000 persons were internally displaced from various districts of Baghlan Province. Most people stayed close to their homes in the Pul-e Khumri and nearby Baghlan-e Jaded districts. Some left for Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif ⁽⁶⁵³⁾. In the beginning of 2017, a large number of individuals were displaced by intense fighting in Dand-e-Ghori ⁽⁶⁵⁴⁾. In July 2017, over 1,000 residents have been displaced from the district Baghlan-e Markazi after a Taliban attack but the families returned to their homes as security forces cleared their villages ⁽⁶⁵⁵⁾.

Baghlan hosts many returnees, primarily from neighbouring countries. In June 2017, IOM documented nearly 137,000 returnees from Pakistan and other countries ⁽⁶⁵⁶⁾. Nearly 1,000 Afghan families, who had returned from Pakistan, were settled in Salamkhel, Walikhel and other parts of the province. They started building shelters there; however, there were reports that they bought the land from the HIA commander who had grabbed the state-owned parcels. The District Chief told Pajhwok Afghan news that proper security was not provided in the area and the authorities could not enter these areas to take further steps ⁽⁶⁵⁷⁾.

⁽⁶⁴⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security situation in Baghlan 'precarious', 27 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security situation in Baghlan 'precarious', 27 December 2016 ([url](#)); IWPR, Afghans Debate Role of Local Militia, 31 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁷⁾ KP, Taliban mortar kill 7 a family, 30 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁸⁾ Pakistan Defence, Two ANA Bases under One-Month Taliban Siege, 13 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁹⁾ Tolo News, 20 Baghlan Villages Cleared of Taliban in Ongoing Operation, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁰⁾ DPA, Seven Afghan troops killed in northern district under Taliban siege, 19 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵¹⁾ Bakhtar News, Eight People Hurt By Taliban Mines Planting, 17 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵²⁾ New York Times (The), Gunmen Attack Hazara Miners in Afghanistan, 6 January 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Gunmen Kill 13 Miners In Northern Afghanistan 6 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 2 October 2017) ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 32.

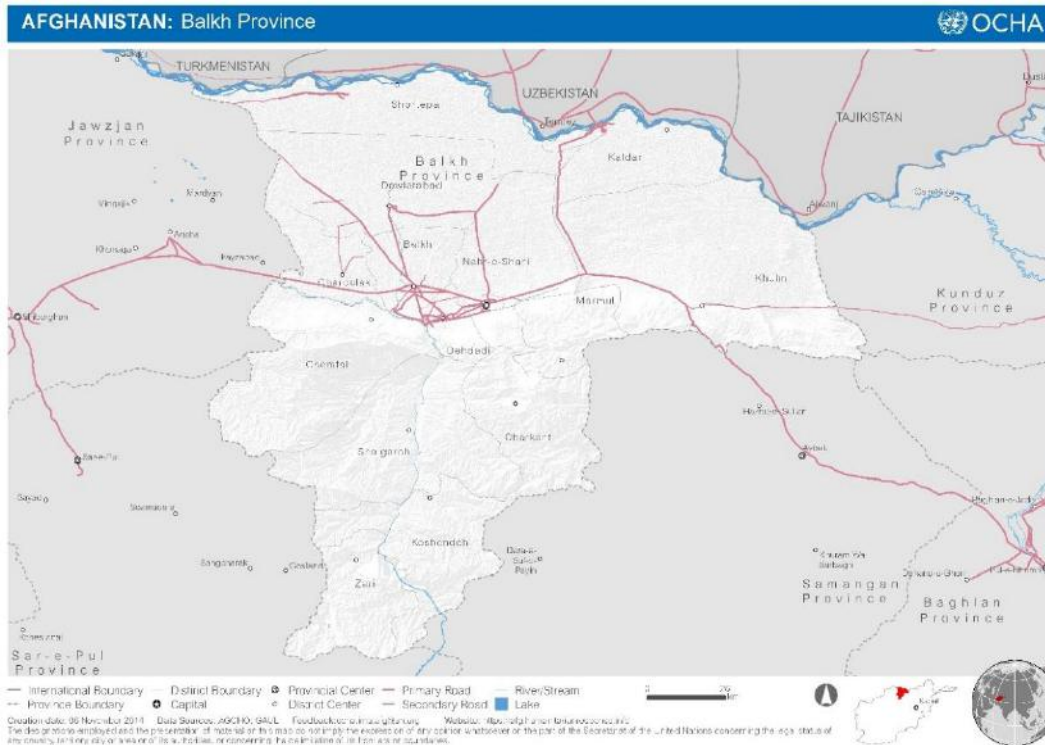
⁽⁶⁵⁵⁾ Tolo News, 20 Baghlan Villages Cleared of Taliban in Ongoing Operation, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁶⁾ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment, June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, HIA commander accused of grabbing, selling state land in Baghlan, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

2.5 Balkh

General description of the province



Balkh is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan, bordering Uzbekistan in the north, Tajikistan in the northeast, Kunduz in the east, Samangan in the southeast, Sar-e Pul in the southwest, Jawzjan in the west and Turkmenistan in the northwest. The provincial capital is Mazar-e Sharif. The province consists of following districts: Balkh, Charbulak (or Chahar Bolak), Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazar-e Sharif, NahreShahi, Sholgarah, Shortepa and Zari ⁽⁶⁵⁸⁾.

The province is estimated to have about 1.38 million inhabitants, of which an estimated 427,647 live in Mazar-e Sharif ⁽⁶⁵⁹⁾. The major ethnic groups living in Balkh province are Tajiks and Pashtuns followed by Uzbek, Hazaras, Turkmen, Arab and Baluch ⁽⁶⁶⁰⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 63.6 % of Balkh's population live in rural areas and 34.3 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁶⁶¹⁾.

Mazar-e Sharif is one of the biggest commercial and financial centres of Afghanistan ⁽⁶⁶²⁾, also described as 'the de facto political, economic, and administrative hub of northern Afghanistan' ⁽⁶⁶³⁾. The city lies on an important east-west connection between Herat in the

⁽⁶⁵⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁹⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil Division, Urban, Rural and Sex-2017-18, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁰⁾ Global Security, Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team Handbook, February 2011 ([url](#)); AREU, The political economy of education and health service delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶¹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 8-9.

⁽⁶⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Balkh, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶³⁾ Fishstein P. et. al., Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan, January 2012 ([url](#)).

west and Kabul and Kunduz in the east. On the border with Uzbekistan lies the vital economic dry port of Hairatan ⁽⁶⁶⁴⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Balkh

The 209th Shaheen Military Corps, based in Balkh province, is described as one of the largest and most important ANA corps in Afghanistan, covering most of northern Afghanistan ⁽⁶⁶⁵⁾. Back in 2015, the decline in insurgent activity in Balkh district was attributed to ANSF effectiveness and specifically to the new district police chief ⁽⁶⁶⁶⁾. According to a 2016 study by Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation (APPRO) 'in general, citizens' complaints are more vociferously lodged against informal power holders than against ANP' ⁽⁶⁶⁷⁾.

Since 2014, Afghan Local Police (ALP) has been deployed in Chemtal, Chahar Bolak and Sholgareh districts ⁽⁶⁶⁸⁾, where its personnel has been 'under the influence of irresponsible armed militia leaders', according to security officials ⁽⁶⁶⁹⁾. Pro-government groups were confirmed by authorities to be present in Chemtal and Chahar Bolak districts in 2015 ⁽⁶⁷⁰⁾. According to UNAMA, pro-government armed groups were responsible for abuses against civilians in several provinces in 2016 and 2017, including Balkh ⁽⁶⁷¹⁾.

In March 2016, Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor stated that some AGEs pledged allegiance to IS. According to RFE/RL they might be 'remnants of the IMU, sent to northwestern areas of Afghanistan by their leader, Usman Ghazi, after he swore allegiance to Islamic State and before Ghazi was killed in November 2015' ⁽⁶⁷²⁾.

Ata Mohammad Noor, described as 'one of Afghanistan's most powerful regional leaders' ⁽⁶⁷³⁾ has launched several operations in the province to suppress the activities of anti-government armed militant groups ⁽⁶⁷⁴⁾.

According to a local media report in July 2017, 'recent reports indicate that the spike in insecurity [in Balkh] is poppy related, which in turn is driven by the Taliban' ⁽⁶⁷⁵⁾. AREU sees further evidence of diminishing government influence in Balkh's rural areas in the rising poppy cultivation in the province, with a governor not able or not willing to act against it ⁽⁶⁷⁶⁾. According to another 2016 media report 'poppy is widely cultivated in Chemtal and Chahar

⁽⁶⁶⁴⁾ CMFC, The rise of Afghan rails, 18 November 2010 ([url](#)); AREU (Fishstein, P.), Balkh's economy in transition, August 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁵⁾ Tolo News, 209 Shaheen Corps: The Base The Taliban Attacked, 22 April 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Officials Claim Over 130 Soldiers Killed In Deadly Attack, 22 April 2017 ([url](#)); The Independent, 'More than 50 people' feared dead after Taliban attack on Afghan military base, 21 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁶⁾ APPRO, Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition. Cycle 5, January 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁷⁾ APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁸⁾ US Department of Defense, Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, April 2014 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP forces under influence of illegal armed men in Balkh, 19 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP forces under influence of illegal armed men in Balkh, 19 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60;

UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Mid-Year Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷²⁾ RFE/RL, Knock At Uzbekistan's Southern Door, Qishloq Ovozi Blog, 4 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷³⁾ Reuters, Powerful Afghan governor pushes for role on national stage, 31 January 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Dreams Big, 31 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁴⁾ KP, Taliban suffer heavy casualties in an airstrike in Balkh province of Afghanistan, 14 December 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban's deputy shadow governor for Balkh critically wounded in operations, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)); 1TV, Hizb commanders pushing for handover of uprising forces posts to Taliban: Balkh's Noor, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁵⁾ Tolo News, Study Finds Opium Cultivation On The Rise In Balkh, 17 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁶⁾ Mansfield, D., Understanding control and influence. What Opium Poppy and Tax Reveal about the Writ of the Afghan State, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)), p.23.

Bolak districts and averagely in Sholgar, Balkh, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi Kham and some other districts of Balkh ⁽⁶⁷⁷⁾.

Taliban control and presence in the different districts of Balkh province remained unchanged according to a March 2017 assessment ⁽⁶⁷⁸⁾ by the ISW, compared to its November 2016 assessment ⁽⁶⁷⁹⁾. About one third of Chahar Bolak and two larger parts of Chemtal district were considered ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’ ⁽⁶⁸⁰⁾. The Taliban claimed to control 50 % of both districts in March 2017 ⁽⁶⁸¹⁾, but expanded its control in Chemtal district by August 2017 ⁽⁶⁸²⁾. According to LWJ, the Taliban and the Afghan military have been battling for control as of mid-August 2017 ⁽⁶⁸³⁾. While the Taliban claimed in March 2017 to only carry out guerilla attacks in Keshendeh district ⁽⁶⁸⁴⁾, ISW’s further assessment indicated that an area covering more than half of the district was a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ ⁽⁶⁸⁵⁾. All of Sholgareh, a large part of Charkent and small parts of Marmul, Nahr-e Shahi and Dehdadi were assessed as ‘low confidence Taliban support zones’ by ISW. In all of those and the remaining districts the Taliban’s presence and activities were reported, also by the Taliban, to be limited ⁽⁶⁸⁶⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Balkh Province counted 455 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽⁶⁸⁷⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	34
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	131
Explosions	51
Security enforcement	85
Non-conflict related incidents	148
Other incidents	6
Total security incidents	455

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Balkh Province ⁽⁶⁸⁸⁾:

Balkh	26	Kishindih	13
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⁽⁶⁷⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh farmers say only poppy meets their needs, 24 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁰⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸²⁾ LWJ, Control map by districts, n.d. (created 2 March 2017) ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸³⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁴⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁵⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, Control map by districts, n.d. (created 2 March 2017) ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁷⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁶⁸⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Chahar Bolak	38	Marmul	1
Chahar Kint	4	Mazar-e Sharif	108
Chimtal	119	Nahr-e Shahi	15
Dawlatabad	19	Sholgara	26
Dihdadi	10	Shortepa	16
Kaldar	23	Zari	21
Khulm	16		

With 46 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 27 injured) documented by UNAMA, Balkh province saw a 56 % decrease in civilian casualties in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016. IED explosions were the leading cause for civilian casualties in Balkh province in the first half of 2017 followed by explosive remnants of war (ERW) and targeted or deliberate killings ⁽⁶⁸⁹⁾.

According to UNAMA, in-fighting between pro-government armed groups caused one civilian death in Balkh province in 2017 ⁽⁶⁹⁰⁾.

There were several reports of security operations carried out in Balkh province ⁽⁶⁹¹⁾. According to media reports, the acting governor and prominent politician Atta Mohammad Noor had launched several operations in some remote districts of the province ⁽⁶⁹²⁾.

In January 2017, NDS announced to have discovered and eliminated a bomb-making factory of the Taliban in Balkh province ⁽⁶⁹³⁾.

In October 2016, an IED blast near a mosque in Khwaja Ghulak area of Balkh district where Shia worshippers had gathered during Ashura (a religious day of mourning), killed 18 civilians and injured 67 others, including 36 children ⁽⁶⁹⁴⁾. While several sources stated no group has claimed responsibility for the attack ⁽⁶⁹⁵⁾, others stated ISKP did ⁽⁶⁹⁶⁾.

AGEs were able to conduct high profile attacks in Mazar-e Sharif:

⁽⁶⁸⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 29.

⁽⁶⁹¹⁾ Kabul Tribune, Clearing operation begins in Balkh, 5 January 2017 ([url](#)); Khaama press, 10 ISIS fighters among 58 militants killed, claims Afghan defense ministry, 5 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 53 insurgents eliminated in past 24 hours, claims MoD, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 militants killed in round-the-clock raids: MoD, 7 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 45 Daesh rebels among 84 killed in security operations, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹²⁾ KP, Taliban suffer heavy casualties in an airstrike in Balkh province of Afghanistan, 14 December 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban's deputy shadow governor for Balkh critically wounded in operations, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)); 1TV, Hizb commanders pushing for handover of uprising forces posts to Taliban: Balkh's Noor, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban bomb-making facility destroyed in Balkh: NDS, 17 January 2017 ([url](#)); Ariana news, Taliban Bomb-Making Factory Discovered in Balkh, 17 January 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban's explosives factory discovered in Balkh province, 17 January 2017 ([url](#)); Afghanistan Times, NDS seizes huge cache of ammunition in Balkh, 17 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#));

DAWN, At least, 14 dead, 24 injured as blast hits Shia mosque in Afghanistan, 12 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁵⁾ KP, 14 killed, over 28 wounded as blast targets Ashura mourners in Balkh, 12 October 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Deadly Attacks Target Shi'a In Afghanistan, 12 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Death Toll Rises To 15 In Balkh Blast, 12 October 2016 ([url](#)); Osman B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring Sectarianism to the Afghan War, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)); United Nations, Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 13 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁶⁾ HRW, Afghanistan's Shia Hazara Suffer Latest Atrocity, 13 October 2016 ([url](#)); DW, IS claims responsibility for bomb attack that killed 14 in Afghanistan, 12 October 2016 ([url](#)); US, Department of Defense, Lead Inspector General For Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Report to the United States Congress. October 1, 2016–December 31, 2016 ([url](#)).

The Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack on the German consulate in Balkh provincial capital Mazar-e Sharif on 10 November 2016, that resulted in 4 civilian deaths and 131 civilians injured, including 29 children and 19 women. As a result of a suicide vehicle-borne IED explosion the consulate building suffered serious damage. There was also significant damage to surrounding property. The Taliban stated the attack was carried out in retaliation for the air strikes in Kunduz of early November 2016 that had killed 32 civilians and injured 36 others⁽⁶⁹⁷⁾. On 21 April 2017 the Taliban carried out a large-scale attack on an Afghan army base near provincial capital Mazar-e-Sharif⁽⁶⁹⁸⁾, which is home to the Afghan army's 209th Corps, as well as to a contingent from the German army⁽⁶⁹⁹⁾. The attack resulted in 'one of the deadliest tolls in a Taliban attack on the Afghan army'⁽⁷⁰⁰⁾, with more than 100 soldiers killed and many wounded⁽⁷⁰¹⁾.

There were reports of IED explosions in Mazar-e Sharif causing civilian casualties in autumn 2016⁽⁷⁰²⁾. Media sources reported that security guards of acting provincial governor Atta Mohammad Noor killed a man behind the wheel of a car speeding in the direction of the acting governor's residence in February 2017. The circumstances of the incident were unclear and an investigation was launched⁽⁷⁰³⁾. No further information on the results of the investigation was found. An insider attack within the 209th Shaheen Military Corps was reported in June 2017 leading to the injury of 7 US soldiers⁽⁷⁰⁴⁾. A clash was reported in August 2017 between supporters of Atta Mohammad Noor and Provincial Council member Asif Mohmand. Two people died as a result of the clashes occurring just before Asif Mohmand landed at Mazar airport, where he was arrested. It was unclear who ordered his arrest⁽⁷⁰⁵⁾.

In December 2016 the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) issued a statement saying at least 21 Taliban fighters had been killed in an air raid on Chemtal district by Afghan Special Forces⁽⁷⁰⁶⁾. Three people were killed and five others wounded in another IED incident in Khulm district in January 2017. Officials and residents assumed a police commander, who was among the killed, was the target of the explosion⁽⁷⁰⁷⁾. A boy was shot dead by a pro-government group member in Sholgareh district in January 2017 after returning from bringing food to an

⁽⁶⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)); DW, German consulate in Afghanistan attacked with Taliban car bomb, 10 November 2016 ([url](#)); DW, Mazar-i-Sharif attack proves no Afghan city is safe, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, German diplomats survive last night suicide attack: officials, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Six Afghans Killed, Scores Injured After Taliban Attack On German Consulate, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Attack On German Consulate In Balkh Leaves 4 Dead, Over 100 Wounded, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Unama condemns attack on civilians in Mazar, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)); USDOD, Lead Inspector General For Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Report to the United States Congress. October 1, 2016–December 31, 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁸⁾ UN, Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁹⁾ BBC News, Afghan casualties in Taliban Mazar-e Sharif attack pass 100, 22 April 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Taliban Attack Afghan Army Base, Killing Dozens, 21 April 2017 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Taliban fighters attack Afghan army base, 'killing 140', 22 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁰⁾ BBC News, Afghan casualties in Taliban Mazar-e Sharif attack pass 100, 22 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰¹⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the U.S. Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰²⁾ Ariana news, At least 3 People Injured In Mazar-e-Sharif Bomb Blast: Officials, 16 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Roadside Blast Kills One, Wounds Four In Balkh, 16 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan news, Driver gunned down by Balkh governor's guards, 13 February 2017 ([url](#)); Khaama press, Man shot dead by Ata Mohammad Noor's guards in Balkh, 13 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁴⁾ Tolo News, Afghan Soldier Opens Fire At Foreign Troops In Balkh, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 American soldiers injured in Balkh 'insider' attack, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁵⁾ Tolo News, Two Killed In Standoff at Mazar Airport, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh airstrikes leave 21 militants dead: MoI, 14 December 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban suffer heavy casualties in an airstrike in Balkh province of Afghanistan, 14 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan news, Anti-Taliban commander among 3 dead in Balkh blast, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Blast At Afghan Buzkashi Match Kills Anti-Taliban Militia Leader, Two Others, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)).

injured AGE fighter, according to UNAMA ⁽⁷⁰⁸⁾. Members of security forces were killed and wounded when a roadside bomb went off while they were conducting an operation in Chemtal district in April 2017 ⁽⁷⁰⁹⁾. A Taliban militant was reportedly killed when an IED he was planting exploded prematurely in the same district in May 2017 ⁽⁷¹⁰⁾. There were reports of a Taliban ambush in Chemtal district in July 2017 that killed 13 members of pro-government groups ⁽⁷¹¹⁾. Other reports mentioned a shooting inside a mosque that killed 13 young people who had no links with police, local police or uprising groups ⁽⁷¹²⁾. A clearing operation was reported in Chahar Bolak and Chemtal districts in July 2017 ⁽⁷¹³⁾. Another operation was carried out in Chemtal district in August 2017, reportedly involving ground and air forces and with casualties on both sides and among the population ⁽⁷¹⁴⁾.

In a 2016 survey of the Afghan people, the Asia Foundation stated that over the course of 2016, the part of the Ring Road crossing through Balkh, Jawzjan, and Faryab became increasingly unsafe ⁽⁷¹⁵⁾. Parts of the highway between Shiberghan and Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province have reportedly fallen under Taliban control several times in 2016 and coordinated attacks on security personnel were reported in Chemtal and Chahar Bolak districts in 2017, intended to create insecurity on that same highway, forcing the government to launch clearing operations ⁽⁷¹⁶⁾. A road connecting Chahar Bolak and Chemtal districts was reportedly closed after a bridge was blown up in August 2017 ⁽⁷¹⁷⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA recorded 791 conflict-induced IDPs (113 families) from Balkh province. Almost all fled their homes in Chemtal district in June and July of 2017 ⁽⁷¹⁸⁾, where operations and clashes were reported ⁽⁷¹⁹⁾. While some were displaced within Chemtal district, more than half left for Mazar-e Sharif ⁽⁷²⁰⁾. The displacement of around 700 people from Chemtal to Dehdadi district was reported, but not yet verified, by UNOCHA in August 2017 ⁽⁷²¹⁾, at a time when an operation involving ground and air forces was reportedly conducted (see above).

Balkh province received 19,320 IDPs between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, according to UNOCHA records. More than half originated from Kunduz district (Kunduz

⁽⁷⁰⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽⁷⁰⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 security personnel killed in Balkh bombing, 9 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁰⁾ KP, Taliban militant killed while planting roadside bomb in Balkh, 3 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Official Says Taliban Killed 13 Local Militiamen In Ambush, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)); Ariananews, 13 Afghan Militia Forces Killed in Taliban Ambush in Balkh, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute 13 Balkh youth in mass shooting, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban kill 13 in an attack on a mosque in Balkh province, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 rebels perish in ongoing Balkh offensive, 8 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁴⁾ Tolo News, Eight Taliban Killed in Chamtal District of Balkh, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Ongoing Clash In Balkh Leaves Two Dead, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)); 1TV, Hizb commanders pushing for handover of uprising forces posts to Taliban: Balkh's Noor, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁵⁾ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁶⁾ RFE/RL, New Turkmen Railway: First Stop, Aqina, Afghanistan. Next Stop...?, 29 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 rebels killed, 100 wounded in Balkh, Jawzjan operations, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban blow up bridge in Char Bolak district of Balkh, 3 August 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Bridge detonated by Taliban in North of Afghanistan sparks furor, 3 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 rebels killed, 100 wounded in Balkh, Jawzjan operations, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 3 July – 9 July 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

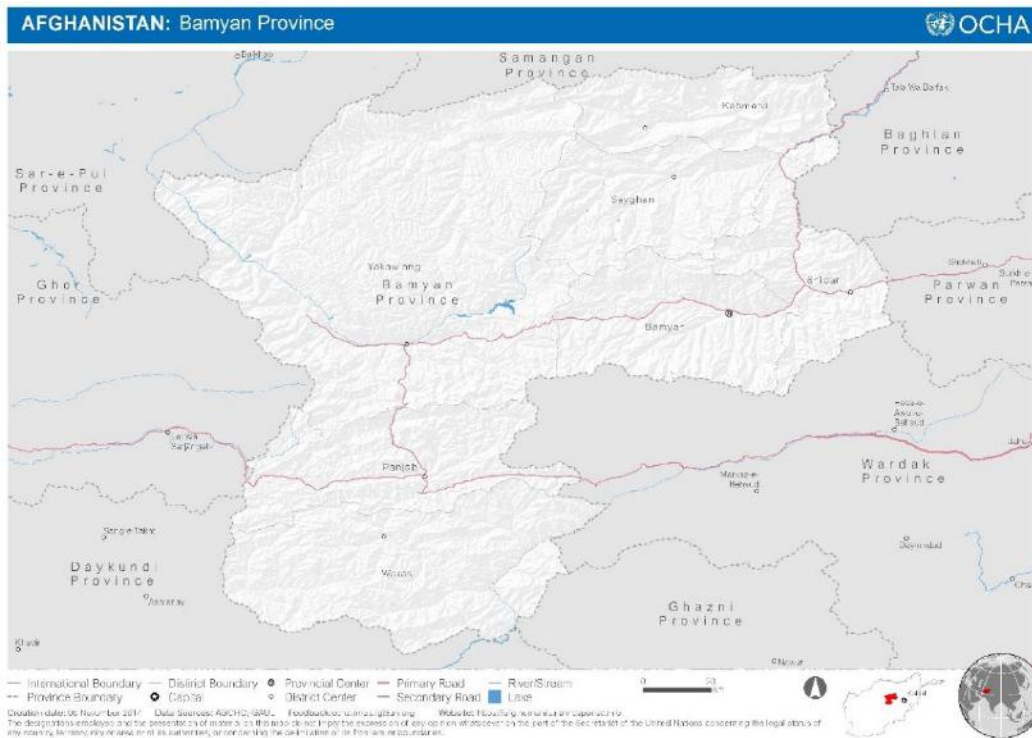
⁽⁷²¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 14 – 20 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

province) and had left Kunduz in the beginning of October 2016 ⁽⁷²²⁾. By mid-October 2016 local officials in Balkh said nearly 2,000 IDPs had returned to their homes in Kunduz ⁽⁷²³⁾.

For more information on Mazar-e Sharif, see *EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽⁷²⁴⁾.

2.6 Bamyan

General description of the province



Bamyan province borders Samangan province to the north, Baghlan, Parwan and Wardak to the east, Ghazni and Daykundi to the south and Sar-e Pul and Ghor to the west. It is divided into 7 districts: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang. Bamyan City is the capital of the province ⁽⁷²⁵⁾. Bamyan Province is mountain-locked and people mainly live in the Bamyan valley in the east and in the Band-e-Amir valley in the west ⁽⁷²⁶⁾. According to UNOCHA, the province had an estimated 447,218 inhabitants in 2015 ⁽⁷²⁷⁾. In its latest data the Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO) estimates that 462,144 people are living in this province ⁽⁷²⁸⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the

⁽⁷²²⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²³⁾ Kabul Tribune, Nearly 2,000 Kunduz IDPs Return Home From Balkh, 15 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Nearly 2,000 Kunduz IDPs Return Home From Balkh, 15 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁴⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Bamyan Province - Reference Map, 18 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁶⁾ Bamyan Tourism, The Land, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷²⁸⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)).

World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 97.1 % of Bamyan's population live in rural areas and 72.9% of its inhabitants is engaged in agricultural work ⁽⁷²⁹⁾.

The large majority of the population belongs to the Hazara ethnic group, followed by Tajiks, Tatars and Pashtuns ⁽⁷³⁰⁾; more than 96 % of the inhabitants speak Dari ⁽⁷³¹⁾.

The Kabul-Bamyan highway is one of the two main routes connecting Bamyan with the capital via Wardak. The pass is 60 kilometres closer to Kabul than the route via Parwan Province ⁽⁷³²⁾. In March 2016, Kam Air began direct commercial flights between Kabul and Bamyan ⁽⁷³³⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Bamyan

According to an anthropologist contacted by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), there are some 'unstable' areas of the north where Bamyan abuts regions with insurgent activity ⁽⁷³⁴⁾.

Three districts, Kahmard, Saighan, and Shibar, are considered 'vulnerable' by an International Organisation based in Afghanistan: AGEs from Baghlan's district Tala Wa Barfak can find there relays for their actions ⁽⁷³⁵⁾. The ISW's Partial Threat Assessment map published in March 2017 identifies a stretch running through Shibar and Kahmard districts and bordering Bamyan and Sayghan districts which is considered a 'low confidence Taliban support zone' ⁽⁷³⁶⁾. In March 2017, the Taliban issued a report regarding its presence in Afghanistan, claiming that its fighters controlled 5 % of the territory of Kahmard, Shibar and Sayghan districts ⁽⁷³⁷⁾.

In 2016, no ALP programme was present in the province ⁽⁷³⁸⁾ and according to an International Organisation based in Afghanistan the ANP is the only government military presence in Bamyan ⁽⁷³⁹⁾.

Recent security trends

In July 2017 UNAMA reported one civilian casualty caused by explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Bamyan ⁽⁷⁴⁰⁾.

⁽⁷²⁹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 11-12.

⁽⁷³⁰⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Report of the Survey on Agricultural and Rural Development Potential in the Central Highlands of Afghanistan, November 2010 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽⁷³¹⁾ ISW, Regional Command East, Bamyan Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass reopens for traffic, 26 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³³⁾ KP, Kam Air starts direct commercial flights to Bamyan for the first time, 9 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³⁴⁾ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Lage der Hazara, Zugang zu staatlichem Schutz und Hintergründe des Konfliktes zwischen Kuchis und Hazara [a-9737-V2], 2 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mails, 14 September 2017 and 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁷³⁶⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment [map], 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³⁷⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷³⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p.91; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 82.

⁽⁷³⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁷⁴⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.73.

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Bamyan province, counted 111 security incidents ⁽⁷⁴¹⁾.

Violence targeting individuals	6
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	6
Explosions	5
Security enforcement	12
Non-conflict related incidents	43
Other incidents	38
Total security incidents	111

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Bamyan Province ⁽⁷⁴²⁾:

Bamyan	64	Shibar	15
Kahmard	5	Waras	4
Panjab	9	Yakawlang	9
Sayghan	4		

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, there were no reports of violence, security incidents or attacks in the province of Bamyan for the months of September, October, November, December 2016 and January, March, April, May and August 2017 ⁽⁷⁴³⁾.

Displacement

In October 2016, UNOCHA assessed 22 displaced persons from Kahmard district to the provincial capital and from 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017, Bamyan province hosted 143 IDPs ⁽⁷⁴⁴⁾. Furthermore, 623 conflict-related IDPs were provided cash in Maydan Wardak and Bamyan provinces between 28 May 2017 and 3 June 2017 ⁽⁷⁴⁵⁾.

⁽⁷⁴¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁷⁴²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

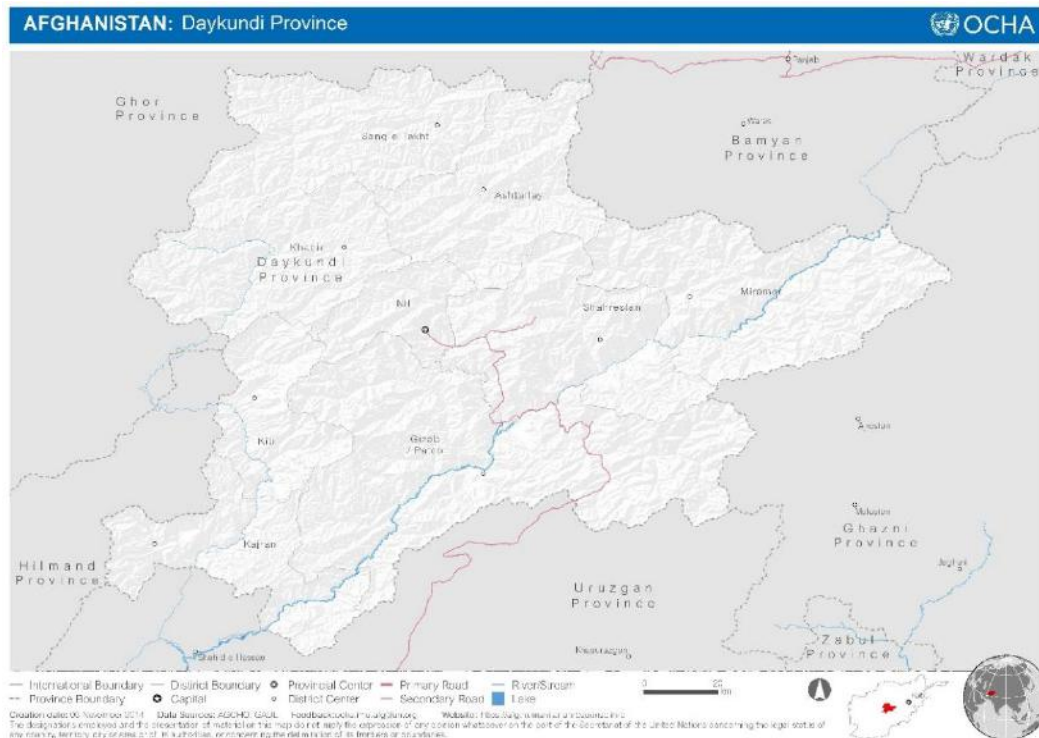
⁽⁷⁴³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, In October, over 3,000 Afghans killed and wounded, 14 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualty toll hits nearly 1,400 in November, 18 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, January toll: 1,300 people killed and wounded in 137 attacks, 7 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, February: 1,400 killed & wounded in 139 attacks, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), Pajhwok Afghan News, April saw Afghan conflict killing nearly 1,500, 6 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3,000 people suffered casualties in May attacks, 5 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, In August, more than 3,000 suffered casualties, 6 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁴⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁴⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, week of 28 May to 3 June 2017, 3 June 2017 ([url](#)).

2.7 Daikundi (Dai Kundi)

General description of the province



Located in the Central Region of Hazarajat, Daikundi is surrounded by Ghor Province in the north, Bamyan province in the east, Ghazni province in the south, Uruzgan province in the southwest and Helmand province in the west ⁽⁷⁴⁶⁾. Besides the provincial capital Nili, Daikundi consists of the following districts: Ashtarlay, Kajran, Khadir, Kiti, Miramor, Sang-e-Takht, Shahrestan and Gizab/Patoo ⁽⁷⁴⁷⁾.

Regarding the establishment of the province of Daikundi, sources differ. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi was once a district of Uruzgan Province and was given the status of a separate province in 2003 ⁽⁷⁴⁸⁾. However, according to the Dutch embassy in Kabul, Daikundi originated from the province of Uruzgan in March of 2004. Additionally, it was stated that the exact borders of the districts and the province are not clear ⁽⁷⁴⁹⁾. Moreover, the district of Gizab is disputed ⁽⁷⁵⁰⁾. According to Martine van Bijlert, co-founder of the AAN, in 2011, Gizab was formally still part of Daikundi province, despite the fact that in 2006 it was temporarily placed under the authority of the province of Uruzgan, a decision that is still valid, even though at that time there was no government presence there ⁽⁷⁵¹⁾. A 2016 report by the UNODC mentioned that Gizab district is formally part of Daikundi, but under the administration of the governor of Uruzgan province ⁽⁷⁵²⁾.

About 80 % of Daikundi's territory is mountainous. Due to heavy snowfall and the long winter, roads remain blocked for months, cutting off communications between the province and the

⁽⁷⁴⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi province background profile, n.d ([url](#)); Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁷⁴⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Daykundi Province – Reference Map [map], April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁴⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral resources of Daikundi province, 1 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁴⁹⁾ Netherlands, Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis/URUZGAN Province, August 2006, ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁷⁵⁰⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁷⁵¹⁾ van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the fight everyone chose to ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁵²⁾ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, October 2016 ([url](#)).

rest of the country ⁽⁷⁵³⁾. In January 2016, civil society activists protested against the negligence of the government in the reconstruction and development of Daikundi ⁽⁷⁵⁴⁾.

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 100 % of Daikundi's population lives in rural areas and 55.1 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁷⁵⁵⁾. The main crops in the province are wheat, barley, potatoes, almonds and beans. However, Daikundi is one of the least productive provinces agriculturally; most of the land is barren and inaccessible ⁽⁷⁵⁶⁾. According to UNODC, 374 hectares of opium poppy were cultivated in Daikundi in 2016, which represents a 2 % decrease from 2015 ⁽⁷⁵⁷⁾.

UNOCHA estimated the population for 2016 to be 468,178 in Daikundi ⁽⁷⁵⁸⁾. Hazaras form the majority in the province, apart from Gizab which is a mixed Pashtun-Hazara district. Daikundi also has small populations of Pashtun, Balochi and Sayeed ⁽⁷⁵⁹⁾.

In June of 2015, the second female governor in Afghanistan, Masooma Muradi, was appointed to the province of Daikundi ⁽⁷⁶⁰⁾. Religious conservatives and political opponents protested against the appointment of a woman as governor. She was replaced by a man in September of 2017 ⁽⁷⁶¹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Daikundi

Daikundi was described as a relatively safe area by Pajhwok Afghan News in March 2015 ⁽⁷⁶²⁾, although locals complained about the presence of illegal armed groups in the province, extortion, kidnapping of girls and armed robbery ⁽⁷⁶³⁾. According to a provincial council member cited by Pajhwok Afghan News, Khadir, Sang-e Takht and Ashtarlay districts have become less secure due to the presence of 'illegal gunmen' such as the Pesaran-i Mublaigh group, led by former jihadi commanders who reportedly captured 23 policemen in late August 2015 ⁽⁷⁶⁴⁾.

According to an international organisation, as of September 2015 a substantial number of schools were closed due to the Taliban's presence as it ideologically opposes the education of girls ⁽⁷⁶⁵⁾.

⁽⁷⁵³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi province background profile, n.d ([url](#)); Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁷⁵⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civil society activists [Photo caption], 2 January 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁵⁵⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 13-14.

⁽⁷⁵⁶⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁷⁵⁷⁾ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁵⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Estimated population 2016/2017, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁵⁹⁾ Die Zeit, Bei den Hazara von Daikundi, 5 January 2014 ([url](#)); ISW, Regional Command South, Day Kundi province, n.d. ([url](#)); van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the fight everyone chose to ignore, 31 October 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶⁰⁾ KP, President Ghani appoints female governor for Daikundi province, 5 June 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶¹⁾ Express Tribune (The), Afghanistan's only female governor replaced by man, 27 September 2017 ([url](#)); Afghan Biographies, Muradi, Masooda Mrs., 28 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi security forces professionally improved: officials, 30 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi security, stability top priority: PC, 31 May 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Daykundi Resident's Protest over Irresponsible Armed Men, 8 April 2015 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi residents protest against Mubaligh brothers, 31 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men's influence growing in Daikundi: PC member, 30 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

As stated by UNODC in December 2015, Daikundi was the only province in the southern part of the country ⁽⁷⁶⁶⁾ where security was generally good, with the exception of Kajran district ⁽⁷⁶⁷⁾. Kajran district specifically, where ANA troops were reportedly deployed in 2015 ⁽⁷⁶⁸⁾, was described as unstable by Pajhwok Afghan News, since it also borders the province of Helmand ⁽⁷⁶⁹⁾.

According to residents of Kajran, the district was on the brink of falling under Taliban control in March 2015. A member of the provincial council stated that seven villages had already fallen to the Taliban, with security forces having been deployed to the area, which, according to the source, apparently was not sufficient ⁽⁷⁷⁰⁾.

In March 2016, Kajran residents expressed fear about a possible spillover of security threats into their area from Baghran district of Helmand and Charchino town of Uruzgan province. A provincial council member from Kajran said in 2016 that several residents of Daikundi province had been killed or wounded by the AGEs en route to Helmand and Uruzgan provinces ⁽⁷⁷¹⁾.

Nearly a dozen security checkpoints fell to the Taliban in Gizab district in the end of May 2016. The ANA admitted a shortage of troops there but denied the district had fallen ⁽⁷⁷²⁾.

According to the residents quoted by Tolo News in November 2016, Daikundi was relatively secure but undeveloped because some local officials were fighting for power. The infrastructure was poor. Most schools had no buildings and roads were lacking. Only Kajran district was regarded as relatively insecure ⁽⁷⁷³⁾.

In a meeting with the Chief Executive of the national unity government, Abdullah Abdullah, in late December 2016, the Daikundi parliamentary representatives discussed a range of issues, and asked for special attention to the security challenges in those Daikundi districts bordering other provinces ⁽⁷⁷⁴⁾.

UNAMA documented the abduction of Hazara civilians in Daikundi in 2016. AGEs released all abductees unharmed ⁽⁷⁷⁵⁾.

According to the UNAMA 2016 annual report, civilians were seriously injured during fights between pro-government armed groups and AGEs in Daikundi. Civilians were endangered by the lack of training and discipline among pro-government armed groups ⁽⁷⁷⁶⁾. According to UNAMA, pro-government armed groups carried out abuses in Daikundi in the first six months of 2017 ⁽⁷⁷⁷⁾.

In March 2017, Taliban issued a report regarding their presence in Afghanistan, announcing their fighters controlled 30 % of Kiti, Ishtarlay and Khadir and that the districts of Shahrstan, Nili, Marmor and Sang-e Takht were not under their control ⁽⁷⁷⁸⁾.

⁽⁷⁶⁶⁾ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶⁷⁾ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶⁸⁾ Sada-e Azadi, Daikundi security forces professionally improved: officials, 31 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁶⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi security forces professionally improved: officials, 30 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi governor pledges improved security, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun 11 police check-posts in Uruzgan's Gizab district, 31 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷³⁾ Tolo News, Daikundi Relatively Secure But Undeveloped: Residents, 15 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷⁴⁾ Bakhtar News, NUG Has Special Attention to Daikundi development: CE Abdullah, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁷⁸⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

As of March 2017, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a part of Gizab district was controlled by the Taliban while most of the remaining part of that district was considered a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’. Kajran and Kiti districts, and a small part of Shahrستان were considered ‘low confidence Taliban support zones’ ⁽⁷⁷⁹⁾.

Recent security trends

The central highlands region comprises Bamyan and Daikundi provinces. Civilian casualties in this region increased by 98 % compared to 2015 when UNAMA recorded 58 civilian casualties (30 deaths and 28 injured) ⁽⁷⁸⁰⁾. In 2016, UNAMA documented 115 civilian casualties (25 deaths and 90 injured) in the central highlands region ⁽⁷⁸¹⁾. Most civilian casualties in the central highlands region were generated by ground engagements. In 2016, UNAMA documented 79 casualties in this region caused by ground engagements, all of them recorded in the second part of the year ⁽⁷⁸²⁾.

At the province level, from 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Daikundi Province counted 153 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽⁷⁸³⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	12
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	57
Explosions	12
Security enforcement	8
Non-conflict related incidents	36
Other incidents	28
Total security incidents	153

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Daikundi Province ⁽⁷⁸⁴⁾:

Ishtarlay	19	Nawmish	39
Kajran	30	Nili	20
Khadir	13	Panjab	1
Kiti	7	Sangi Takht	7
Miramor	12	Shahrستان	6

According to the UNAMA mid-year report 2017, Daikundi is one of the provinces where the civilian casualties increased due to attacks by AGEs in comparison to 2016 ⁽⁷⁸⁵⁾. Between 1

⁽⁷⁷⁹⁾ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2016, 7 December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 36-37.

⁽⁷⁸⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁷⁸¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁷⁸²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁸³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#). In these figures, the number of incidents of Gizab are not included.

⁽⁷⁸⁴⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁷⁸⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

January and 30 June 2017, 7 persons were killed and 14 injured in Daikundi due mainly to ERW, followed by targeted killings and ground engagements ⁽⁷⁸⁶⁾. Meanwhile, according to Pajhwok Afghan News, examining attack numbers in August 2017, comparing to other provinces, the least number of attacks took place in Daikundi and no violent attack was reported in this province during the 12 months preceding the article ⁽⁷⁸⁷⁾.

In a ground operation in Gizab district in September 2016, a pro-Government armed group fired a mortar targeting AGEs, but which landed on a residential home and seriously injured three children and a woman ⁽⁷⁸⁸⁾.

In November 2016, ANA helicopters mistakenly dropped ammunition and food in an area controlled by the Taliban in Gizab district. According to the Kandahar police chief 'Taliban militants frequently attacked security posts in Gizab district and heavy clashes happened there' ⁽⁷⁸⁹⁾.

Displacement

According to UNOCHA, between January and September 2017, 160 individuals were displaced inside the province due to conflict from the district of Gizab to the district of Nili in Daikundi; 21 people were displaced from Kajran in Daikundi to Kabul, and 7 were displaced from Miramor in Daikundi to Ghazni ⁽⁷⁹⁰⁾.

⁽⁷⁸⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽⁷⁸⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 24,500 people lost lives, suffered injuries in last 12 months, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

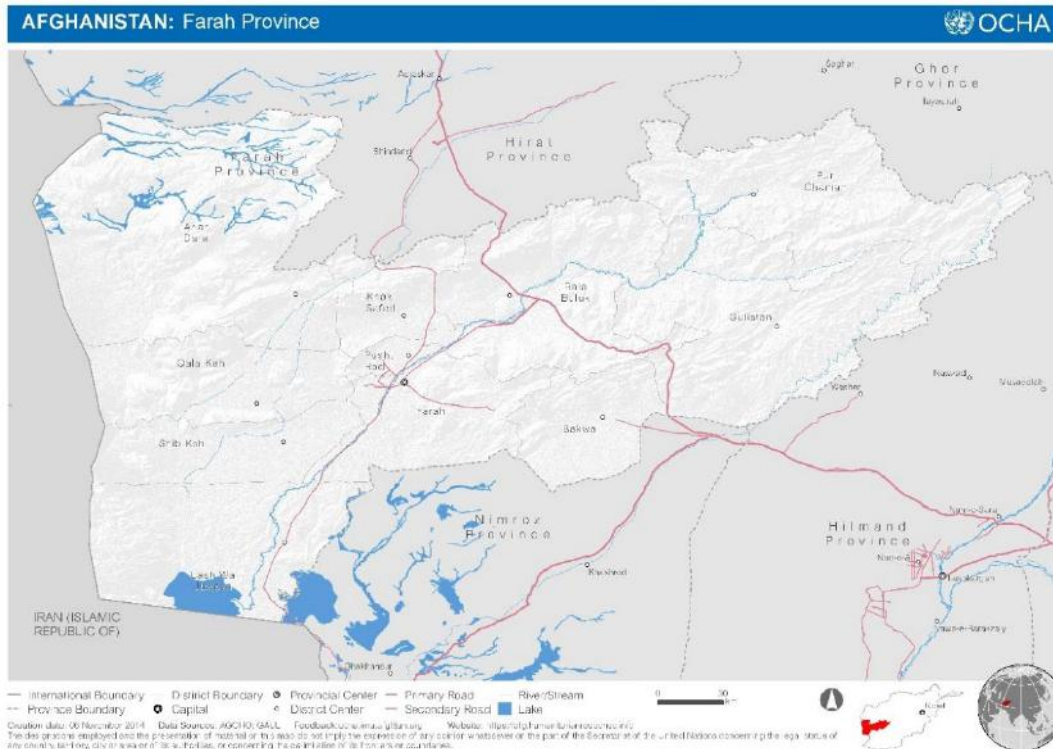
⁽⁷⁸⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 100.

⁽⁷⁸⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Bullets dropped to militants due to bad weather: Raziq, 7 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁹⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2017 and 16 September 2017, 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.8 Farah

General description of the province



Farah province is located in the western part of Afghanistan and borders Herat, Ghor, Helmand and Nimroz provinces as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran ⁽⁷⁹¹⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 507,405 ⁽⁷⁹²⁾. The province comprises eleven administrative units: Farah City and the districts of Anar Deh (Anar Dara), Bakwa, Bala Bolok (Bala Buluk), Gullistan (Gulistan), Khak e Safid (Khaki Safed), Jaween (Lash Wa Juwayn), Pur Chaman (Purchaman), Pusht e Rood (Pusht Rod), Qala Ka (Qala-e-Kah, formerly called Pusht-Koh) and Sheb Koh (Shib Koh) ⁽⁷⁹³⁾. Almost all districts are connected to Farah City through gravel or asphalt roads ⁽⁷⁹⁴⁾.

According to an international organisation, ethnic and tribal groups living in Farah include Pashtun, Tajik, Sadat, Mir, Khawaja, Aimaq, Moghul, Qizilbash, Surkh Kaman, Uzbek, Hazara, Baluch and Turkmen. Pashtuns are believed to be the majority, followed by Tajiks. A majority of the population speaks both Pashto and Dari (especially in the more urbanised areas). Pashto is more predominant in rural areas. Districts with an overwhelmingly Pashtun population include Bala Buluk, Khak-e-Safed, Bakwa and (albeit to a lesser extent) Farah City, while Anar Dara, Qala-e-Kah and Purchaman are predominantly Tajik ⁽⁷⁹⁵⁾.

⁽⁷⁹¹⁾ UNOCHA, Farah Province: Reference Map, 18 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁹²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁹³⁾ UNOCHA, Farah Province: Reference Map, 18 February 2014 ([url](#)); Office of the President of Afghanistan, Farah, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁷⁹⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁷⁹⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Agriculture is the main source of income for local residents, although more than 20 % of households in Farah generate income from trade and services ⁽⁷⁹⁶⁾. Agricultural activities include the cultivation of wheat and fruit. Animal husbandry is widely practiced in the northeastern districts ⁽⁷⁹⁷⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 92.7 % of Farah's population live in rural areas and 65.2 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁷⁹⁸⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Farah

Farah province is viewed by AGEs as a corridor between Afghanistan's southern and western regions. The 285-kilometre border with Iran makes Farah a junction for various kinds of legal and illegal markets, as well as cross-border smuggling. As a result, Farah is highly profitable and strategically important for AGEs and criminal groups ⁽⁷⁹⁹⁾.

Media sources refer to Farah province as 'insecure' ⁽⁸⁰⁰⁾ or 'volatile' ⁽⁸⁰¹⁾. The UN Secretary-General, in a March 2017 report, referred to Farah as one of the provinces with increased Taliban activity and stated that the group continued to challenge the government's control of the provincial capital ⁽⁸⁰²⁾. As the UN reports, during the the summer of 2016, the Taliban launched an attempt to take control of the provincial capital, Farah city ⁽⁸⁰³⁾. Tolo News reports that in March 2017, Bakwa, Gulistan, Khak-e Safed districts were key Taliban strongholds, while seven other administrative units including the provincial capital were described as 'insecure' and 'war-hit' by the article. The report quotes officials as admitting that they were more concerned with maintaining government offices in each district than with ending the current Taliban predominance in much of the province as such ⁽⁸⁰⁴⁾.

According to NATO officials, the military alliance deployed 200 troops to Farah in January 2017 following attempts by Taliban in previous months to take over the provincial capital ⁽⁸⁰⁵⁾. According to reporting by Tolo News in March 2017, security forces in Farah were facing shortages of weapons and equipment ⁽⁸⁰⁶⁾. More NATO troops (around 120, according to local sources) were sent to Farah in July 2017, a provincial government spokesperson is reported as saying ⁽⁸⁰⁷⁾. According to an LWJ map based on an evaluation of Taliban claims of control, Khak-e Safed, Bala Buluk, Gulistan and Bakwa districts were under full Taliban control as of late March 2017 and there was a Taliban presence in Purchaman district. Anar Dara and Pusht-e-Rod districts are described as being heavily contested while a minimal Taliban presence was reported for Shib Koh and Lash-e Juwayn districts ⁽⁸⁰⁸⁾. According to a map published in March

⁽⁷⁹⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁷⁹⁷⁾ UC Davis, Farah, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁹⁸⁾ Ministry of Economy/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016, ([url](#)), pp. 15-16.

⁽⁷⁹⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁸⁰⁰⁾ Al Jazeera, Taliban fighters attack police, capturing two districts, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Farah Downgraded To War-Hit Province: Report, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰¹⁾ Al Jazeera, NATO deploys 200 soldiers in Afghanistan's Farah, 8 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰²⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017, p. 3. ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰³⁾ UN Security Council, Letter dated 9 May 2017 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 25 May 2017, p. 7 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰⁴⁾ Tolo News, Farah Downgraded To War-Hit Province: Report, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰⁵⁾ Al Jazeera, NATO deploys 200 soldiers in Afghanistan's Farah, 8 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰⁶⁾ Tolo News, Farah Downgraded To War-Hit Province: Report, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰⁷⁾ Tolo News, Foreign Forces Deployed To Farah Province, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁰⁸⁾ LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists 'Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen', 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

2017 by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), parts of Pur Chaman, Bala Buluk, Khak-e Safed and Bakwa districts are ‘Taliban control zones’, while most of Gulistan, Bala Buluk, and Khak-e Safed as well as smaller parts of Anar Dara, Qala-e Kah, Shib Koh and Lash-e Juwayn districts are reported to be ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’⁽⁸⁰⁹⁾. A number of local residents and civil society activists noted a lack of judicial institutions and personnel in Farah⁽⁸¹⁰⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Farah province counted 484 security incidents⁽⁸¹¹⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	81
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	250
Explosions	70
Security enforcement	61
Non-conflict related incidents	14
Other incidents	8
Total security incidents	484

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Farah province⁽⁸¹²⁾:

Anar Dara	20	Lash Wa Juwayn	11
Bakwa	15	Pur Chaman	15
Bala Buluk	165	Pusht Rod	61
Farah	135	Qala-I-Kah	32
Gulistan	7	Shib Koh	2
Khaki Safed	21		

As for civilians affected by conflict-related violence, UNAMA documented 181 civilian casualties (73 deaths and 108 injured) in Farah province during the first six months of 2017, a 33 % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the primary cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by targeted killings and aerial attacks⁽⁸¹³⁾. As specified by UNAMA, 78 civilian casualties (17 deaths and 61 injured) from ground fighting were registered in Farah province during this half-year period, compared to 36 civilian casualties (11 deaths and 25 injured) recorded during the first six months of 2016⁽⁸¹⁴⁾. During

⁽⁸⁰⁹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸¹⁰⁾ Tolo News, Farah Residents Concerned Over Lack of Courts, Attorneys, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸¹¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁸¹²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁸¹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽⁸¹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 24.

the first half of 2017, 57 civilian casualties (eight deaths and 49 injured) from the use of indirect and/or explosive weapons were documented in Farah, compared to 19 civilian casualties (three deaths and 16 injured) recorded during the first six months of 2016 ⁽⁸¹⁵⁾. Aerial operations accounted for 31 civilian casualties (seven deaths and 24 injured) during the first half of 2017 ⁽⁸¹⁶⁾.

As reported by the UN Secretary-General in June 2017, Farah is one of the provinces on which the Taliban have recently focused their attacks ⁽⁸¹⁷⁾. The ISW notes that Taliban launched an assault on the provincial capital of Farah in October 2016 ⁽⁸¹⁸⁾, in January 2017 Al Jazeera speaks of ‘attempts by Taliban fighters in recent months to overrun’ the capital city ⁽⁸¹⁹⁾. A March 2017 study of the World Food Programme (WFP) based on a survey of 15 community representatives of Bala Buluk district quotes respondents as saying that the security situation has worsened, especially in the district centre, and that locals travelling from the surrounding villages to the district centre face security and access problems. It is noted that the main market is not functioning primarily due to lack of security. Both the main market and smaller, temporary markets face ‘significant food shortages’ and food prices in Bala Buluk are higher than in the provincial centre. Insecurity also prevents residents of Bala Buluk from going to work ⁽⁸²⁰⁾. Sources report about ANSF combat activity resulting in civilian casualties in Bala Buluk district in March 2017 ⁽⁸²¹⁾ and in Mazaar village in June 2017 ⁽⁸²²⁾.

Security-related incidents resulting in casualties among ANSF and/or AGEs, including armed clashes, AGE attacks on security outposts and IED explosions were reported by media with reference to local official sources in Bala Buluk district ⁽⁸²³⁾ and Farah City in October 2016 ⁽⁸²⁴⁾, Bakwa district ⁽⁸²⁵⁾, Farah City and Bala Buluk district in November 2016 ⁽⁸²⁶⁾, Farah City in December 2016 ⁽⁸²⁷⁾, Bala Buluk district in January 2017 ⁽⁸²⁸⁾, Purchaman district in May 2017 ⁽⁸²⁹⁾, Shib Koh and Qala-e Kah districts in June 2017 ⁽⁸³⁰⁾, Lash-e Juwayn ⁽⁸³¹⁾ and Pusht Rod ⁽⁸³²⁾ districts in July 2017 and in Bakwa district ⁽⁸³³⁾, Farah City ⁽⁸³⁴⁾ and Qala-e Kah district in August 2017 ⁽⁸³⁵⁾.

Sources report several cases of targeted killings of civilians by AGEs, such as the killing of a woman accused of campaigning against AGE activity in Bala Buluk district in November 2016

⁽⁸¹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 26.

⁽⁸¹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 52.

⁽⁸¹⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security; Report of the Secretary-General, 15 June 2017, p. 4 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸¹⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸¹⁹⁾ Al Jazeera, NATO deploys 200 soldiers in Afghanistan's Farah, 8 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁰⁾ WFP, Bala Buluk District – Farah Province – Conflict Rapid Assessment, 27 March 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 1-2.

⁽⁸²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 54.

⁽⁸²²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 of a family injured in Farah artillery strike, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban killed in Kabul's Qarabagh; cop killed in Farah, 18 September 2016 ([url](#)); AP, Afghan military kill 6 security forces personnel in air strike mistake, 1 October 2016, available at: ([url](#)); DPA, Six Afghan security forces killed in fighting with Taliban, 1 October 2016, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, No threats to Farah City from Taliban, say officials, 10 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁵⁾ AP, Afghan official: Taliban kill 8 policemen in country's west, 18 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁶⁾ Tolo News, 12 police killed in Taliban attacks in Farah, 28 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁷⁾ Tolo News, 11 Policemen Killed In Farah Attack, 24 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁸⁾ Tolo News, 15 Taliban, 2 ANA soldiers killed in Farah clash, 28 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸²⁹⁾ Tolo News, 6 rebels eliminated, 10 injured in Farah clashes, 13 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸³⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Six Afghan Policemen Reported Killed In Taliban Attack, 30 June 2017 ([url](#)); DPA, Taliban attack leaves six police officers dead in western Afghanistan, 1 July 2017, available at: ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Taliban killed, 9 injured in Farah clash, 23 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸³¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 policemen killed in Farah roadside bombing, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸³²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Farah: Teenager commits suicide, 2 police shot dead, 20 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸³³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban killed in Farah clash, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸³⁴⁾ Tolo News, 2 policemen among 3 killed in Farah roadside bombing, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸³⁵⁾ AP, Official: Roadside mine kills 3 police in Afghanistan, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸³⁶) and the killing of a female relative of an ANP officer in January 2017 (⁸³⁷). As reported by a Farah police spokesperson, the district governor of Khak-e Safed was killed in a targeted IED attack that was claimed by the Taliban in February 2017 (⁸³⁸). A provincial government spokesperson reported that the governor of Shib Ko district was killed in an IED explosion in July 2017 (⁸³⁹). At least seven civilians were forced off a passenger bus and shot dead by alleged AGEs in Bala Buluk district in July 2017 (⁸⁴⁰).

IED explosions with civilian casualties were reported in Khak-e Safed district in November 2016 (⁸⁴¹), Bala Buluk district in January 2017 (⁸⁴²), Shib Koh district in July 2017 (⁸⁴³), Pusht Rod district in July 2017 (⁸⁴⁴) and Farah City in August 2017 (⁸⁴⁵).

AGEs abducted a group of students in Bala Buluk district in September 2016 (⁸⁴⁶), three car passengers on the outskirts of Farah City in March 2017 (⁸⁴⁷) and three men in Lash-e Juwayn district in May 2017 (⁸⁴⁸). UNAMA lists Farah as one of the provinces where abductions of children were documented during 2016 (⁸⁴⁹).

UNAMA reports that in February 2017, AGEs sent verbal threats to schools in several villages in Farah district. As a result, six schools were temporarily shut down (⁸⁵⁰). UNAMA also mentions that during 2016, AGEs made use of schools in Farah for military purposes (⁸⁵¹). According to UNOCHA, ten health facilities were closed down in April 2017 following AGE threats (⁸⁵²). As reported by the UN Secretary-General, between June and August 2017, AGEs forced one or more health facilities to close down temporarily 'in an attempt to coerce non-governmental organisations that are running the facilities to improve service delivery for their combatants' (⁸⁵³).

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 5,581 individuals from Farah province displaced by conflict. During this period, Bala Buluk district produced the highest number of displaced persons (3,800), followed by Farah City (728) and Pushtrod district (665) (⁸⁵⁴). Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 57,481 individuals from Farah province displaced by conflict. During this period, 51,832

(⁸³⁶) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 24.

(⁸³⁷) UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

(⁸³⁸) Tolo News, Farah District Governor Targeted In IED Explosion, 7 February 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸³⁹) AP, Afghan official says roadside mine kills district governor, 25 July 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴⁰) Firstpost, Afghanistan: Militants stop bus, gun down seven passengers in Farah province, 12 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Taliban Kill Seven Civilians In Farah, 12 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴¹) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 66.

(⁸⁴²) Pajhwok Afghan News, Heroin factory destroyed, 2 women killed in Farah, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴³) RFE/RL, Six Civilians Killed By Roadside Bomb In Afghanistan's Farah Province, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴⁴) Tolo News, 4 Civilians Killed In Roadside Mine Blast In Farah, 4 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴⁵) Tolo News, 2 policemen among 3 killed in Farah roadside bombing, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴⁶) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

(⁸⁴⁷) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gunmen kidnap 3 passengers in Farah, 19 March 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁴⁸) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 43.

(⁸⁴⁹) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 27.

(⁸⁵⁰) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

(⁸⁵¹) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 30.

(⁸⁵²) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report; Week of 09 to 15 April 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁸⁵³) UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

(⁸⁵⁴) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

individuals were displaced from Farah City, more than 40,000 of them on 4 October 2016. Other districts with more than 1,000 displaced individuals documented by UNOCHA were Bala Buluk (2,149), Pushtrod (1,519) and Gulistan (1,428) ⁽⁸⁵⁵⁾. UNOCHA states that Farah was one of the provinces that produced the highest numbers of IDPs in 2016, specifying that October was the worst month country-wide, with Taliban carrying out assaults on several provincial capitals, including Farah City ⁽⁸⁵⁶⁾. As the same source notes, increased fighting in Bala Baluk district in early March 2017 reportedly led to the displacement of up to 5,000 unverified persons ⁽⁸⁵⁷⁾.

⁽⁸⁵⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁵⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Over Half a Million Afghans Flee Conflict in 2016: A look at the IDP statistics, 28 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁵⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report; Week of 5 to 11 March 2017, 11 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

2.9 Faryab

General description of the province



Faryab is situated in the western end of the northern region of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan to the west and north, Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul to the east, Ghor to the south and Badghis in the southwest. The provincial capital is Maymana. The province is comprised of the following districts: Almar, Andkhoy, Bilcheragh, Dawlatabad, Garziwan, Khan-e-Char Bagh,

Khwasabzposh, Kohestan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorghon, Shirintagab⁽⁸⁵⁸⁾. Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN)'s Obaid Ali describes Faryab as a strategically important province, connecting western parts of Afghanistan with the north⁽⁸⁵⁹⁾.

The population of the province is estimated at just over 1 million people and provincial capital Maymana has an estimated population of 88,044⁽⁸⁶⁰⁾. Faryab is one of only two (the other being Sar-e Pul) Afghan provinces with an ethnic Uzbek majority⁽⁸⁶¹⁾. Other groups in the province include Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, Mugul and other ethnicities⁽⁸⁶²⁾.

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 87.9 % of Faryab's population live in rural areas and 39.9 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work⁽⁸⁶³⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Faryab

According to an international organisation, since 2014 the security situation indicated that the province had passed the 'tipping point' into a vicious cycle of security threats, consistent attacks on security forces, inaccessibility of government actors and inaccessibility of non-government development actors. These issues increased frustrations of local communities, which exacerbated security problems⁽⁸⁶⁴⁾. The IWPR notes in February 2016 that 'there has been a steady increase in fighting over the last few years in Faryab⁽⁸⁶⁵⁾.

A joint study by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) and The Liaison Office (TLO) names Faryab as one of the Northern provinces where irregular forces, such as *arbaki* or private paramilitary units of commanders, and anti-government forces, which are mostly various local Taliban groups, outnumber the ANSF and National Uprising units⁽⁸⁶⁶⁾.

Faryab is described as one of the provinces on which the Taliban have focused their attacks⁽⁸⁶⁷⁾ and 'one of the provinces on which the Taleban have focused their local recruitment drive', which has led to the Taliban gaining significant ground in Faryab⁽⁸⁶⁸⁾. According to locals, since 2015 government control has been limited to district centres⁽⁸⁶⁹⁾ and Faryab has been partially controlled by Taliban⁽⁸⁷⁰⁾. In recent years the Taliban have publicly announced the existence of training camps in Faryab province⁽⁸⁷¹⁾. A local police official estimated the

⁽⁸⁵⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁵⁹⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁶⁰⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil Division, Urban, Rural and Sex-2017-18, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁶¹⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)); Gompelman G., Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province, January 2011 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁸⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile Faryab province, n.d. ([url](#))

⁽⁸⁶³⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 17-18.

⁽⁸⁶⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁸⁶⁵⁾ IWPR, Taleban Threat May Tempt Turkmenistan out of Isolation, 19 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁶⁶⁾ Mielke, K. & Misak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan. A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 28-29, .

⁽⁸⁶⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁶⁸⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁶⁹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan MP says Taliban 'very much at ease' in Faryab province, 15 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁷⁰⁾ Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Return of militias To Afghan front lines sparks allegations of abuses, 5 September 2015 ([url](#)); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁷¹⁾ Roggio, B., 67 Taliban fighters 'graduate' from camps in Afghan north, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

number of Taliban fighters active in Faryab province in 2017 at more than 3,000, however Obaid Ali cautions that such figures are often exaggerated ⁽⁸⁷²⁾.

According to a regional police unit commander, foreign militants are present and active in Bilcheragh, Garziwan and Dawlatabad districts where they are frequently involved in armed clashes with security forces ⁽⁸⁷³⁾. Insurgent groups in Faryab also include Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) ⁽⁸⁷⁴⁾.

Afghan sources of Tajik journalist and expert on Afghanistan, Ilkhom Nazriev, have claimed that armed groups that operate under the IS banner are present in some districts of Faryab ⁽⁸⁷⁵⁾. Faryab is one of nine provinces where ISKP has appointed recruiters, according to United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in April 2016 ⁽⁸⁷⁶⁾. According to the Jamestown Foundation 'IS was already known to be present in Faryab' by March 2015 ⁽⁸⁷⁷⁾.

According to an international organization active in the province, the Junbesh-e Melli party, led by ethnic Uzbek, General Dostum, was a dominant political force in the province in 2016 and retained strong political influence. There is a strong rivalry with Jamiat-e Islami ⁽⁸⁷⁸⁾. According to UNAMA the majority of all incidents of ground engagements between pro-Government armed groups affiliated to rival political parties in Afghanistan occurred in Faryab province in 2016 ⁽⁸⁷⁹⁾. For example, in mid-March 2017, clashes were reported between supporters of the two parties that resulted in at least five people being killed ⁽⁸⁸⁰⁾.

A local police chief claimed in December 2016 that public uprising forces had been involved in half of the operations launched in Faryab. According to this source, the Afghan Local Police force in Faryab was reduced from 500 to 300 members ⁽⁸⁸¹⁾. In 2014 and 2015 armed pro-government militias in Faryab have been accused of killing, assaulting and abusing civilians ⁽⁸⁸²⁾.

The Taliban controls a zone of the province that includes the south and east of Khwajasabzposh district, areas in Bilcheragh district, areas in the western part of Garziwan district, an area of Pashtunkot and a wide area in Qaysar district, according to a March 2017 assessment by ISW. The northern districts of Khan-e Char Bagh, Andkhoy, Qaramqol and Qorghon were considered 'low confidence Taliban support zones' ⁽⁸⁸³⁾. On its March 2017 map ⁽⁸⁸⁴⁾ ISW mainly indicated changes in Taliban presence and control in Khwajasabzposh, Bilcheragh and Almar districts, compared to its June 2016 ⁽⁸⁸⁵⁾ assessment. ISW considered parts of Bilcheragh district to have turned from 'low confidence Taliban support zones' in June

⁽⁸⁷²⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁷³⁾ Tolo News, 600 Foreign Fighters Sent To Northern Provinces: Police, 01 February 2017 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁷⁴⁾ DW, Why is northern Afghanistan increasingly unstable?, 1 March 2017 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁷⁵⁾ IWPR, Afghan Instability Threatens Tajikistan, 28 July 2017 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁷⁶⁾ USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan assessing the Threat, April 2016 [url](#), p. 2.

⁽⁸⁷⁷⁾ Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁷⁸⁾ Mielke K. & Misak N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2016 [url](#), p. 5.

⁽⁸⁷⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016, February 2017 [url](#), p. 94.

⁽⁸⁸⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Central Asia's Anxious Watch On The Afghan Border, 21 March 2017 [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 19 to 25 March 2017, March 2017 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁸¹⁾ Tolo News, Public Uprising Groups Involved In 50% Of Faryab Operations, 16 December 2016 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁸²⁾ HRW, World Report 2017 – Afghanistan, 12 January 2017 [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2014, February 2015 [url](#), p. 85; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2015, July 2015 [url](#), pp. 73-77.

⁽⁸⁸³⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 [url](#); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁸⁴⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 [url](#).

⁽⁸⁸⁵⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016 [url](#).

2016 into ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’ by March 2017. According to ISW, the Taliban expanded their control in Khwajasabzposh district since November 2016 ⁽⁸⁸⁶⁾, compared to previous maps ⁽⁸⁸⁷⁾, and Almar district center was considered to be contested or under threat by March 2017 ⁽⁸⁸⁸⁾. In March 2017, the Taliban claimed to control 80% or more of Qaysar, Almar, Lolash (Kohestan), Pashtunkot, Jumma Bazaar (Khwajasabzposh), Shirintagab, Dawlatabad districts, without controlling the district centers ⁽⁸⁸⁹⁾. With the exception of Qaysar and Pashtunkot districts, this was in line with information from local sources in March 2017, claiming that in these districts ‘the government presence is limited to the district centres and a few kilometers around them’ ⁽⁸⁹⁰⁾. Obaid Ali reported that heavy fighting in these districts occurred in March 2017 and local journalists told the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) in March 2017 that the government and the insurgents each controlled half of Qaysar, Garziwan and Pastunkot districts, whereas the provincial capital Maymana, Andkhoy, KhaneChar Bagh, Bilcheragh, Qorghhan and Qaramqol districts were said to be ‘relatively calm’ with Taliban activity ‘limited to far-flung villages’ ⁽⁸⁹¹⁾. Furthermore the Taliban claimed in March 2017 to have control over 10% of Maymana and Bilcheragh districts, and to share equal control with the government in Garziwan and Andkhoy districts ⁽⁸⁹²⁾. Obaid Ali points out the difficulty in estimating the exact proportion of government and of Taliban controlled parts of Faryab province, though Faryab is according to him ‘generally considered one of the most contested provinces in the north-west’ ⁽⁸⁹³⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Faryab Province counted 1,256 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽⁸⁹⁴⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	106
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	876
Explosions	102
Security enforcement	75
Non-conflict related incidents	84
Other incidents	13
Total security incidents	1,256

⁽⁸⁸⁶⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁸⁷⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁸⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁸⁹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁹⁰⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁹¹⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁹²⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁹³⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁹⁴⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [Introduction](#).

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Faryab Province⁽⁸⁹⁵⁾:

Almar	174	Kohistan	27
Andkhoy	9	Maymana	65
Bilchiragh	76	Pashtun Kot	207
Dawlatabad F	111	Qaramqol	25
Gurziwan	49	Qaysar	200
Khani Chahar Bagh	5	Qurghan	4
Khwaja Sabz Posh	113	Shirin Tagab	191

With 289 civilian casualties (61 deaths and 228 injured) recorded by UNAMA, Faryab province saw a 5 % increase in civilian casualties in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016. It was ranked among the ten provinces in Afghanistan with the highest numbers of civilian casualties⁽⁸⁹⁶⁾. Ground engagements were the leading cause for civilian casualties in Faryab province in the first half of 2017 followed by IED explosions and targeted or deliberate killings⁽⁸⁹⁷⁾. In line with its 2016 reporting⁽⁸⁹⁸⁾, UNAMA ranked Faryab among the four provinces documenting both high numbers of and notable increases in civilian casualties from ground fighting in the first half of 2017, with 166 civilian casualties (24 deaths and 142 injured)⁽⁸⁹⁹⁾.

In the first half of 2017 Faryab continued to be the province with most civilian casualties attributed to pro-Government armed groups (6 deaths and 22 injured), according to UNAMA, although, in line with the general trend, this represented a 56 % decrease compared to the same period in 2016⁽⁹⁰⁰⁾. UNAMA documented the arrest of six civilians by a pro-Government armed group commander in Bilcheragh district in September 2016. He ill-treated three of them in detention, one died as a result⁽⁹⁰¹⁾. Pro-government armed groups reportedly killed civilians in Qaysar district in December 2016 and January 2017⁽⁹⁰²⁾ and civilians related to AGE members in April and May 2017 in Almar district⁽⁹⁰³⁾. A civilian man was shot dead by pro-Government armed group members in Garziwan district after he tried to view the scene of an IED attack that had targeted them, UNAMA reported in the first half of 2017⁽⁹⁰⁴⁾. Residents and tribal elders from Dawlatabad district accused ALP members of killing civilians and setting their houses on fire in July 2017 while locals denied having killed civilians, claiming they were militants⁽⁹⁰⁵⁾.

⁽⁸⁹⁵⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽⁸⁹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 11, 79.

⁽⁸⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽⁸⁹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 41-42.

⁽⁸⁹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 11, 24.

⁽⁹⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 11, 60.

⁽⁹⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 95.

⁽⁹⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 95.

⁽⁹⁰³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽⁹⁰⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽⁹⁰⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP forces in Faryab accused of killing 7 villagers, 13 July 2017 ([url](#)).

In the first half of 2017 UNAMA documented eight civilian casualties from in-fighting between pro-Government armed groups ⁽⁹⁰⁶⁾. In March 2017, fighting was reported between groups associated with rival political parties, Junbesh-e Melli and Jamiat-e Islami. Several people were killed and wounded as a result ⁽⁹⁰⁷⁾.

UNAMA noted that Faryab was one of the provinces experiencing increases in civilian casualties from the use of indirect and/or explosive weapons in the context of ground fighting in the first half of 2017, with 109 civilian casualties ⁽⁹⁰⁸⁾. Incidents of mortar shells hitting houses and causing several civilian casualties, including children, have been reported in Khwajasabzposh district in November 2016, Pashtunkot district in September 2016 and May 2017, and in Dawlatabad district in August 2017 ⁽⁹⁰⁹⁾.

There were reports of Taliban attacks and clashes with security forces or uprising groups in Shirintagab district in September 2016, Khwajasabzposh in July 2017 ⁽⁹¹⁰⁾, Dawlatabad district in June 2017 ⁽⁹¹¹⁾ and Qaysar district in June and July 2017 ⁽⁹¹²⁾. Such clashes reportedly resulted in casualties on both sides in Khwajasabzposh district in October 2016 ⁽⁹¹³⁾, Shirintagab district in November 2016, February 2017 and May 2017 ⁽⁹¹⁴⁾, Qaysar district in September 2016 and February 2017 ⁽⁹¹⁵⁾, Bilcheragh district in April 2017 ⁽⁹¹⁶⁾, Pashtunkot district in December 2016 ⁽⁹¹⁷⁾ and June 2017 ⁽⁹¹⁸⁾ and in Dawlatabad in July 2017 ⁽⁹¹⁹⁾. There were reports of clashes resulting in casualties among civilians in Khwajasabzposh district in September 2016, October 2016 and July 2017 ⁽⁹²⁰⁾ and in Shirintagab district in June 2017 ⁽⁹²¹⁾.

⁽⁹⁰⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 11, 29.

⁽⁹⁰⁷⁾ KP, Clash among Junbish and Jamiat gunmen leaves 4 dead in North of Afghanistan, 19 March 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Feud Between Rival Police Groups Sets Off Deadly Clashes in Afghanistan, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 dead, 4 injured as rival protesters clash in Faryab, 24 March 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 19 to 25 March 2017, March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁰⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 26.

⁽⁹⁰⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 47; Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 dead, dozen hurt as mortar hits Faryab wedding, 3 November 2016 ([url](#)); UNGA, The situation of human rights in Afghanistan and technical assistance achievements in the field of human rights, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6; Al Jazeera, 'Mortar attack kills 13 civilians' in Faryab province, 12 August 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Thirteen Civilians Killed By Mortar Shell In Northern Afghanistan, 12 August 2017 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 92; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 26.

⁽⁹¹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Fighting yet again deprives Faryab's capital, 4 districts of electricity, 25 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces' vehicle burnt to ashes in Taliban attack, 19 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹¹⁾ RFE/RL, At Least 13 Militants Killed In Afghan Air Strikes, Say Officials, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 15 dead in Faryab clashes, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Faryab police killed, 1 captured in Taliban attack, 18 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Fighting in Faryab displaces 1,000 families, 2 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban judge among 3 insurgents killed in Faryab assault, 7 November 2016 ([url](#)); News24, Taliban attack kills 5 in northern Afghan village, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 policemen among 7 killed in Faryab clash, 30 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 ALP men, 4 rebels killed in Faryab firefight, 7 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 militants killed in Faryab convoy attack, 28 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁶⁾ DID press, Taliban takeovers a village and several police stations in Faryab, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture strategic area of Balcharagh district, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Zafar-21 offensive concluded with 7 rebels dead in Faryab, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, BP commander survives Taliban attack in Faryab, 10 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Faryab brothers killed in Taliban ambush, 26 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁹⁾ Tolo News, 20 Taliban Militants Killed In Faryab, 22 July 2017 ([url](#))

⁽⁹²⁰⁾ Tolo News, Taliban Attack Districts In Faryab, Suffer Heavy Casualties: Officials, 19 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 police killed in Taliban attack in Faryab, 20 October 2016 ([url](#)); Afghanistan Times, Four students killed in Faryab, 7 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 students dead in Farah firefight, says official, 7 July 2017 ([url](#)); MENAFN, 13 rebels slain, 19 hurt in Faryab clashes, 17 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 15 dead in Faryab clashes, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)).

In July 2017 fighting between security forces and insurgents was reported in Qaysar, Almar, Bilcheragh, Khwajasabzposh, Dawlatabad, Shirintagab and Kohistan districts of Faryab province ⁽⁹²²⁾. In Khwajasabzposh district the fighting prevented humanitarian organisations from conducting assessment of thousands of IDPs in the district ⁽⁹²³⁾.

Official sources reported about operations or clashes in several provinces, including Faryab, between November 2016 and July 2017, during which dozens of militants were killed ⁽⁹²⁴⁾. Security operations, launched in response of Taliban attacks and clashes, were reported to be backed by air raids in Almar district in January 2017 ⁽⁹²⁵⁾, Pashtunkot district in April 2017 ⁽⁹²⁶⁾, Qaysar district in December 2016 and July 2017 ⁽⁹²⁷⁾ and Dawlatabad, Shirintagab and Kohistan districts in July 2017 ⁽⁹²⁸⁾. Afghan aerial operations caused civilian casualties in several provinces, including Faryab, in the first half of 2017, according to UNAMA records ⁽⁹²⁹⁾.

Incidents of targeted attacks and killings of (former) members of security forces or uprising groups by the Taliban were reported in Dawlatabad district in October 2016 ⁽⁹³⁰⁾, Khwajasabzposh district in January and July 2017 ⁽⁹³¹⁾ and in Kohistan district in May 2017 ⁽⁹³²⁾. In Almar district eight security force members, all members of one family, were reportedly killed in February 2017 by another family member who was associated with the Taliban but had surrendered ⁽⁹³³⁾. Civilian casualties were reported during such targeted attacks and killings, including the killing of the son of a district policeman, along with a policeman, near a Taliban checkpoint in February 2017 in Shirintagab district ⁽⁹³⁴⁾, a suicide attack at the main district bazaar in Qaysar district in January 2017, targeting an ALP commander ⁽⁹³⁵⁾, a Taliban ambush on a military convoy in Shirintagab district in July 2017 ⁽⁹³⁶⁾, and the killing of a tribal elder and another person, along with a public uprising commander and two other fighters during a dinner party in Qorghon district June 2017 ⁽⁹³⁷⁾.

⁽⁹²²⁾ Tolo News, NIMA ROOZ: Faryab's Kohistan District Falls to The Taliban, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²³⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan 1 – 31 July 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²⁴⁾ KP, 11 killed, bride among 12 wounded in an explosion in Faryab, 5 November 2016 ([url](#)); KP, 43 militants killed in 17 provinces in past 24 hours, MoI claims, 10 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 56 insurgents eliminated in security operations: MoD, 31 March 2017 ([url](#)); KP, 67 militants killed during counter-terrorism operation in past 24 hours: MoD, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 43 insurgents killed in past 24 hours: MoD, 26 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 26 fighters eliminated in fresh security incidents: MoD, 7 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 19-year-old girl strangles herself to death in Faryab, 7 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Zafar-21 offensive concluded with 7 rebels dead in Faryab, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Public Uprising Groups Involved In 50% Of Faryab Operations, 16 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Thousands displaced as Taliban advance in Faryab, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²⁶⁾ KP, Haqqani network and ISIS militants among 53 killed in airstrikes: MoD, 30 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²⁷⁾ KP, 10 Taliban insurgents killed, 19 wounded in Faryab airstrike: MoD, 29 December 2016 ([url](#)); Afghanistan Times, 143 Taliban killed in Faryab, 25 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²⁸⁾ Afghanistan Times, 143 Taliban killed in Faryab, 25 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab operation leaves 9 rebels dead, 7 wounded, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, At least 140 Taliban killed in Faryab airstrikes, clashes, 25 July 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Afghan forces retake control of Kohistan from Taliban in Faryab, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake control of Kohistan district, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 200 Taliban suffer casualties in battle for Kohistan, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹²⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 53.

⁽⁹³⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Key Taliban figure, uprising commander killed in Faryab, 5 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ex-NDS official among 3 killed in Faryab, Badakhshan, 14 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Uzbek snipers kill 3 Faryab uprising members, 15 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, JIA key member among 5 killed in Faryab, 22 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³³⁾ Tolo News, Eight Police Force Members Killed In Faryab, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Police: Taliban Kill Eight Afghan Security Forces, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Police: Taliban Kill Eight Afghan Security Forces, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 including district police chief's son shot dead, 21 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab suicide attack leaves 2 dead, scores wounded, 5 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 dead as Taliban ambush ANA convoy in Faryab, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 people killed in separate incidents in Faryab, 8 June 2017 ([url](#)).

Several incidents were reported of members of security forces being killed or wounded in roadside bomb or VBIED explosions in Almar district ⁽⁹³⁸⁾ between September 2016 and July 2017, another one in Dawlatabad district in March 2017 ⁽⁹³⁹⁾ and in Shirintagab in July 2017 ⁽⁹⁴⁰⁾. Such explosions reportedly resulted in civilian casualties in Almar district in February 2017 ⁽⁹⁴¹⁾ and in Pashtunkot district in June 2017, when a 10-year old child reportedly lost his legs after being hit by a roadside bomb explosion ⁽⁹⁴²⁾.

Other reported security incidents that caused civilian casualties, included the killing of a woman by the Taliban in Kohistan district in October 2016 in what was said to be a revenge attack for refusing a marriage proposal by a Taliban commander ⁽⁹⁴³⁾, a clash between two local commanders in Almar district in November 2016 ⁽⁹⁴⁴⁾, the killing of two civilians by the Taliban in Shirintagab in November 2016 ⁽⁹⁴⁵⁾, the beating to death of a man in Garziwan district in January 2017 by the Taliban, who accused him of cooperating with ALP ⁽⁹⁴⁶⁾, the kidnapping of a high school student who was found dead during an operation in Maynama city in January 2017 ⁽⁹⁴⁷⁾ and the killing of the director of a petroleum factory in his office in May 2017 in provincial capital Maymana ⁽⁹⁴⁸⁾. June 2017 reports mentioned the killing of an elder who was negotiating the release of captives with the Taliban. The Taliban confirmed the arrest of the man but denied killing him ⁽⁹⁴⁹⁾. A religious scholar and his daughter were reportedly shot dead while asleep in their house in Andkhoy district in June 2017, his son was injured in the attack. The district chief accused the Taliban of the killing ⁽⁹⁵⁰⁾.

More than 80 schoolgirls and their teachers reportedly fell ill and were hospitalised in Qorghan district in March 2017, as a result of a suspected poison attack ⁽⁹⁵¹⁾. In May 2017, unidentified gunmen were reported to have torched a girls' school in Pashtunkot district ⁽⁹⁵²⁾. In June 2017, seven schools were reported to be occupied and used as accommodations and operational bases by AGEs in Kwhajasabzposh district ⁽⁹⁵³⁾.

Several villages and areas in Khwajasabzposh district reportedly switched hands between November 2016 and February 2017 ⁽⁹⁵⁴⁾, while an area in that district was confirmed to be seized by the Taliban in June 2017 ⁽⁹⁵⁵⁾. In April 2017, the Taliban captured the strategic area of Aqbalaq in Bilcheragh district, according to local security officials and a provincial council

⁽⁹³⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab roadside explosion claims lives of 4 ANA soldiers, 10 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab roadside blast claims lives of 2 troops, 14 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Afghan soldiers killed in Faryab landmine blast, 18 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Faryab Blast Leaves One Dead, 16 Wounded, 16 February 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Almar District Police Chief Killed In Bomb Blast, 5 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹³⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban, 6 police killed in north violence, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Uzbek snipers kill 3 Faryab uprising members, 15 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴¹⁾ Tolo News, Faryab Blast Leaves One Dead, 16 Wounded, 16 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Cleric, his daughter gunned down in Faryab, 11 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militant kills woman over marriage refusal in Faryab, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 children among 13 wounded by mortar shells, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban blamed for killing two civilians in Faryab, 5 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill man with repeated guns strokes in Faryab, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kidnapped boy found dead in Faryab, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab petroleum director gunned down in office, 11 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁴⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down elder seeking release of captive, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Cleric, his daughter gunned down in Faryab, 11 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, March 8: Above 80 Faryab schoolgirls 'poisoned', 8 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Girls' school set alight; Taliban deny involvement, 18 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵³⁾ APC, Briefing Note to HCT The Protection situation in the North and North East Update - 15 June 2017, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁹⁵⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 31 people killed & wounded in Faryab offensive, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 16 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Local uprising group commander among 7 family-members dead in Faryab, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 villages cleared, 3 police posts recaptured in Faryab, 18 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab's strategic area captured by Taliban, 8 June 2017 ([url](#)).

member ⁽⁹⁵⁶⁾. On 23 July 2017, local officials confirmed that the Kohistan district center fell to the Taliban ⁽⁹⁵⁷⁾, but after launching an air and ground operation, security forces claimed to have recaptured Kohistan district center on 25 July 2017 ⁽⁹⁵⁸⁾.

In a 2016 survey of the Afghan people the Asia Foundation stated that over the course of 2016, the part of the Ring Road crossing through Balkh, Jawzjan and Faryab had become increasingly insecure ⁽⁹⁵⁹⁾. Humanitarian organisations noted that insecurity on Faryab's roads or highways impacted the capacity to move between districts for them but also for civilians and limited access to certain areas ⁽⁹⁶⁰⁾. Security and access issues limited food supplies from Maymana to the markets in these districts, with Kohestan district being impacted the most, facing significant food shortages ⁽⁹⁶¹⁾. In the summer of 2017, reports mentioned that the Taliban had controlled and closed the roads in Kohestan district for the past year ⁽⁹⁶²⁾. UNOCHA noted increasing insecurity along the Maymana highway in February 2017 when AGEs took control of several additional villages in Faryab province, adding to areas they had captured earlier in the year in Khwajasabzposh and Shirintagab districts ⁽⁹⁶³⁾. Every now and then officials announced the launch of operations to reopen the Maymana-Jawzjan or Maymana-Andkhoy highway ⁽⁹⁶⁴⁾. In August 2017, UNOCHA reported that besides remoteness, ongoing clashes and mines along the road from Maymana made access to Faryab's neighbouring Badghis province very challenging ⁽⁹⁶⁵⁾.

Displacements

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA recorded 39,134 conflict-induced IDPs (4,851 families) from Faryab province. Most IDPs (19,705) were recorded to be from Khwajasabzposh district, with more than half of those IDPs displaced in October and November 2016 ⁽⁹⁶⁶⁾, at a time when ongoing clashes between security forces and insurgents

⁽⁹⁵⁶⁾ DID press, Taliban takeovers a village and several police stations in Faryab, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture strategic area of Balcharagh district, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵⁷⁾ Tolo News, NIMA ROOZ: Faryab's Kohistan District Falls To The Taliban, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Trapped forces face death, 5 Faryab districts may fall: PC, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Kilid Group (The), Faryab's Kohistan District Falls to Taleban, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Taliban Seize Control Of Two Districts In Afghanistan, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Forces Under Siege By Taliban in Faryab's Kohistan District, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, At least 140 Taliban killed in Faryab airstrikes, clashes, 25 July 2017 ([url](#)); Khaama press, Afghan forces retake control of Kohistan from Taliban in Faryab, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake control of Kohistan district, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 200 Taliban suffer casualties in battle for Kohistan, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁵⁹⁾ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶⁰⁾ APC, Briefing Note to HCT The Protection situation in the North and North East Update - 15 June 2017, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶¹⁾ WFP, Faryab Province — Conflict Rapid Assessment, January 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan. 01 – 31 December 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, JIA key member among 5 killed in Faryab, 22 May 2017 ([url](#)); Afghanistan Times, Kohistan, Tayware districts fall to Taliban, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 200 Taliban suffer casualties in battle for Kohistan, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field report. Week of 12 to 18 February 2017, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 31 people killed & wounded in Faryab offensive, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Zafar-21 offensive concluded with 7 rebels dead in Faryab, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)); MENAFN, 3 rebels slain, 19 hurt in Faryab clashes, 17 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab operation leaves 9 rebels dead, 7 wounded, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 14 – 20 August 2017, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

were reported in that district ⁽⁹⁶⁷⁾. High numbers of conflict-induced IDPs from Khwajasabzposh district were also reported in June 2017, when AGEs captured strategic locations in the district ⁽⁹⁶⁸⁾.

Other districts that generated many IDPs were:

- Bilcheragh with a peak in April 2017, when military operations were carried out in the district ⁽⁹⁶⁹⁾;
- Pashtunkot, mainly in April and May 2017 ⁽⁹⁷⁰⁾;
- Dawlatabad mainly in July 2017 ⁽⁹⁷¹⁾;
- Shirintagab especially in October 2016, January and May 2017, and;
- Almar, mainly in January 2017 ⁽⁹⁷²⁾, when fighting between Taliban and government forces occurred ⁽⁹⁷³⁾.

Increasing tensions between two rival parties in Faryab were reported to have prompted some families to relocate to neighbouring provinces out of fear of new clashes in April 2017 ⁽⁹⁷⁴⁾. The displacement of some 700 people to Garziwan was reported following attacks by AGEs on villages in Garziwan district by the end of August 2017 ⁽⁹⁷⁵⁾.

Faryab province received 36,786 conflict-induced IDPs between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, according to UNOCHA records, almost all of them from within the province and most displaced to Maymana ⁽⁹⁷⁶⁾.

⁽⁹⁶⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Fighting in Faryab displaces 1,000 families, 2 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶⁸⁾ APC, Briefing Note to HCT The Protection situation in the North and North East Update - 15 June 2017, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)), p.1.; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 4 to 10 June 2017, June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁶⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 09 to 15 April 2017, April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 31 July – 6 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷²⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Thousands displaced as Taliban advance in Faryab, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)).

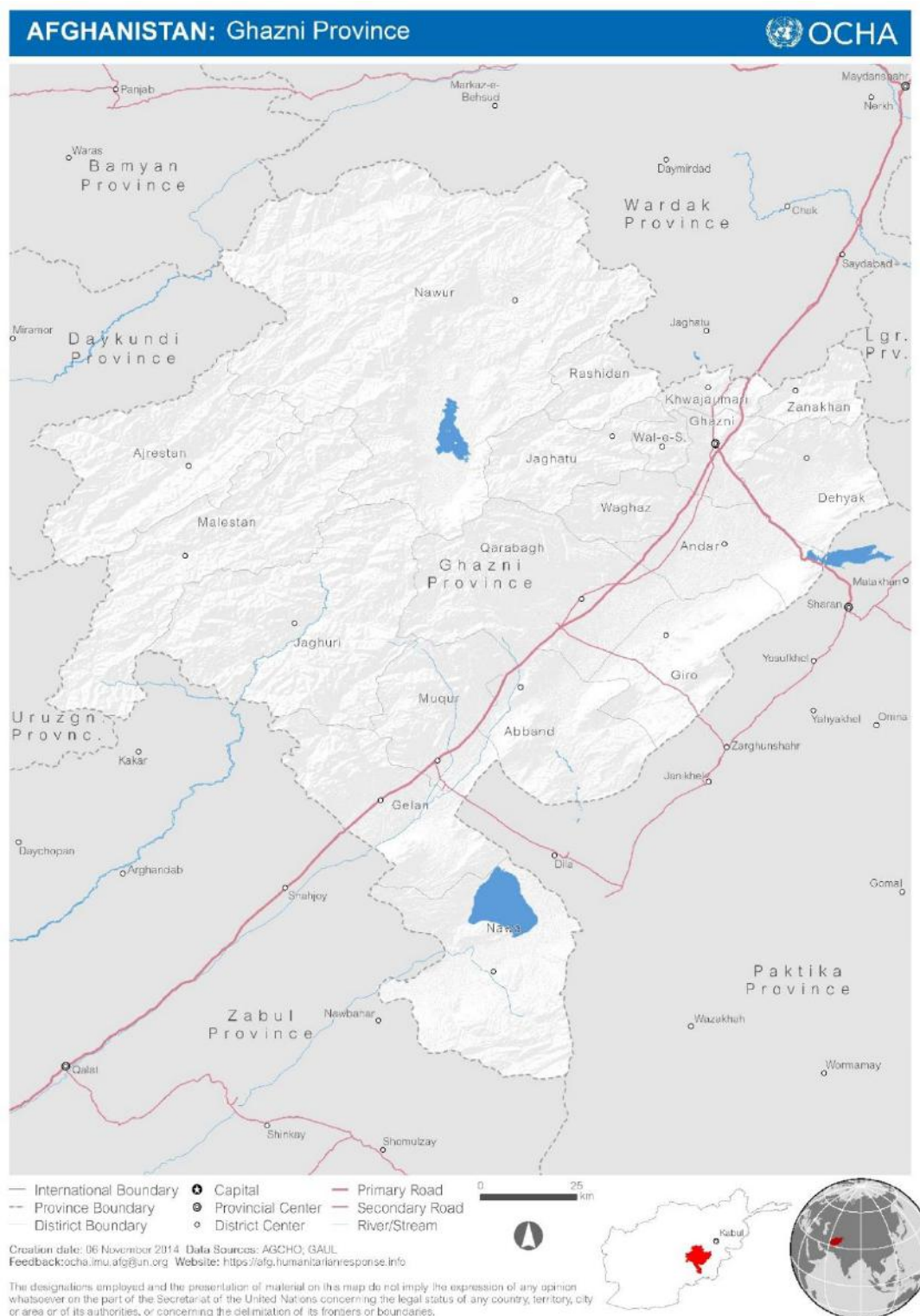
⁽⁹⁷⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, Week of 02 to 08 April 2017, April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 28 August – 3 September 2017, September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.10 Ghazni

General description of the province



Ghazni Province is located in the southeast of the country. The province borders Wardak and Bamyan province to the north, Paktya, Paktika and Logar to the east, Zabol to the southwest

and Uruzgan and Daykundi to the west ⁽⁹⁷⁷⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 1,228,831 and the population of Ghazni City is 60,458 ⁽⁹⁷⁸⁾.

Ghazni province comprises 19 administrative units: the provincial capital Ghazni City and the districts Jaghoori (Jaghuri), Malistan, Nawar (Nawur), Ajristan (Ajrestan), Andar, Qarabagh, Geero (Giro), Muqur, Wayiz (Waghaz), Gaillan (Gelan), Abband, Nawa, Deh Yak (Dehyak), Rasheedan (Rashidan), Zankhan (Zanakhan), Khwaja Omari (Khwajaumari), Jaghato (Jaghato), and Wali Mohammad Shaheed (Walimuhammad-e Shahid) ⁽⁹⁷⁹⁾ which is also sometimes referred to as Khogyani ⁽⁹⁸⁰⁾.

Ghazni comprises arid and flat regions in the southeast and mountainous and humid areas in the northwest ⁽⁹⁸¹⁾. Ghazni city is located 145 kilometres south of Kabul City on the Kabul-Kandahar highway ⁽⁹⁸²⁾.

The population of Ghazni is described as culturally diverse, with the largest groups being Pashtuns and Hazaras, and a small Tajik population which is concentrated in Ghazni City. Some Kuchi nomads, Hindus and Sikhs are also present in Ghazni ⁽⁹⁸³⁾.

Economically, Ghazni predominantly depends on agriculture and livestock. Trade is also important, as the province is located on the crossroads between several provinces ⁽⁹⁸⁴⁾. Agricultural production comprises fruits and nuts, vegetables, grain, fodder and industrial crops, and the most common livestock include sheep and goats ⁽⁹⁸⁵⁾.

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 95.1 % of Ghazni's population live in rural areas and 53.6 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽⁹⁸⁶⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Ghazni

Ethnic considerations play an important role in politics in Ghazni, with Pashtuns, Hazaras and Tajiks competing for influence in the government ⁽⁹⁸⁷⁾. In the province, which is situated on routes linking Kabul to Kandahar and the border with Pakistan, the Taliban are said to have a large presence as of January 2017 ⁽⁹⁸⁸⁾. As of September 2017, they are described as the dominant insurgent group in the province, with local elements of the Haqqani network operating under their umbrella ⁽⁹⁸⁹⁾. Small pockets of IS activity in Ghazni province were reported in February 2017 ⁽⁹⁹⁰⁾; in January 2017, Ghazni local officials claimed that the group

⁽⁹⁷⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Ghazni Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁷⁹⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Ghazni Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to UNOCHA, UNOCHA, Ghazni Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸⁰⁾ Germany, BAMF/BAA/BFM, Sicherheitslage in Afghanistan, March 2011 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁹⁸¹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan - Regional Command East, 2009 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Ghazni, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸³⁾ CPAU, Conflict analysis: Jaghoori and Malistan districts, Ghazni province, April 2009 ([url](#)), p. 5; International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁹⁸⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni economic report, 29 May 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸⁵⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Ghazni Province, 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸⁶⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

⁽⁹⁸⁷⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁹⁸⁸⁾ AP, Suicide bomber wounds 4 in Afghanistan, 26 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁹⁹⁰⁾ BBC News, Terror threat, 25 February 2017 ([url](#)).

had strongholds in Nawa district ⁽⁹⁹¹⁾. An international organisation mentioned rumours about IS presence in Nawa and in the Rasana area of Gelan district in 2016, adding that this presence has not been confirmed by Afghan security forces ⁽⁹⁹²⁾.

As Pajhwok Afghan News reports in July 2017, provincial police chief Aminullah Amarkghel claimed that 142 militant groups comprising 2,000 armed men, including Arabs, Chechens, Pakistanis and Uzbek nationals, are active in Ghazni, with some of the groups fighting the government and others engaging in human trafficking and armed robberies. The Taliban denied this claim, stating that they were the only insurgent group in the province. However, the deputy head of the provincial council acknowledged that different militant groups were active in Ghazni ⁽⁹⁹³⁾. NDS claimed that they killed a top Pakistani al Qaeda leader in Nawa district on 9 January 2017 ⁽⁹⁹⁴⁾.

According to an LWJ map based on an evaluation of Taliban claims of control, Nawa and Zanakhan districts were under full Taliban control as of September 2017 and Abband, Giro, Gelan, Qarabagh, Waghaz, Andar, Dehyak and Ghazni districts are described as being contested. Rashidan district is described as ‘unconfirmable Taliban claim’ ⁽⁹⁹⁵⁾. According to a map published by ISW, large parts of Ghazni (with the exception of Nawur district) are ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’ or ‘Taliban control zones’ (e.g. large parts of Rashidan, Jaghatu, Zanakhan, Walimuhammad-e Shahid districts in the north of the province, parts of Andar, Giro and Qarabagh districts in the east, parts of Jaghuri, Malestan and Ajristan in the west, parts of Nawa including the district center) ⁽⁹⁹⁶⁾.

The Taliban claim in a March 2017 article on their ‘Voice of Jihad’ website that Nawa, Khogyani, Rasheedan and Zanakhan districts were under their control, while Nawar, Ajristan and Malistan were under government control (‘enemy control’). In these areas, Taliban ‘guerilla attacks’ are carried out. The Taliban further claim that Giro district center and 2% of Giro district’s territory were under government control, while 98 % of Giro were under Taliban control. The district centres of Waghaz, Shilgar, Deh Yak, Qarabagh, Aab Band and Gelan were under government control, while 80 % of the district areas were under Taliban control. The district centers of Maqur, Khwaja Omari and Jaghatu were also under government control, while 60 % of these districts’ areas were under Taliban control ⁽⁹⁹⁷⁾.

According to an international organisation, Nawa district is reported to have been under Taliban control for the last eight years, while the district centres of Khogyani and Zanakhan were relocated to Ghazni centre and the district centre of Rasheedan was relocated to Jaghatu district. The districts of Giro, Ab Band, Waghaz, Ajiristan, Gelan, Muqur, Qarabagh, Andar and Dih Yak are mostly populated by Pashtuns and are described as strongholds where the Taliban have active shadow administrations. Districts with a better security situation are Nawur, Malistan, Jaghuri (which are exclusively populated by Hazara), Jaghatu and Khwaja Omarai (which have a mixed population with Hazara as the dominant group) ⁽⁹⁹⁸⁾.

⁽⁹⁹¹⁾ Tolo News, Daesh Infiltrating The North Through Ghazni: Governor, 29 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹²⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽⁹⁹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 140 armed groups operating in Ghazni: Police chief, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁴⁾ LWJ, Afghan intelligence confirms top al Qaeda leader killed in raid, 19 Februar 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁵⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁶⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁷⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁹⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Ghazni Province counted 1,215 security incidents⁽⁹⁹⁹⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	26
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	954
Explosions	108
Security enforcement	108
Non-conflict related incidents	12
Other incidents	7
Total security incidents	1,215

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Ghazni Province⁽¹⁰⁰⁰⁾:

Ab Band	26	Khwaja Umari	44
Ajristan	29	Muqur	38
Andar	340	Nawa	3
Bahrami Shahid (Jaghatu)	11	Nawur	1
Dih Yak	76	Qarabagh	110
Gelan	59	Rashidan	6
Ghazni	190	Waghaz	79
Giro	119	Zana Khan	78
Jaghuri	6		

UNAMA noted a total of 165 civilian casualties (65 deaths and 100 injured) during the first half of 2017 in Ghazni, a 26 % decrease over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by IEDs⁽¹⁰⁰¹⁾.

With regard to targeted killings, UNAMA reports the killing of a judge and his driver on 5 June 2017 at a Taliban check post⁽¹⁰⁰²⁾. According to the Ghazni provincial police chief, the Taliban ambushed and killed Jaghatu District Governor Manzur Hussain and a passenger in his car on 2 August 2017⁽¹⁰⁰³⁾.

Between September and November 2016, armed clashes were reported in Giro district and other locations: According to the Ghazni governor, on 4 September 2016 Taliban carried out coordinated attacks on Giro district after surrounding it for several days and blocking a

⁽⁹⁹⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁰⁰⁰⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁰⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁰⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 41.

⁽¹⁰⁰³⁾ AP, Pentagon: 2 US service members killed in Afghanistan blast, 3 August 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

highway ⁽¹⁰⁰⁴⁾. The provincial police chief and local security officials claimed that on 15 October 2016, the security forces have released at least 50 prisoners from a Taliban jail in Giro district ⁽¹⁰⁰⁵⁾. The governor claimed on 24 October 2016 that up to 370 Taliban and 35 government forces were killed during previous 20 days around Ghazni city and Deyak, Andar and Giro districts. The Taliban tried to block the Kandahar-Kabul highway ⁽¹⁰⁰⁶⁾. On 6 November 2016, a spokesman of the Ghazni security command reported that an attempt of 80 Taliban to capture Waghaz district was foiled and 6 insurgents were killed ⁽¹⁰⁰⁷⁾.

Armed clashes and airstrikes were also reported in 2017: On 21 February 2017 the Ministry of Interior reported two suicide bombers killed in an airstrike in Nawa district ⁽¹⁰⁰⁸⁾. According to government sources, eleven Pakistani insurgents were killed in airstrikes in Gelan and Nawa districts on 31 March 2017 ⁽¹⁰⁰⁹⁾, and two senior leaders of the Haqqani network and six other militants were killed in an airstrike on 7 April 2017 in the Giro district ⁽¹⁰¹⁰⁾. As confirmed by the provincial police chief, the deputy intelligence chief of Paktika province, General Abdul Wahab, and three security guards were killed during clashes with the Taliban in Andar district on 2 April 2017 ⁽¹⁰¹¹⁾. Ghazni's police chief confirmed that on 19 May 2017 the Taliban attacked the district centre in Waghaz, using a suicide car bomb with several gunmen attacking. Two police officers and around 20 Taliban fighters were reportedly killed in the battle ⁽¹⁰¹²⁾. A police official reports on 30 July 2017 the storming of a security outpost by the Taliban, 2 police officers were killed ⁽¹⁰¹³⁾. A spokesman of the Ghazni security directorate stated in media sources on 22 August 2017 that 12 Taliban were killed in a military operation in Zanakhan district ⁽¹⁰¹⁴⁾.

On 26 January 2017, an Afghan official quoted by AP stated that a prematurely detonated explosive device wounded four people in Ghazni city ⁽¹⁰¹⁵⁾. In June 2017, a roadside bomb killed five people and wounded six others, as reported by the provincial police chief in the media ⁽¹⁰¹⁶⁾.

Other security-related incidents include an ambulance being ambushed on 7 May 2017 in Andar district ⁽¹⁰¹⁷⁾ and a nightly attack on a girl's school in Qarabagh on 21 May 2017. As reported by an education official, the school was damaged, but nobody was hurt in the incident ⁽¹⁰¹⁸⁾. Local security officials reported that thirteen children were rescued in Qarabagh district in July 2017 as militants were trying to smuggle them to Pakistan in order for them to be enrolled into *madrassas* and be trained as insurgents ⁽¹⁰¹⁹⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban launch coordinated attack on Giro district, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁰⁵⁾ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Release 50 Prisoners From Taliban Jail In Ghazni, 15 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁰⁶⁾ Xinhua, 370 militants killed in Afghan eastern Ghazni province in 20 days: official, 24 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁰⁷⁾ Bakhtar News, Taliban Massive Attack Repelled In Vaez District, Ghazni, 6 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁰⁸⁾ Khaama Press, Deadly suicide attack foiled as truck bomb destroyed in Ghazni airstrike, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁰⁹⁾ Khaama Press, 11 Pakistani insurgents killed in airstrikes in Ghazni province of Afghanistan, 1 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹⁰⁾ Khaama Press, Top Haqqani terrorist network leaders killed in Ghazni airstrike, 8 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹¹⁾ Khaama Press, Paktika deputy intelligence chief killed in Taliban militants attack, 3 April 2017 ([url](#)); AP, 4 Afghan intelligence agents killed in Taliban attack, 3 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹²⁾ AP, Afghan officials: 3 killed after gunmen storm bank, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Ghazni Province, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Afghan Taliban launch three-pronged assault on Ghazni city, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹³⁾ AP, Official says Taliban attack kills 2 police, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹⁴⁾ Bakhtar News, Armed Taliban Rebels Killed In Ghazni, 22 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹⁵⁾ AP, Suicide bomber wounds 4 in Afghanistan, 26 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹⁶⁾ AP, IS says it has taken Tora Bora, bin Laden's Afghan hideout, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽¹⁰¹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Primary school for girls blown up in Ghazni capital, 22 May 2017 ([url](#)).

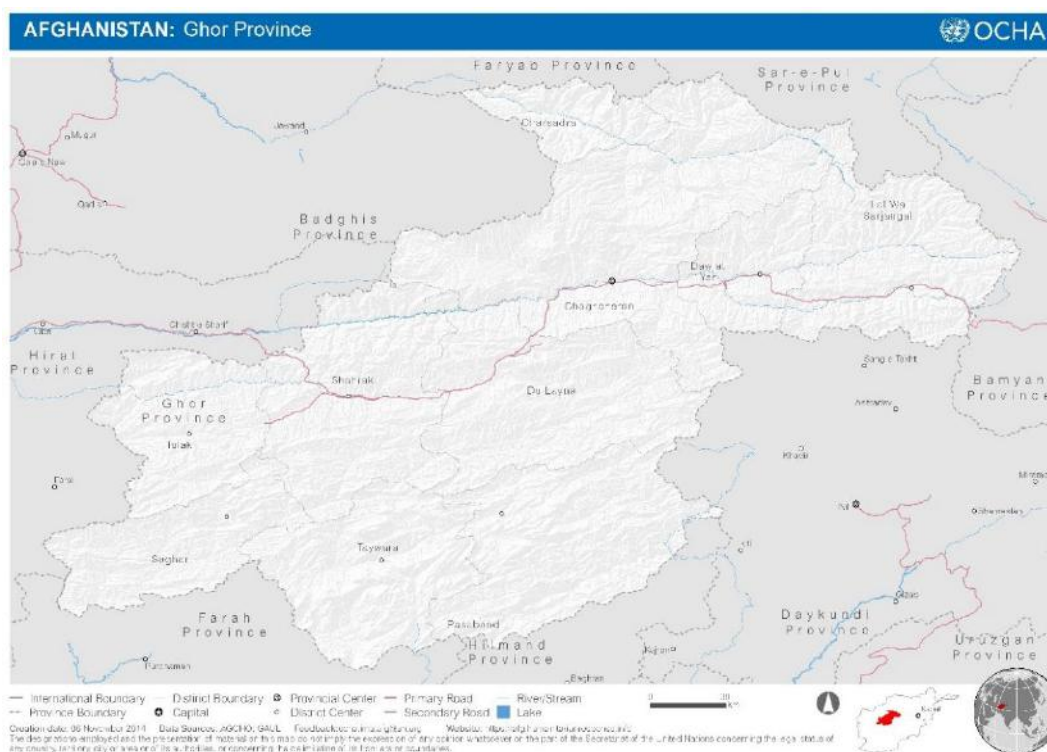
⁽¹⁰¹⁹⁾ KP, Afghan forces once again militants bid to smuggle 13 children to Pakistan, 16 July 2017 ([url](#)).

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 1,141 individuals from Ghazni province displaced by conflict. During this period, Andar district produced the highest number of displaced persons (259), followed by Walimuhammad-e Shahid (210), Waghaz (196) and Qarabagh (161) districts ⁽¹⁰²⁰⁾. UNOCHA reports in March 2017 that clashes in Gelan, Qarabagh and Muqur districts displaced 3,500 individuals ⁽¹⁰²¹⁾ and in May 2017 that 840 individuals were displaced from Uruzgan province and Andar, Giro and Gelan districts in Ghazni province to Ghazni City centre ⁽¹⁰²²⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 6,366 individuals from Ghazni province who were displaced by conflict. 5,852 of these individuals originate from Giro district, most displacements in this district were documented on 16 September ⁽¹⁰²³⁾.

2.11 Ghor

General description of the province



Ghor province is located in central-northwestern Afghanistan and has borders with Herat, Badghis, Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Bamyan, Daykundi, Helmand and Farah provinces ⁽¹⁰²⁴⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 690,296 ⁽¹⁰²⁵⁾.

Ghor province comprises 10 administrative units: the provincial capital Firoz Koh (formerly called Chagh Charan (Chaghcharan) and the districts Lal o Sarjangan (Lal Wa Sarjangan),

⁽¹⁰²⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰²¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 26 March - 1 April 2017, 1 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽¹⁰²²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 30 April to 6 May 2017, 6 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰²³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰²⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Ghor Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰²⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

Dawlatyar (Dawlat Yar), Char Sadda (Charsadra, Charsada), Doleena (Du Layna), Shahrak, Taywara (Toera), Pasaband, Sagar (Saghar) and Tolak (Tulak) ⁽¹⁰²⁶⁾.

Ghor's territory is 90 % mountainous or semi-mountainous ⁽¹⁰²⁷⁾ and the province is characterised by small isolated villages which are mostly inaccessible during winter ⁽¹⁰²⁸⁾, when roads remain blocked for most traffic. Ghor is considered one of Afghanistan's least developed provinces ⁽¹⁰²⁹⁾. Sources either refer to the Aimaq ⁽¹⁰³⁰⁾ or Tajiks ⁽¹⁰³¹⁾ as the ethnic majority in the province. According to an international organisation, Tajiks make up around 80 % of Ghor's population, followed by Hazaras (17 %). Pashtuns account for about 2 or 3 % of the population. During the summer months, Pashtun Kuchis migrate to Ghor from the neighbouring Farah, Helmand, Herat, and Badghis provinces, with a seasonal estimate of 20,000 ⁽¹⁰³²⁾. Most inhabitants of Ghor speak Dari ⁽¹⁰³³⁾. The province's economy is 90% dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry ⁽¹⁰³⁴⁾. Due to its proximity to areas producing large amounts of opium, Ghor is the main transit route for opium from Faryab to Helmand ⁽¹⁰³⁵⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 94.1 % of Ghor's population live in rural areas and 56.1 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁰³⁶⁾. According to the head of Ghor's civil society organisations, 70 % of children in the province are deprived of educational opportunities ⁽¹⁰³⁷⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Ghor

As noted by the IWPR in August 2016, certain remote areas of Ghor province were 'entirely out of government control' ⁽¹⁰³⁸⁾. Security officials estimated in 2015 that 103 illegal armed groups (with 4,500 members) were active in Ghor, in addition to 3,500 AGE members ⁽¹⁰³⁹⁾. Another major issue in the province are permanent rivalries between tribes which have left dozens dead and hundreds displaced ⁽¹⁰⁴⁰⁾. Obaid Ali of the AAN stated that '[t]he Taimani and Firuzkahi [tribes of the Chahar Aimaq] are considered the largest and most influential, but there are a great number of smaller groups, most of them of Tajik origin'. Ali noted in 2013

⁽¹⁰²⁶⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Ghor Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to UNOCHA, Ghor Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰²⁷⁾ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰²⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Introduction of Ghor Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰²⁹⁾ IWPR, Outrage at Marriage of Six-Year-Old Girl, 20 August 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Introduction of Ghor Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰³⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won't Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰³¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰³²⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰³³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Introduction of Ghor province, n.d. ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰³⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor people demand building of big water reservoirs, 13 March 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰³⁵⁾ Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰³⁶⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 21-22.

⁽¹⁰³⁷⁾ IWPR, Afghanistan: Ghor's Education System Near Collapse - Most schools are closed, but teachers still receive their salaries, 5 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰³⁸⁾ IWPR, Outrage at Marriage of Six-Year-Old Girl, 20 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰³⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor governor views armed groups as major security threat, 23 November 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

that in spite of their common language (Persian) and religion (Sunnism), there is intense infighting among these groups and that these conflicts have become 'more acute' in previous years. According to Ali, Ghor's ethnic fragmentation poses a considerable security risk, with strongmen from numerous tribes seeking to defend territories and tribal honour ⁽¹⁰⁴¹⁾.

As noted by Antonio Giustozzi, the Taliban's Mashhad Shura claims authority over western Afghanistan, including Ghor province ⁽¹⁰⁴²⁾. As an international organisation noted, the ANSF in the province cooperate with illegal armed groups to fight the Taliban, especially in Pasaband, Charsada and Dawlatyar districts. The same source also mentions activities of the ISKP group in Murghab Valley of Firozkoh district ⁽¹⁰⁴³⁾ (north of the provincial capital) where, according to the Ghor police chief, as of 2017, IS is currently 'trying to establish a stronghold' and has trained young recruits ⁽¹⁰⁴⁴⁾. As noted by other officials, the group is led by two local ISKP commanders. Local civil society activists noted in June 2017 that the group has been recruiting in the province over the past year ⁽¹⁰⁴⁵⁾. In November 2016, Borhan Osman of the AAN meanwhile stated in a 2016 article that there was 'no credible evidence of an actual IS presence in Ghor' ⁽¹⁰⁴⁶⁾.

AAN analyst Obaid Ali stated in 2013 that the ANSF suffered from a shortage of personnel and was insufficiently equipped to control AGEs and illegal armed groups in the province, and in many cases police were more loyal to their tribes and often refused to confront their own kinsmen ⁽¹⁰⁴⁷⁾. A New York Times article from August 2017 put the number of ANSF in the province at 2,700 ⁽¹⁰⁴⁸⁾.

As an international organisation stated in September 2017, four-fifths of the territory of Pasaband district are controlled by the Taliban, who have a stronghold in the district's Kakori area. In May 2016, the Taliban sought to create a south-north corridor to Bala Murghab district in Badghis province, launching attacks on ANSF around the Pasaband district centre. According to the source, the security situation in the district remains 'fragile', with Taliban groups active some five to ten kilometres from the district centre ⁽¹⁰⁴⁹⁾. The Taliban's Voice of Jihad website claims that the government only controls the Pasaband district centre. Taliban also state that they control 80 % of Charsada district and 70 % of Dawlatyar and Taywara districts, 65 % of Saghar, Tulak, Shahrak and Du Layna districts and 40 % of Lal Wa Sarjangal district. In addition, the Taliban have claimed to have control over 30 % of the territory of the provincial capital ⁽¹⁰⁵⁰⁾. According to a map published by the ISW, most of Pasaband and smaller parts of Du Layna, Firoz Koh, Charsada are labelled as 'high confidence Taliban support zones'. Small parts of Pasaband and Du Layna are referred to as 'Taliban control zones', and a very small part of Firoz Koh district is marked as 'high confidence ISIS support zone' ⁽¹⁰⁵¹⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁴¹⁾ Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽¹⁰⁴³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁴⁾ Tolo News, Daesh Militants Recruiting In Ghor Province: Officials, 9 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁵⁾ Tolo News, Daesh Militants Recruiting In Ghor Province: Officials, 9 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁶⁾ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, 23 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁷⁾ Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁸⁾ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁴⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁰⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)). A map was published by the Long War Journal (LWJ) based on an evaluation of these Taliban claims: LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists 'Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen', 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁵¹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Ghor province counted 162 security incidents ⁽¹⁰⁵²⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	28
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	66
Explosions	28
Security enforcement	11
Non-conflict related incidents	21
Other incidents	8
Total security incidents	162

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Ghor province ⁽¹⁰⁵³⁾:

Chaghcharan	59	Pasaband	15
Charsada	5	Saghar	7
Dawlat Yar	8	Shahrak	24
Du Layna	31	Taywara	3
Lal Wa Sarjantal	3	Tulak	7

UNAMA noted a total of 20 civilian casualties (10 deaths and 10 injured) during the first six months of 2017 in Ghor, a 67 % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground engagement attacks constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by IEDs ⁽¹⁰⁵⁴⁾.

As reported by the New York Times in August 2017, Ghor was long neglected by the central government before a recent surge in Taliban attacks ⁽¹⁰⁵⁵⁾. An international organisation stated in September 2017 that the Taliban were ‘relatively active’ in eight districts of the province, most of which border volatile Helmand, Farah, Badghis, Faryab and Uruzgan provinces ⁽¹⁰⁵⁶⁾. According to security officials, Taliban operating under a commander with close ties both to Iran and senior political figures in Kabul have set up checkpoints along the main highway passing through Ghor to extort travelers ⁽¹⁰⁵⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁵²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁰⁵³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁰⁵⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁵⁾ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁵⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁷⁾ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)).

Media reported that the Taliban launched a coordinated attack on Taywara and Pasaband districts in July 2017 and that Taywara district was (briefly) captured by the insurgents ⁽¹⁰⁵⁸⁾.

In an October 2016 report, the BBC quoted the governor of Ghor province as claiming that armed men linked to the ISKP abducted and killed a group of civilians north of Firoz Koh ⁽¹⁰⁵⁹⁾. With regard to the same abductions and killings (which took place in the Murghab valley) UNAMA notes that 35 persons were abducted and 26 of them (21 men and five boys) were killed, apparently in revenge for the death of the group's commander in fighting with the ANSF. The other abductees were released ⁽¹⁰⁶⁰⁾. Borhan Osman of the AAN pointed to evidence indicating that the perpetrators were a group of criminals with past links both to the Taliban and the central government but with no affiliation to the ISKP group ⁽¹⁰⁶¹⁾. UNAMA meanwhile quotes sources as reporting that the perpetrators identified as 'Daesh' (ISKP) and had been active in the Murghab Valley although they did not appear to have links to IS in Nangarhar province or Syria. The Taliban denied any involvement ⁽¹⁰⁶²⁾. According to the New York Times, the group responsible for the killings operates under the leadership of a local commander affiliated with Jamiat-e Islami, one of Afghanistan's main political parties and has 'yet to face justice despite operating not far from the provincial capital' ⁽¹⁰⁶³⁾.

As reported by UNAMA, an IED attack targeting Taliban that was attributed to self-proclaimed ISKP fighters left one civilian woman with injuries. Self-identified ISKP fighters were also responsible for the abduction of five members of a family in Firoz Koh district in March 2017 following a tribal dispute and the abduction of eleven civilians in Dawlat Yar district in May 2017 after a personal dispute. The latter incident in turn provoked the kidnapping by members of the affected tribe of six civilian persons belonging to the same tribe as the abductors. All abductees involved in these incidents were eventually released after negotiations ⁽¹⁰⁶⁴⁾.

UNAMA notes that abductions of Hazara civilians by AGEs were reported in a number of provinces including Ghor. The abductees were released unharmed ⁽¹⁰⁶⁵⁾.

According to officials, three Afghan employees of Catholic Relief Services, a humanitarian aid organisation, were killed by unknown gunmen in Ghor near the provincial capital in August 2017. Another two employees were wounded ⁽¹⁰⁶⁶⁾.

UNAMA mentions that during 2016, use of educational facilities by parties to the conflict for military ends was reported in a number of provinces including Ghor ⁽¹⁰⁶⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁸⁾ Tolo News, Taliban's Coordinated Attack Pushed Back In Ghor, 21 July 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Taliban Seize Two More Afghan Districts in Sustained Fighting, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Taliban Seize Two Key Districts in Ghor and Faryab Provinces, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake control of Ghor's Taywra district, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Afghan forces battle to retake district from Taliban, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁵⁹⁾ BBC News, IS in Afghanistan 'kills 30 abducted civilians', 26 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁶⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 72.

⁽¹⁰⁶¹⁾ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, 23 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁶²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁰⁶³⁾ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁶⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, Juli 2017 ([url](#)), p. 49.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 74.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁶⁾ Reuters, Three aid workers killed in Afghanistan: officials, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁶⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 30.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 10,485 individuals from Ghor province displaced by conflict. During this period, Taywarah district produced the highest number of displaced persons (3,419), followed by Shahrak (2,689), Do Layna (2,515) and Chaghcharan (1,120) districts ⁽¹⁰⁶⁸⁾. UNOCHA notes in August 2017 that 5,300 persons were displaced as a result of the Taliban attack on Taywara district ⁽¹⁰⁶⁹⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016 5,545 individuals from Ghor province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA. During this period, Shahrak district produced the highest number of displaced persons (2,438), followed by Chaghcharan (1,037) and Do Layna (669) districts ⁽¹⁰⁷⁰⁾.

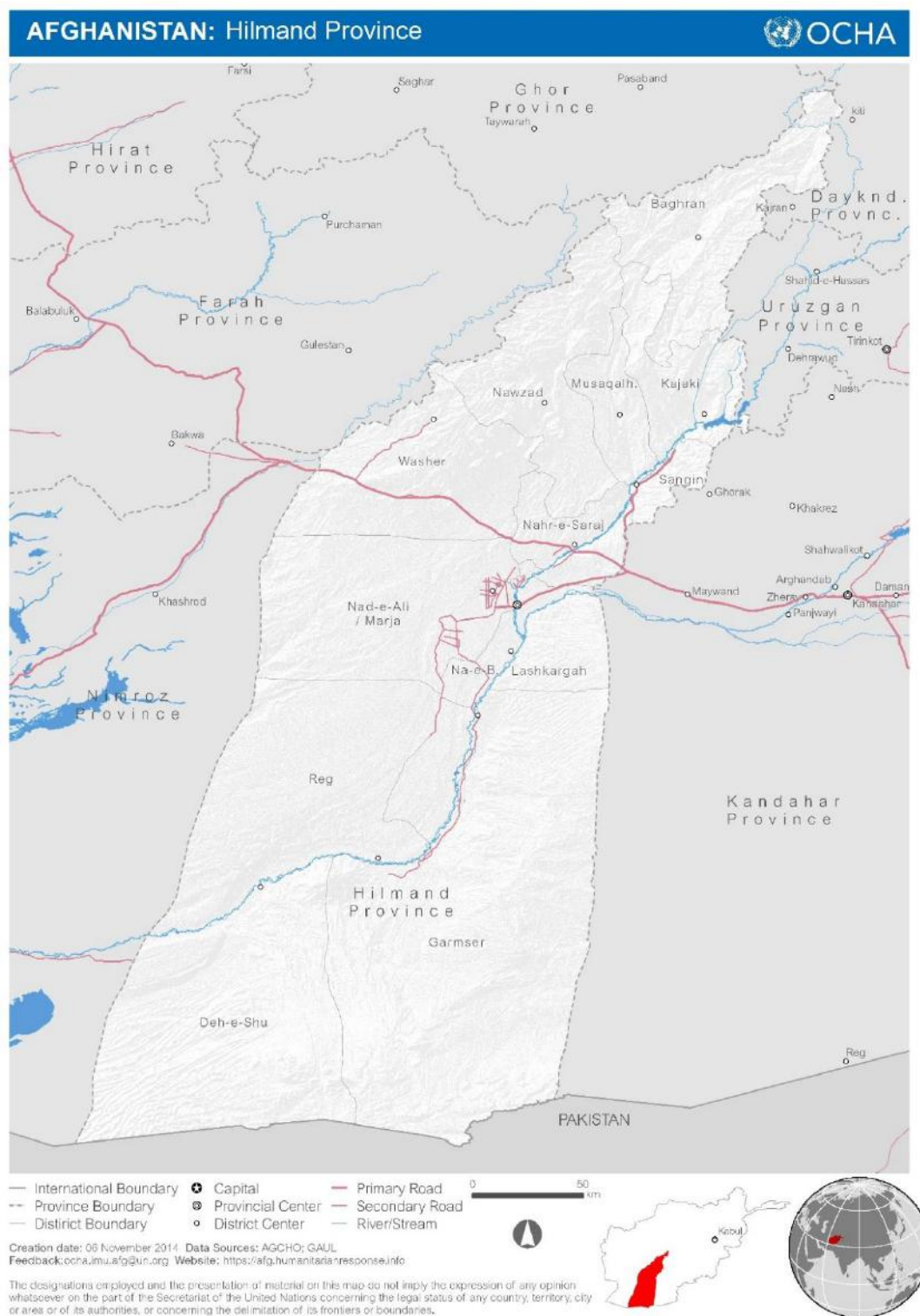
⁽¹⁰⁶⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁶⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Fighting escalates over control of district; Issue 67; 01 – 31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

2.12 Helmand

General description of the province



Helmand province is located in southern Afghanistan and shares a border with the provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan, Daikundi, Ghor, Farah and Nimroz. The province also shares a 162

kilometre border with Pakistan along the Durand line ⁽¹⁰⁷¹⁾. Helmand province comprises 13 administrative units: the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, and the districts of Baghran (including the area of Nawamish), Dishu (also known as Deh Shu), Garmser, Kajaki, Musa Qala, Nad Ali (including the area of Marjah), Nahr-e Sarraj (including Helmand's second biggest city Gereshk), Nawayi Barakzai (also known as Nawa), Naw Zad, Reg (also known as Khanashin), Sangin, and Washir ⁽¹⁰⁷²⁾.

Helmand is the largest province of Afghanistan ⁽¹⁰⁷³⁾. The province has an estimated population of 955,970, of which 124,131 live in Nahr-e Sarraj and 110,252 live in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah ⁽¹⁰⁷⁴⁾. Provincial authorities, however, estimate that the population of Helmand could be as high as 1.5 million ⁽¹⁰⁷⁵⁾.

Helmand's population is overwhelmingly Pashtun (approximately 95 %). There are also significant numbers of Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks, and a small Sikh population concentrated in Lashkar Gah and the areas southwards from the provincial capital ⁽¹⁰⁷⁶⁾. There is also a substantial number of Baluch in the south, especially in Dishu district ⁽¹⁰⁷⁷⁾. The population of Helmand is known to be very conservative. The central areas are more ethnically and tribally mixed and generally more educated whereas the north is less educated and has stronger tribal dynamics. Most of Helmand's Pashtun population is from the Durrani tribes: the north and Garmser is primarily Alizai, the area between Gereshk and Sangin is dominated by Barakzai, Kajaki is Ishaqzai and Alakozai. Noorzai are dominant in Nad Ali, Washir, and Nawayi Barakzai ⁽¹⁰⁷⁸⁾. The most prominent tribe supporting the Taliban in Helmand has been Ishaqzai, followed by Hotak, and Kakar ⁽¹⁰⁷⁹⁾.

Helmand River makes the province one of the most fertile areas in Afghanistan, and the river bank area is heavily populated ⁽¹⁰⁸⁰⁾. Helmand is the centre of the most widespread cultivation of opium anywhere in the world, which drives the local economy ⁽¹⁰⁸¹⁾. Helmand produces as much opium on its own as other provinces combined ⁽¹⁰⁸²⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 94.1 % of Helmand's population live in rural areas and 68.2 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁰⁸³⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁷¹⁾ UNOCHA, Hilmand Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁷²⁾ UNOCHA, Hilmand Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁷³⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Helmand Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁷⁴⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)) p. 36.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁵⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Helmand Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d. ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁶⁾ Coghlan, T., The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History, in : Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 121.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁷⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Helmand Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#))

⁽¹⁰⁷⁸⁾ Coghlan, T. The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History, in Giustozzi ed, Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. pp. 121-123

⁽¹⁰⁷⁹⁾ Coghlan, T., The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History, in Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 136

⁽¹⁰⁸⁰⁾ Coghlan, T., The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History, in Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 121

⁽¹⁰⁸¹⁾ Coghlan, T., The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History, in Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 122, 124

⁽¹⁰⁸²⁾ UNODC/Afghanistan, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)) p. 5

⁽¹⁰⁸³⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)) pp. 23-24

The Kabul-Herat highway runs through the province of Helmand crossing the districts of Nahr-e Sarraj and Washir ⁽¹⁰⁸⁴⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Helmand

Helmand is the heartland of the Taliban and is known as a centre of insurgency, smuggling and opium production ⁽¹⁰⁸⁵⁾. It was the last province to fall when the Taliban were overthrown in 2001, and the insurgency after 2001 has been the fiercest there ⁽¹⁰⁸⁶⁾. The Taliban has a strong presence in Helmand. According to LWJ, reporting in September 2017, more than half of the districts are contested, with the northern and southern districts of Dishu, Rig, Naw Zad, Musa Qala, and Baghran completely under Taliban control ⁽¹⁰⁸⁷⁾. Helmand's two main towns, Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, are among a handful of places in the province that are not under Taliban control ⁽¹⁰⁸⁸⁾. However, the Taliban has had a stronghold for years in the Qalayi Gaz area of Gereshk due to support from local Ishaqzai tribe, and a number of Taliban elite force training camps were said to be operating in the area ⁽¹⁰⁸⁹⁾.

The security situation in Helmand has deteriorated since foreign combat troops left the province in the beginning of 2015, and already by the end of that year several areas of the province had come under Taliban control ⁽¹⁰⁹⁰⁾. The districts of Baghran, Naw Zad, Musa Qala, Washir, and Dishu were described in May 2016 as under stable Taliban control and have had no functioning formal schools for girls or boys for over a decade ⁽¹⁰⁹¹⁾. Helmand's northernmost districts of Baghran, Kajaki, Musa Qala, and Naw Zad, which share similar demographics with 98 % hailing from the Alizai tribe, have constituted a Taliban safe haven for years ⁽¹⁰⁹²⁾. Naw Zad was captured by the Taliban in June 2015 ⁽¹⁰⁹³⁾. The remote Baghran district in the north of Helmand has been completely under Taliban control for the longest of all the districts; it was reportedly the first district that the Taliban captured after their fall from power. The district was described by a New York Times journalist in 2015 as 'a mini-emirate' where listening to music and trimming beards was banned and cellphone services were closed down ⁽¹⁰⁹⁴⁾.

Described as the heart of northern Helmand, Musa Qala serves as the de facto capital of the Taliban in the province as of 2017. Musa Qala also has economic significance with its large

⁽¹⁰⁸⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Helmand Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁸⁵⁾ BBC News, Snipers and green tea on Helmand's front line, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁸⁶⁾ Coghlan, T. The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History, in Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 120, 151.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁷⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁸⁸⁾ Guardian (The), Rasmussen S.E., The War America Can't Win : How the Taliban Are Regaining Control in Afghanistan, 3 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁸⁹⁾ Amiri R., Helmand (2): The Chain of Chiefdoms Unravels, 11 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁰⁾ Amiri R., Helmand (2): The Chain of Chiefdoms Unravels, 11 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹¹⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., Enhancing Access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)) p. 12.

⁽¹⁰⁹²⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); Amiri, R. Helmand (1): A Crisis Long Time Coming, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The Chain of Chiefdoms Unravels, 11 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹³⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); Amiri, R. Helmand (1): A Crisis Long Time Coming, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The Chain of Chiefdoms Unravels, 11 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁴⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Taliban Present Gentler Face but Wield Iron Fist in Afghan District, 14 August 2015 ([url](#)).

bazaar. Musa Qala district centre's drug bazaar at the heart of Helmand's poppy production area is one of the biggest drug markets nationwide and attracts key drug traders and smugglers ⁽¹⁰⁹⁵⁾. According to a BBC reporter who visited the area in May 2017, the Taliban had banned the use of mobile phones and Internet in Musa Qala for security and religious reasons. There was a district hospital and schools functioning with government support without Taliban interference, but they lacked basic supplies and facilities. Women were only allowed to go to school until the age of about 12 years. One young man was reportedly given 40 lashes as a punishment for watching a Bollywood film. Sangin and Musa Qala, being strategically important areas to the Taliban, have reportedly more lenient rules compared to other places under Taliban control ⁽¹⁰⁹⁶⁾.

Alongside Musa Qala, Sangin is another large centre for drug trade and smuggling. Since the insurgency began, this district has been of strategic importance for the Taliban, not only because of drug smuggling routes, but also because it is considered a crucial part of a corridor connecting the Alizai dominated districts in the north with the rest of the province. The road connecting the Kajaki Dam in the north and the provincial capital Lashkar Gah in the south also runs through Sangin. Furthermore, it has a significant population of Ishaqzai, who are considered one of the most religiously conservative tribes across Afghanistan ⁽¹⁰⁹⁷⁾. Kajaki is a strategically and economically important district because of its hydro-electric power station, the Kajaki dam ⁽¹⁰⁹⁸⁾.

Nahr-e Sarraj, known as 'a Taliban hotbed' ⁽¹⁰⁹⁹⁾, and its main city Gereshk, is according to AAN analysis 'a highly strategic location; it connects northern and central Helmand and is also on the main route through Helmand in the east-west direction. The ring road passes through this district, coming from Kandahar in the east and passing on to Herat in the northwest. Whoever controls this district, and this part of the ring road, controls the trade route between Kandahar and Herat' ⁽¹¹⁰⁰⁾. The semi-official district of Marjah is said to be firmly under the control of the insurgents ⁽¹¹⁰¹⁾.

The provincial capital of Lashkar Gah has been effectively surrounded by the Taliban for well over two years ⁽¹¹⁰²⁾. The main road leading to the provincial capital has been in and out of government control for months. In Lashkar Gah, the frontline is on the city's western edge ⁽¹¹⁰³⁾, and most of the Taliban attacks occur in the western suburbs of the city (Spina Kota, Bolan, and Bashiran) ⁽¹¹⁰⁴⁾.

Recent security trends

⁽¹⁰⁹⁵⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A Crisis Long Time Coming, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The Chain of Chiefdoms Unravels, 11 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁶⁾ BBC News, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants, 8 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁷⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A Crisis Long Time Coming, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁸⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A Crisis Long Time Coming, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁹⁹⁾ BBC News, Snipers and green tea on Helmand's front line, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁰⁰⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A Crisis Long Time Coming, 10 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁰¹⁾ Guardian (The), The War America Can't Win : How the Taliban Are Regaining Control in Afghanistan, 3 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁰²⁾ LWJ, Analysis: US military assessment of Taliban control of Afghan districts is flawed, LWJ, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁰³⁾ BBC News, Snipers and green tea on Helmand's front line, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁰⁴⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)) p.14.

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Helmand Province counted 2,258 security incidents⁽¹¹⁰⁵⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	29
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1,935
Explosions	169
Security enforcement	103
Non-conflict related incidents	8
Other incidents	14
Total security incidents	2,258

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Helmand Province⁽¹¹⁰⁶⁾:

Dishu	39	Nad Ali	276
Garmser	130	Nahr-e Sarraj	299
Kajaki	92	Naw Zad	5
Lashkar Gah	636	Nawayi Barakzai	215
Marjah	360	Sangin	189
Musa Qala	4	Washer	13

According to the Helmand provincial council, in April 2017, more than 85 % of the province was under insurgent control. Of 14 districts, seven were in Taliban hands, and two were under siege. In the rest, the government operated in central areas only⁽¹¹⁰⁷⁾. Musa Qala and Sangin are among the most important towns that are controlled by the Taliban in Afghanistan⁽¹¹⁰⁸⁾.

According to a UNOCHA assessment in May 2017 for the first quarter of the year, the districts of Sangin, Marjah, Nawayi Barakzai, Washir, Khanashin, Musa Qala, Kajaki, and Naw Zad were the hot-spot areas of the conflict in Helmand⁽¹¹⁰⁹⁾. For the first six months of 2017, UNOCHA classified Nad Ali, Marjah, Lashkar Gah, and Sangin districts among the areas in Afghanistan where the conflict was most severe in terms of the number of incidents, the amount of civilian casualties and the numbers of IDPs originating from the area. The conflict was severe in all districts except Washir, Baghran, Naw Zad and Musa Qala⁽¹¹¹⁰⁾. UNOCHA prioritised the districts of Lashkar Gah, Nahr-e Sarraj, Naw Zad, Nawayi Barakzai, Reg/Khanashin, and Sangin in the first quarter of 2017 as areas of integrated protection programming meant for high combat intensity areas as well as populations under armed opposition group control⁽¹¹¹¹⁾.

⁽¹¹⁰⁵⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹¹⁰⁶⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹¹⁰⁷⁾ BBC News, Snipers and green tea on Helmand's front line, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁰⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 7, 15.

⁽¹¹⁰⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - First Quarter Report (January - March 2017), updated 18 May, original publication date 9 May ([url](#)), p. 31.

⁽¹¹¹⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹¹¹¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

According to UNOCHA, many of Helmand's districts are inaccessible to the government, UN agencies, and national and international organisations ⁽¹¹¹²⁾.

Helmand has the highest number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan after the capital Kabul. UNAMA noted a total of 532 civilian casualties (238 deaths and 294 injured) during the first six months of 2017 in Helmand, a five % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by IEDs and suicide and complex attacks ⁽¹¹¹³⁾. After Kabul, suicide and complex attacks affected Helmand the most. UNAMA documented two suicide attacks in Lashkar Gah city during the first six months of 2017, both claimed by Taliban. One targeted the New Kabul bank as ANSF personnel collected salaries, resulting in 72 civilian casualties (29 deaths and 43 injured). The other suicide attack targeted an NDS check-post in Nahr-e Sarraj district that killed one civilian ⁽¹¹¹⁴⁾. The Taliban launched a suicide attack against police as they were collecting their salaries near the main police headquarters in Lashkar Gah on 23 August 2017 resulting in the deaths of five people and injury of at least 38 others ⁽¹¹¹⁵⁾.

According to the UN, there was a significant increase in airstrikes between 1 March and 31 May 2017. These airstrikes were due to Taliban attacks against the ANSF around Lashkar Gah and surrounding districts that were repelled after support through international military-conducted airstrikes ⁽¹¹¹⁶⁾. Aerial operations caused 43 civilian casualties (36 deaths and seven injured) in Helmand province during the first six months of 2017 ⁽¹¹¹⁷⁾. Of all Afghan provinces, Helmand suffered the highest number of civilian casualties (31 deaths and seven injured) from international military force airstrikes, largely as a result of three aerial operations in Sangin district, when airstrikes killed 26 civilians and injured six over three days from 9 to 11 February 2017 ⁽¹¹¹⁸⁾.

Civilian casualties from pressure-plate IEDs more than doubled in Helmand during the first half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. UNAMA observed that the increase appeared to occur as a direct consequence of the increased tactical use of pressure-plate IEDs by the insurgents to block ANSF access to contested areas by placing the devices on main roads linking civilian-populated areas. In its mid-year report for 2017, UNAMA documented 74 detonations resulting in 135 civilian casualties (65 deaths and 70 injured) compared to 27 detonations causing 50 civilian casualties (15 deaths and 35 injured) during the same period in 2016 ⁽¹¹¹⁹⁾. The district of Nad Ali had an especially high number of civilian casualties from IEDs. Of strategic importance to both Taliban and ANSF due to its proximity to the provincial capital and its agricultural potential, the district has been heavily contested. The Taliban took control of most of the district with the exception of the district administrative centre in 2016. UNAMA documented 20 pressure-plate IED detonations that resulted in 34 civilian casualties (22 deaths and 12 injured) in the first half of 2017 compared to only four civilian casualties (two deaths and two injured) from four pressure-plate IED detonations during the same period in 2016 ⁽¹¹²⁰⁾. On 30 September 2016, a pressure-plate IED killed nine members of the

⁽¹¹¹²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)) p. 35.

⁽¹¹¹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹¹¹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽¹¹¹⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Taliban Suicide Bombing Kills Five People in Southern Afghanistan, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹¹⁶⁾ UNGA, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)) p. 4.

⁽¹¹¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)) p. 52.

⁽¹¹¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)) pp. 54-55.

⁽¹¹¹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)) p. 37.

⁽¹¹²⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 38.

same family (including six children and two women) in Nad Ali after their vehicle hit the device while fleeing towards Lashkar Gah city to avoid the ongoing fighting in the area ⁽¹¹²¹⁾.

Lashkar Gah is one of the provincial capitals in Afghanistan facing the most intense pressure from the Taliban ⁽¹¹²²⁾.

Lashkar Gah remains under virtual siege after Taliban's attempts to take over the city in August and October 2016 ⁽¹¹²³⁾. From 1 August 2016 until 31 October 2016 the Taliban launched a large-scale attack against the districts of Lashkar Gah, Garmser, Nahr-e Sarraj, Nad Ali, Nawayi Barakzai, and Naw Zad, in an attempt to take over Lashkar Gah city. UNAMA reported 123 civilian casualties (31 deaths and 92 injured) during the three month period, most of which were recorded in Nad Ali and Nahr-e Sarraj districts ⁽¹¹²⁴⁾. On 12 October 2016 the Taliban fired several rockets towards the provincial governor's compound in Lashkar Gah city, injuring 17 civilians (including 10 children and three women). The fighting caused the closure of the Lashkar Gah – Kandahar highway, preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance and restricting the freedom of movement of the population. The clashes also damaged civilian homes and resulted in the closure of education and healthcare facilities ⁽¹¹²⁵⁾. The main road leading to Lashkar Gah has been at times under Taliban control and at other times under government control. The Taliban controlled the road from Lashkar Gah to Nad Ali and Marjah for months until it was cleared by government forces in spring 2017, but the frontline with the Taliban forces remains only a few hundred metres from the main road ⁽¹¹²⁶⁾.

In the first three months of 2017, the Taliban's focus was on capturing the strategically important district of Sangin ⁽¹¹²⁷⁾. In March 2017, the Taliban managed to overrun Sangin after a series of failed attempts ⁽¹¹²⁸⁾. Sangin still remained under Taliban control in the autumn 2017 ⁽¹¹²⁹⁾. During Taliban's 2017 campaign, the districts of Nad Ali, Nahr-e Sarraj and Lashkar Gah have been the focus of attacks ⁽¹¹³⁰⁾. The Taliban attacks around Lashkar Gah and surrounding districts have been repelled by the ANSF through support from international forces' air strikes ⁽¹¹³¹⁾. The strategically important areas in Nad Ali have remained under the control of the Afghan government ⁽¹¹³²⁾.

The district of Nawayi Barakzai (Nawa) remains heavily contested. The Taliban took over the district in an overnight attack in the beginning of October 2016, killing the district police chief. Previously, the Taliban had taken over the district in August 2016 for a period of two weeks

⁽¹¹²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 64.

⁽¹¹²²⁾ Sweden, Lifos, Lägesanalys: Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p.5.

⁽¹¹²³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - First Quarter Report (January - March 2017), updated 18 May, original publication date 9 May ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽¹¹²⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 44.

⁽¹¹²⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 51.

⁽¹¹²⁶⁾ BBC News, Snipers and green tea on Helmand's front line, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹²⁷⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽¹¹²⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - First Quarter Report (January - March 2017), updated 18 May, original publication date 9 May ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽¹¹²⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin: Afghanistan, Issue 67, 1-31 August 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹³⁰⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽¹¹³¹⁾ UNGA, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)), p.4.

⁽¹¹³²⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

(¹¹³³). At the same time, the Taliban overran the district of Reg/Khanashin (¹¹³⁴). The Taliban controlled Nawayi Barakzai for almost 9 months, until on 17 July 2017, Afghan forces recaptured the district centre (¹¹³⁵). Nawayi Barakzai has again seen heavy fighting after its recapture by the government forces. Taliban militants killed several policemen in raids in the district on 28 July 2017 and 19 August 2017 (¹¹³⁶). Reportedly at least 13 people were killed and 19 injured in a car bomb attack near a market in Nawa on 27 August 2017. Members of the security forces were among the casualties, as well as civilians shopping at the market (¹¹³⁷).

Pajhwok News Agency reported a total of 152 attacks occurred in Helmand during a 12 month period from August 2016 to July 2017. Helmand had the most attacks of all provinces after Nangarhar and Faryab. Helmand also had the second highest number of casualties after Nangarhar: 2,288 for the same period (¹¹³⁸).

Displacement

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, 24,137 individuals from Helmand province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA:

- 15,197 from Lashkar Gah;
- 4,369 from Nad Ali;
- 2,278 from Nawayi Barakzai;
- 1,775 from Garmser;
- 441 from Nahr-e Sarraj;
- 35 from Sangin;
- 21 from Naw Zad;
- 7 from Baghran, and;
- 7 from Kajaki.

Most of them were displaced to Lashkar Gah City or to Maywand, Panjwayi, Reg, and Kandahar City in Kandahar Province. A total of 392 individuals went to Herat (¹¹³⁹).

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 10,155 individuals from Helmand province displaced by conflict:

- 3,813 from Nawayi Barakzai;
- 2,675 from Nad Ali;
- 1,983 from Lashkar Gah;
- 973 from Garmser;
- 620 from Sangin;
- 84 from Musa Qala, and;
- 7 from Baghran.

6,005 of them were displaced to Lashkar Gah, almost 3,000 to Kandahar City and other areas in Kandahar Province, and 721 were displaced within Garmser (¹¹⁴⁰).

(¹¹³³) Roggio, B., Taliban overruns another district in Helmand, LWJ, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹¹³⁴) Pajhwok Afghan News, After Nawa, Helmand's Khanshin district also falls to Taliban, 4 October 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹¹³⁵) UNGA, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

(¹¹³⁶) RFE/RL, Several Afghan Policemen Killed in Taliban Attack on Checkpoint in Helmand Province, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Taliban Kill Five Police in Southern Afghanistan, 19 August 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹¹³⁷) BBC News, Afghanistan bomb attack: 13 killed in car blast in Helmand, 27 August 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹¹³⁸) Pajhwok Afghan News, 24,500 people lost lives, suffered injuries in last 12 months, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

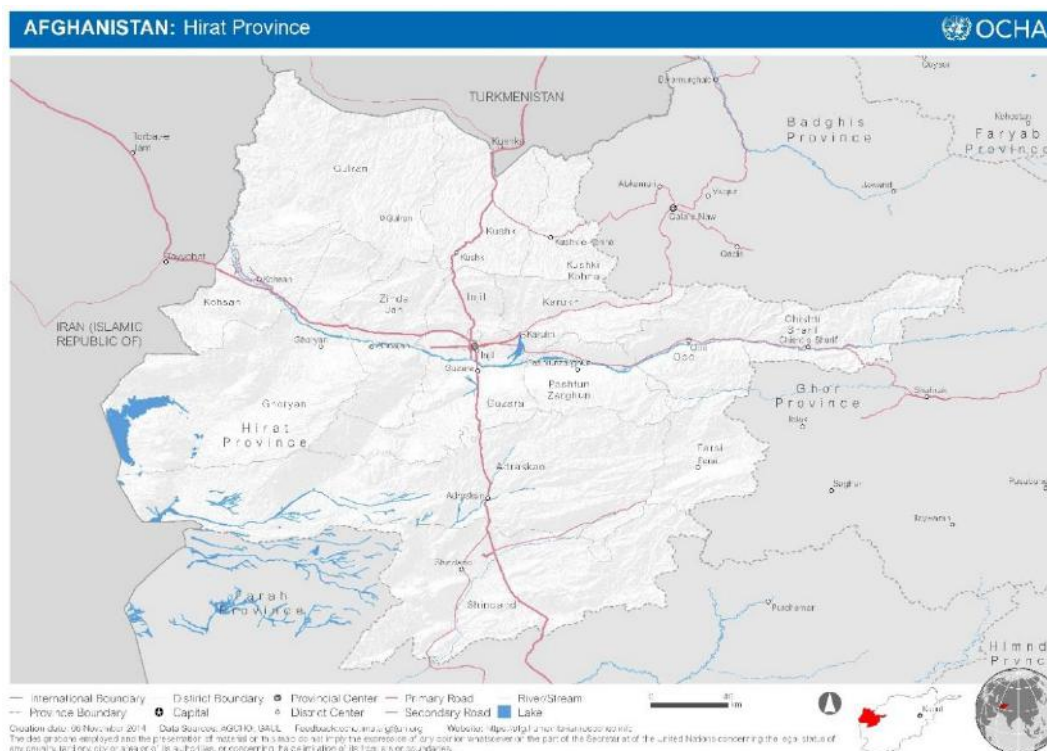
(¹¹³⁹) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁴⁰) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

Some 1,500 people were reportedly displaced from Nawayi Barakzai in the beginning of September 2017 ⁽¹¹⁴¹⁾.

2.13 Herat

General description of the province



Herat, located in the west of Afghanistan, is one of Afghanistan's largest provinces. It shares borders with the provinces of Badghis and Turkmenistan in the north. The province of Farah is to the south, while Ghor is to the east and the Islamic republic of Iran to the west ⁽¹¹⁴²⁾. Herat has 16 districts: Adraskan, Chist-e Sharif, Farsi, Ghoryan, Gulran, Guzara, Herat, Injil, Karukh, Kohsan, Kushk, Kushk-e Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, Shindand, Zinda Jan ⁽¹¹⁴³⁾.

The provincial capital is Herat City, estimated to house 491,967 inhabitants; the population in the province is an estimated 1,928,327 ⁽¹¹⁴⁴⁾.

Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Turkmens, Uzbeks and Aimaq live in Herat province. In eleven of the province's districts, Pashtuns are in the majority ⁽¹¹⁴⁵⁾. Historically, the provincial capital was a Tajik-dominated enclave in a Pashtun-majority province, but the ethnic composition of the city has changed over the years. This has led to a pronounced degree of ethnic segregation in the city, with many neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by a single ethnic group.

⁽¹¹⁴¹⁾ UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, Week of 4 - 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁴²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁴³⁾ Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁴⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Estimated population 2016/2017, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁴⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

Neighbourhoods such as Jebrael (in the west of the city) are now home to a minority population of some 60,000, predominantly Hazaras ⁽¹¹⁴⁶⁾.

Herat province is a key trading hub and its provincial capital is described by sources as economically, socially and culturally vibrant ⁽¹¹⁴⁷⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 71.7 % of Herat's population lives in rural areas and 36.3 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹¹⁴⁸⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Herat

Many different players operate in Herat Province: former mujahideen fighters, local power elites, rebel groups and criminals. This creates a complex picture of shifting alliances and conflicts ⁽¹¹⁴⁹⁾.

In July 2016, Herat's provincial council expressed concerns about the worsened security situation in the districts of the province. The council's security committee stated that AGEs controlled numerous areas in different districts, pointing to Shindand, Adraskan, Golran, Koshk-e Kohna and Farsi as especially under threat. The committee officials pointed out that the Taliban ruled most of the villages in those districts ⁽¹¹⁵⁰⁾.

Injil district, as well as Herat City and district, were considered relatively calm, according to an international source quoted by Landinfo in December 2016. Herat city was reportedly also considered one of the safest places in Afghanistan, and insurgents had only a limited presence in the city ⁽¹¹⁵¹⁾. According to AAN, insecurity in Herat city was largely by armed criminals. Crime, such as assassinations, kidnappings and thefts, was a real problem for the inhabitants of the city ⁽¹¹⁵²⁾.

The most unstable district is Shindand, 130 kilometres from Herat City, with an area of 6,762 square kilometres and a population of about 800,000. Shindand is Afghanistan's largest district, but it is allotted funds only equal to other districts. In June 2015, President Ghani ordered the division of the district into several smaller districts ⁽¹¹⁵³⁾. In 2015, according to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, Shindand accounted for one-third of all security incidents in Herat Province, although the security situation in recent years has deteriorated in other areas of the province. A vast district largely populated by Pashtuns, it houses a strategically important military airbase built by the Soviets and reactivated by the US. The airbase is mainly used as a training facility for Afghan pilots ⁽¹¹⁵⁴⁾. Shindand is described as a 'historic opium growing district' ⁽¹¹⁵⁵⁾. The district also has two important roads: the ring road connecting

⁽¹¹⁴⁶⁾ Leslie, J., Political and economic dynamics of Herat, USIP, March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁴⁷⁾ Leslie, J., Political and economic dynamics of Herat, USIP, March 2015 ([url](#)), p. 5; Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁴⁸⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 25-26.

⁽¹¹⁴⁹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Herat, 15 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁰⁾ Tolo News, Concerns Over Security Increases in Herat, 8 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵¹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Herat, 15 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵²⁾ Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt won't talk peace from weak position, Ghani, 1 June 2015 ([url](#)); Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁴⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (1), 3 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁵⁾ Edinburgh International, Afghanistan Weekly Security Report 26 February 2015, 26 February 2015 ([url](#)); Edinburgh International, Afghanistan Weekly Security Report 5 March 2015, 5 March 2015 ([url](#)).

Herat with Kandahar, from which a secondary road leads towards Farah ⁽¹¹⁵⁶⁾. According to AAN in January 2016, there were intra-Taliban clashes in Shindand and Pashtun Zarghun. Taliban repeatedly abducted workers of Salma hydro-electric dam because of their collaboration with the government. Another district that witnessed increased Taliban activity is Kushke Kohna ⁽¹¹⁵⁷⁾. In March 2017, according to ISW, a part of Shindand and an area covering small parts of Kohsan and Ghoryan were considered 'Taliban control zones'. Other areas in Shindand, Ghoryan and Kushke Kohna districts were considered 'high confidence Taliban support zone'. In Herat province, parts of Adraskan and Guzura, including an area along the Herat-Kandahar highway, and areas in Farsi, Kushk, Gulran and Kohsan were considered 'low confidence Taliban support zones' ⁽¹¹⁵⁸⁾.

In Guzara district, south of Herat city, AGEs have their main presence in the Seyawshan area. The district houses Herat International Airport, located at approximately 18.5 kilometers south of Herat city. According to an international source, quoted by Landinfo, a rocket was fired towards the airport on two occasions in 2016. Both rockets were fired at night from mountainous areas in Guzara district, east of the airport. The rockets struck open terrain and caused no casualties ⁽¹¹⁵⁹⁾. In a document providing information on aerodrome capabilities, the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority (ACAA) noted, in March 2017, that there were no hotels at the airport but there were hotels in the town and taxis were available at the civilian terminal ⁽¹¹⁶⁰⁾. The director of a research organization, interviewed by EASO in February 2017 and quoted in a report of August 2017, stated that the main road from the airport in Herat to the city cuts through two districts (Injeel and Guzara) that are potentially insecure ⁽¹¹⁶¹⁾. Guzara has also witnessed increased criminal activity by armed kidnappers and thieves ⁽¹¹⁶²⁾.

Activists and officials in Herat province warned in November 2016 that rising numbers of children were being recruited by local trafficking networks to smuggle drugs. Street children were reportedly particularly vulnerable ⁽¹¹⁶³⁾.

According to AAN in January 2017, security in the province had worsened, with several districts undergoing heavy clashes between Afghan government forces and the armed opposition, mostly the Taliban, and between rival Taliban factions. These factions were headed, on one side, by Mullah Mansour and, on the other side, by Mullah Rasool who fought for power in various provinces throughout Afghanistan since the revelation of the death of Mullah Omar. Mullah Mansour succeeded Mullah Omar. But Mullah Rasool, assisted by Mullah Niazi, hailing from Herat, contested this succession and headed a breakaway faction of the Taliban ⁽¹¹⁶⁴⁾.

⁽¹¹⁵⁶⁾ Suroush, Q., Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan's unfinished Ring Road, 16 January 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁷⁾ Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁵⁹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Herat, 15 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶⁰⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Herat, 15 December 2016 ([url](#)); ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication – Republic of Afghanistan, 2 March 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 103-106.

⁽¹¹⁶¹⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 129.

⁽¹¹⁶²⁾ Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶³⁾ IWPR, Afghan Children Targeted by Drug Gangs, 29 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶⁴⁾ RUSI, An Interview with Mullah Rasool on Reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, 16 March 2016 ([url](#)); Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)); BBC News, Afghan Taliban splinter group names Mullah Rasool as leader, 4 November 2015 ([url](#)); DW, Taliban infighting likely to intensify after new leader's appointment, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)); Afghan Biographies, Mullah Abdul Manan Niazi, 02 August 2015 ([url](#)).

Meanwhile, the provincial administration's heads and police chiefs, suddenly dismissed by President Ghani in December 2014, were not replaced. This affected the local administrations performance ⁽¹¹⁶⁵⁾.

In March 2017, Taliban issued a report regarding their presence in Afghanistan, claiming that its fighters controlled 70 % of the territory of Shindand, Gulran, Kushke Kohna and Adraskan, as well as 20 % of Farsi, Chisti Sharif, Awba [Obe], Pashtun Zarghun and Rabat-e-Sangi [Kushkh]. Taliban fighters claimed to carry out guerrilla attacks in Ghoryan, Zanda Khan [Zinda Jan], Injeel [Injil], Guzara, Kohsan and Karukh districts ⁽¹¹⁶⁶⁾. Taliban often conducted insurgency activities by carrying out direct attacks, roadside bombings, and established checkpoints to kidnap government workers ⁽¹¹⁶⁷⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Herat Province counted 730 security incidents ⁽¹¹⁶⁸⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	93
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	173
Explosions	65
Security enforcement	193
Non-conflict related incidents	178
Other incidents	28
Total security incidents	730

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Herat Province ⁽¹¹⁶⁹⁾:

Adraskan	47	Karukh	16
Chishti Sharif	33	Kohsan	34
Farsi	12	Kushk	14
Ghoryan	31	Kushki Kuhna	28
Gulran	18	Obe	33
Guzara	51	Pashtun Zarghun	20
Hirat	179	Shindand	134
Injil	69	Zinda Jan	11

⁽¹¹⁶⁵⁾ Kazemi, R., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶⁷⁾ KP, Afghan army and police officers kidnapped by Taliban in Herat, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁶⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹¹⁶⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

According to UNAMA, between 1 January and 30 June 2017, 107 civilians were killed and 108 injured in Herat, mainly by IEDs but also by ground engagements and targeted and deliberated killings⁽¹¹⁷⁰⁾. In 2016, UNAMA documented 836 civilian casualties (344 deaths and 492 injured) in the western region, which comprises four provinces, including Herat. This represents a 19 % increase in civilian casualties compared to 2015 when UNAMA recorded 703 civilian casualties (288 deaths and 415 injured) in the west⁽¹¹⁷¹⁾.

In the second half of 2016, UNAMA recorded five separate attacks against Shia Muslim mosques and gatherings in Afghanistan, including one in Herat province. On 22 November 2016, AGEs detonated a remote-controlled IED that injured four Shia Muslim worshippers at the Razaiya Mosque in Herat city. No group claimed responsibility for this incident⁽¹¹⁷²⁾. In its 2016 annual report, UNAMA also stated that the trend to attack Shia Muslim mosques and gatherings, appears to be continuing in 2017. On 1 January 2017, a remote-controlled IED detonated at a Shia mosque in Herat city, killing one Shia worshipper and injuring five other civilians⁽¹¹⁷³⁾. Two days later, hundreds of Shia Muslims demonstrated in Herat City against increasing attacks by radical Islamic groups, shouting slogans against the Islamic State (IS)⁽¹¹⁷⁴⁾. In May 2017, a device, targeting a Shia religious gathering in a Herat mosque, exploded prematurely, killing seven people and injuring 17 more. This attack was claimed by the IS⁽¹¹⁷⁵⁾. However, according to various sources contacted by Landinfo, IS does not have a presence in Herat⁽¹¹⁷⁶⁾. To counter this kind of attack, the government of Afghanistan armed some local inhabitants during Ashura in 2017 to tighten security around Shia mosques in Herat⁽¹¹⁷⁷⁾.

In October 2016, two local Taliban commanders and a member of their group were killed when their own mine exploded⁽¹¹⁷⁸⁾. In November 2016, Afghan security forces launched a military operation in Shindad, killing over fifty Taliban militants, including two local commanders, and wounding 10 other fighters⁽¹¹⁷⁹⁾. Fighting continued for three days in Shindand in December 2016, with official sources claiming to have wounded 30 Taliban militants and killed another 30, including a commander. The same sources said security forces and civilians had suffered no casualties. However, Taliban claimed only three of their fighters were killed and eight wounded. The movement also claimed that the security forces suffered heavy losses in the fighting⁽¹¹⁸⁰⁾. In February 2017, according to official sources, two suicide bombers stormed into the compound of a rival group led by Mullah Rasool. Reportedly, the two suicide attackers and at least three militants loyal to Mullah Rasool were killed during the attack⁽¹¹⁸¹⁾.

From December 2016 until February 2017, ANSF reportedly launched several counter-insurgency offensives in Herat province, although no details were provided about the exact location or impact on the civilian population⁽¹¹⁸²⁾.

⁽¹¹⁷⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁷¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽¹¹⁷²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽¹¹⁷³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽¹¹⁷⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Hundreds of Afghan Shi'a Protest Killings, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁷⁵⁾ AAN, Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁷⁶⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Herat, 15 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁷⁷⁾ AAN, Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#));

UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽¹¹⁷⁸⁾ Kabul Tribune, 2 local Taliban commanders killed in their own mine blast, 23 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁷⁹⁾ Tolo News, Over 50 Insurgents Killed in Herat Offensive, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 militants eliminated, as many hurt in Herat firefight, 7 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸¹⁾ KP, Suicide bombers attack Taliban compound in west of Afghanistan, 28 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 Taliban killed, 23 wounded in fresh operations: MoD, 9 December 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 34 Insurgents Killed Across The Country: MoD, 31 December 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 77 Insurgents Killed,

Wounded In Operations in 16 Provinces, 8 January 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Afghan Forces Kill 49 Insurgents Across

Amnesty International (AI) released a statement in February 2017, indicating that in Afghanistan a series of attacks on civilians had occurred, including the murder of four women in Herat and Badakhshan provinces. In Herat, the killers left a note saying: ‘This is the punishment for prostitutes’ ⁽¹¹⁸³⁾.

The representative of a civil-society organisation, who provided input to EASO in January 2017 and who was quoted in a report of August 2017, stated that one of the most pressing issues in Herat City was the fear of being kidnapped, or having one’s children kidnapped for ransom. The same source said that there had been an upward trend in assassinations in the past year of civil society people, religious leaders, and politicians ⁽¹¹⁸⁴⁾.

According to AAN analyst Reza Kazemi, writing in January 2017, Ismail Khan, former governor and self-proclaimed *amir* of Herat, stated that insecurity was spreading to the gates of the Herat City from nearby provinces like Farah. He added that he and his mujahideen would not wait for the Afghan government’s permission to defend Herat if the government hesitated to do so ⁽¹¹⁸⁵⁾.

Taliban insurgents continue to claim through their media that they have repeatedly attacked, wounded and killed pro-government armed groups in Herat ⁽¹¹⁸⁶⁾.

Displacement

According to UNOCHA, between 1 January and 20 September 2017, a total of 5,272 persons from Herat were displaced due to conflict inside their own province (5,236) and in Badghis (29). Among them, 553 individuals were displaced from Ghulran to Kushk district, 21 from Gulran to Herat district, 35 from Kushk-e-Kohna to Herat district, 3,276 from Shindand to Hirat district, 18 from Obe and 11 from Kushk-e-Kohna to Qala-e-Naw district in Badghis, 28 from Kushk to Injil, and 14 from Adraskan to Injil ⁽¹¹⁸⁷⁾.

For more information on Herat City, see EASO *Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* ⁽¹¹⁸⁸⁾.

The Country, 29 January 2017 ([url](#)); KP, 8 key Taliban leaders among 37 killed in joint operations: MoD, 18 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 rebels killed during country-wide offensives, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸³⁾ AI, Afghanistan: Attack on ICRC is a horrific crime, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸⁴⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 87.

⁽¹¹⁸⁵⁾ AAN, The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat’s dynamism, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

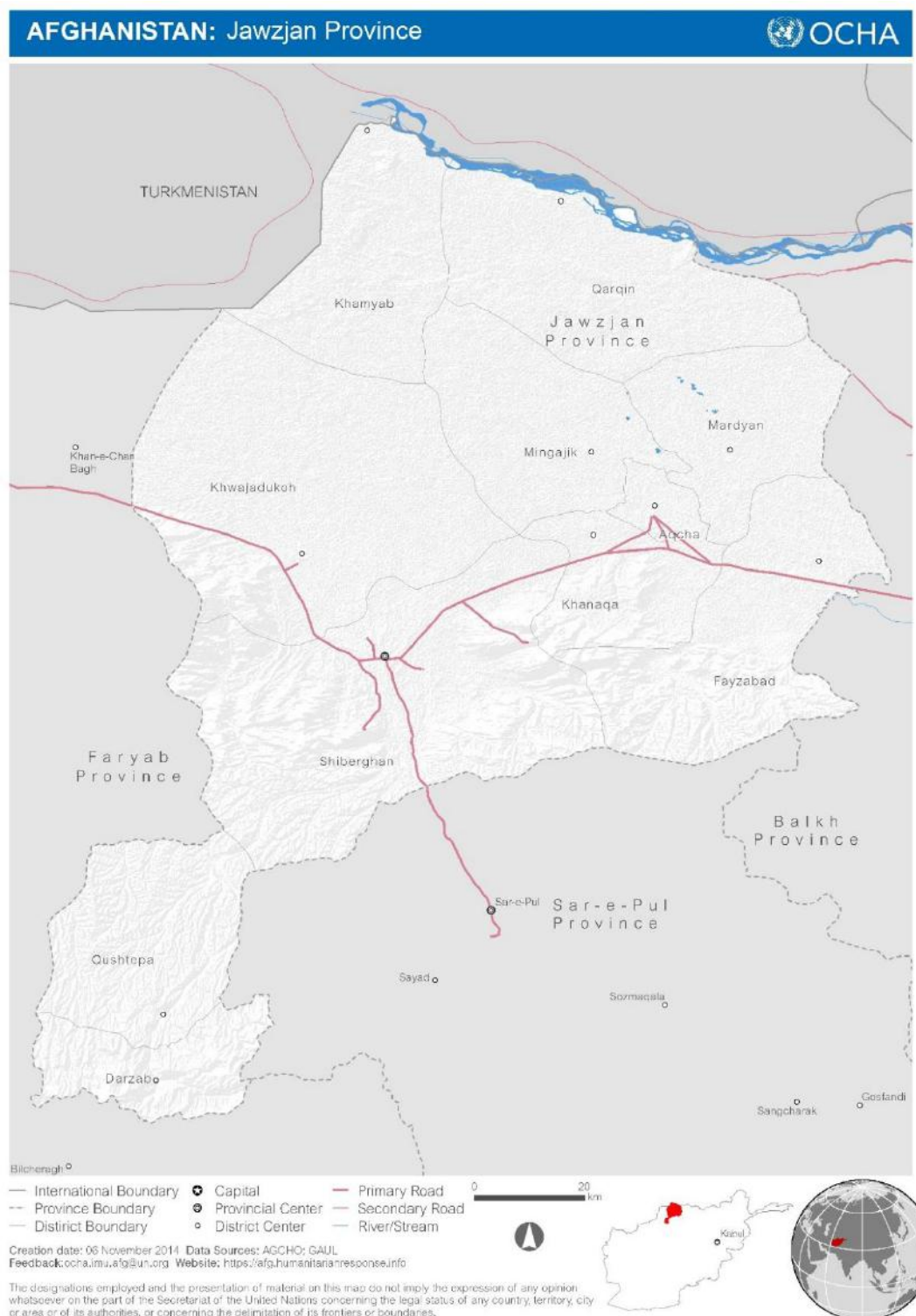
⁽¹¹⁸⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Herat, 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2017 and 20 September 2017, 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸⁸⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)).

2.14 Jawzjan

General description of the province



Jawzjan is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan in the north, Balkh in the east, Sar-e Pul in the south and Faryab in the west. It consists of following districts: Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khamyab, Khanaqa, Khwajadukoh, Mardyan, Mingajik, Qarqin, Qushtepa, Shiberghan. The provincial capital Shiberghan lies on the ring road from Mazar-e

Sharif to Herat. A secondary road connects Sar-e Pul with the ring road also in Shiberghan (¹¹⁸⁹). More than a quarter of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain while more than two thirds of the area is made up of flat land (¹¹⁹⁰).

The province is estimated to have 559,691 inhabitants, the provincial capital Shiberghan has an estimated population of 178,358 (¹¹⁹¹). The major ethnic groups living in Jawzjan are Uzbek and Turkmen followed by Tajik, Pashtun and Arabs (¹¹⁹²). Turkmen dominate the population in the northern and eastern districts, notably Khamyab, Qarqin, Mingajik, Mardyan and Aqcha. Uzbeks comprise the largest ethnic group in Darzab, Qushtepa and Fayzabad (¹¹⁹³).

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 78.7 % of Jawzjan's population lives in rural areas and 10.3 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work (¹¹⁹⁴).

Background on the conflict and actors in Jawzjan

IWPR notes in February 2016 that 'there has been a steady increase in fighting over the last few years in the Jowzjan and Faryab provinces of Afghanistan' (¹¹⁹⁵).

A joint study in June 2016 by Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) and The Liaison Office (TLO) names Jawzjan as one of the Northern provinces where irregular forces, such as *arbaki* or private paramilitary units of commanders, and anti-government forces, which are mostly various local Taliban groups, outnumber the ANSF and National Uprising units (¹¹⁹⁶).

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is reported to have infiltrated Jawzjan Province since spring 2015 (¹¹⁹⁷). As of February 2017, according to the Long War Journal (LWJ), a 'faction of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State's Khorasan province (ISKP), is known to operate in Jawzjan' (¹¹⁹⁸).

There have been reports about the presence of ISKP in Jawzjan province since 2015, mainly in Darzab and Qushtepa districts (¹¹⁹⁹). ISKP-affiliated groups, in particular groups around commanders Qari Hekmat, who pledged allegiance to ISKP in 2015 (¹²⁰⁰), Mullah Nader and Ghazanfar, have been accused by residents and local officials of involvement in several security incidents, such as killings, kidnappings or clashes with security forces or rival AGEs

(¹¹⁸⁹) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014 ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹⁰) Jowzjan Governor Office, About Jawzjan, n.d. ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹¹) CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil Division, Urban, Rural and Sex-2017-18, n.d. ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹²) Jowzjan Governor Office, About Jawzjan, n.d. ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹³) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

(¹¹⁹⁴) Ministry of Economy/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 17-18.

(¹¹⁹⁵) IWPR, Taleban Threat May Tempt Turkmenistan Out of Isolation, 19 February 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹⁶) Mielke K. & Misak N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹⁷) RFE/RL, Son of Slain IMU Leader Promotes IS In Afghanistan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹⁸) LWJ, Afghan Taliban denies involvement in murder of Red Cross workers, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹¹⁹⁹) Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan group wooing residents to join Daesh, 13 April 2015 ([url](#)); KP, First ISIS deaths reported in Jawzjan province of Afghanistan, 9 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Daesh commander killed in Jawzjan, 28 February 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), 10 police officers killed in ambush by militants in Afghanistan, 25 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants exploiting Jawzjan youth's joblessness, 16 August 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, As IS Crumbles In Syria And Iraq, Afghanistan Braces For More Fighters, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Ex-Taliban commander joins Daesh in Jawzjan, 18 May 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), ISIS, Aided by Ex-Taliban Groups, Makes Inroads in Northern Afghanistan, 28 June 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰⁰) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰¹). The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reported in March 2017 that 'ISIS militants are increasing their operational tempo in Jowzjan Province' (¹²⁰²). Different sources stated that rumours about ISKP presence are not confirmed. According to an international source cited by Landinfo, an ISKP-label is used to refer to self-proclaimed ISKP-groups, without apparent link or affiliation with ISKP-groups in eastern Afghanistan or IS in Syria and Iraq (¹²⁰³). A joint study by BICC and TLO points out that it is very common for government and security officials to make opportune use of the label ISKP (¹²⁰⁴). UNAMA notes, however, that the use of photos referring to an offensive in Darzab district of Jawzjan by the press agency of Islamic State in the Levant, Al Amaq, in public statements from June 2017 (¹²⁰⁵), 'indicates the possibility that Daesh/ISKP in Jawzjan province may be accepted as members of the broader Daesh/ISKP and ISIL groups' (¹²⁰⁶). In that same month, ISKP claimed to have captured army positions in Darzab district (¹²⁰⁷), marking 'the first time ISK laid claim to a district in northwest Afghanistan', as RFE/RL noted (¹²⁰⁸).

Tolo News reported that according to the Governor of Jawzjan province, the 'public uprising groups' numbers reached 1,000 to 2,000 in November 2016 and their role in maintaining security was effective (¹²⁰⁹). The Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program chief in the north pointed out in March 2017 that 500 illegal armed groups were active in the region, their number having increased five times. Among the 'uprising groups', he counted Taliban militants who had joined the peace process but still carried guns and Afghan Local Police (ALP). He referred to Aqcha district as an example, claiming the number of illegal armed uprising group members there had increased from once 50 up to 2,000 (¹²¹⁰).

In September 2016, the political situation in Jawzjan was described as significantly linked to Junbesh-e Melli and its leader, Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum. However, after years of single party domination by Junbesh in the province, other political parties, such as Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami, have succeeded in establishing bases in the province (¹²¹¹). Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum has made several trips to Jawzjan province to head operations against AGEs since October 2015 (¹²¹²). In October 2016 hundreds or thousands of people were reported to have taken up arms against the Taliban in support of the Afghan security forces and Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum in Jawzjan

(¹²⁰¹) Pajhwok Afghan News, Residents protest against Daesh over killing youth, 27 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 killed as Taliban, Daesh clash in Nangarhar, Jawzjan, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Six Red Cross Workers Killed In Afghan Attack, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰²) ISW, ISW Daily update March 6, 2017, 7 March 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰³) Norway, Landinfo, Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Jawzjan, 5 April 2017 ([url](#)); Mielke K., and Misak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)), pp.28-29.

(¹²⁰⁴) Mielke, K. and Misak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰⁵) Terrormonitor, Islamic State Claims To Have Captured Weapons From ANA In Jowzjan [Twitter], posted on: 26 June 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰⁶) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 47-49.

(¹²⁰⁷) Terrormonitor, Islamic State Claims To Have Captured 7 Army Positions, Killed 8 Soldiers & Captured in Jowzjan [Twitter], posted on: 20 June 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰⁸) RFE/RL, Is There A Terror Threat In Turkmenistan?, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²⁰⁹) Tolo News, Military operation to be launched in Jawzjan, 16 November 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹²¹⁰) Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Illegal armed groups aiding Taliban in north', 11 March 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹²¹¹) International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

(¹²¹²) RFE/RL, Afghan Fighting Reaches Turkmenistan's Border, 23 October 2015 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Afghan Army Retakes Taliban-Held District, 24 October 2015 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Turkmenistan's Afghan Policy Revealed, 27 October 2015 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dostum arrives in north, vows to teach militants a 'lesson', 19 April 2016 ([url](#)); Eurasianet, Quiet Desperation: Turkmen Villagers Fear Afghan Conflict, But Won't Say It Out Loud, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Central Asia's anxious watch on the Afghan border, 21 March 2017 ([url](#)).

province ⁽¹²¹³⁾. Afghanistan Analyst Obaid Ali, referring to reports by international organisations and Afghan media, points out that ‘Dostum’s use of militias in his counter-offensives has raised serious questions, with accusations that they have carried out abuses against the civilian population, particularly in Pashtun-inhabited areas’ ⁽¹²¹⁴⁾. According to Obaid Ali, the military and political dominance of General Abdul Rashid Dostum is challenged by the Taliban’s successful recruitment drive among Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan ⁽¹²¹⁵⁾. General Abdul Rashid Dostum being under investigation for torture allegations since Autumn 2016 ⁽¹²¹⁶⁾, left Afghanistan for Turkey in May 2017 ⁽¹²¹⁷⁾ and had not returned to Afghanistan by the end of August 2017 ⁽¹²¹⁸⁾. The absence or fracturing of Dostum’s militia could explain a security gap in northwestern Afghanistan including Jawzjan, according to ISW ⁽¹²¹⁹⁾.

As of June 2016, of the 600 approved ALP personnel, a total of 420 ALP were reported to serve in the districts of Qushtepa, Darzab and Fayzabad ⁽¹²²⁰⁾.

In 2014, RFE/RL stated that in the northern districts of Jawzjan, several former Jihadi warlords have rearmed their followers and created *arbaki* ⁽¹²²¹⁾. The ANP Directorate of Security confirmed the formation of pro-government armed groups in Khamyab, Aqcha, Mingajik, Fayzabad, and Qarqin districts ⁽¹²²²⁾. According to UNAMA, these pro-government groups have been responsible for human rights abuses in 2015 and 2016 in northern Afghanistan ⁽¹²²³⁾, including in Jawzjan, but as they are affiliated with powerbrokers, they went unpunished ⁽¹²²⁴⁾.

There have been reports of women picking up arms to fight AGEs in Darzab and Qushtepa districts in November 2016 and January 2017 ⁽¹²²⁵⁾.

Several cases of switching allegiances between AGEs and security forces, uprising groups or pro-government armed groups and also between different AGE groups have been reported in Jawzjan between November 2016 and July 2017 ⁽¹²²⁶⁾.

⁽¹²¹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2,000 Jawzjan residents up in arms against Taliban, 18 October 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Hundreds pick up arms in support of Dostum in Jawzjan after Taliban ambush, 18 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁴⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁵⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁶⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Vice President Denies Assaulting, Abducting Political Rival, 30 November 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Afghan Vice President Defies Summons By Attorney General Over Abuse Allegations, 22 December 2016 ([url](#)); BBC News, Afghan warrants for Vice-President Dostum’s ‘sex assault’ guards, 24 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mol asked to arrest Dostum’s guards: AGO, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁷⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Vice President Flies to Turkey Amid Torture and Rape Allegations, 19 May 2017 ([url](#)); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the U.S. Congress, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁸⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Vice President’s Return Thwarted as Plane Is Turned Back, 18 July 2017 ([url](#)); KP, General Dostum welcomes announcement of new US strategy for Afghanistan, 24 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁹⁾ ISW, Warning update: The expansion of ISIS in Northwestern Afghanistan, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: Nowruz Update, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹²²¹⁾ RFE/RL, Last line of defense against the Taliban – Qarqeen, 15 March 2014 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, More warnings south of the Afghan-Turkmen Border, 17 August 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Mid-Year Report 2015, August 2015 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹²²⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Mid-Year Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽¹²²⁵⁾ Tolo News, Jawzjan women pick up arms to fight insurgents, 1 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Darz Ab women up in arms against Daesh insurgents, 7 January 2017 ([url](#)); Dawn, Bereaved women join fight against IS in northern Afghanistan, 16 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁶⁾ Tolo News, Insurgents do about turn after joining peace process in Jawzjan, 16 November 2016 ([url](#)); KP, 8 insurgents killed, over a dozen wounded in Jawzjan clash, 18 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, In Jawzjan, 11 former fighters return to insurgency, 1 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, reconciled rebel group returns to insurgency, 29 December 2016 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), ISIS, Aided by Ex-Taliban Groups, Makes

In 2016, Jawzjan province lost the poppy-free status it had regained in 2008 ⁽¹²²⁷⁾.

ISW presented little changes in its March 2017 assessment of Taliban control and presence in Jawzjan Province, compared to its June 2016 assessment ⁽¹²²⁸⁾, with the exception of a pocket considered a ‘low confidence ISIS support zone’ stretching between Qushtepa and Darzab districts and overlapping with a zone considered to be under Taliban control. The rest of Darzab district is divided into a Taliban controlled zone and a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’. Another small pocket in Qushtepa district is assessed as a ‘high confidence ISIS support zone’, while the rest of that district a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ ⁽¹²²⁹⁾. Analyst Obaid Ali described Qushtepa and Darzab in September 2017 as districts where the government presence is ‘limited to the government offices in the district centre, while militants rule the remaining parts’ ⁽¹²³⁰⁾. According to the March 2017 assessment by ISW, the Taliban controls a zone in the west of Mingajik district and the remaining part of the district is a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ ⁽¹²³¹⁾, while the Taliban claimed in March 2017 to only carry out guerilla attacks in the district ⁽¹²³²⁾. All of Shiberghan and Aqcha and parts of Khamab, Mardyan, Khanaqa and Fayzabad districts are assessed by ISW in March 2017 as ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’. Two small pockets are considered to be under Taliban control in Khanaqa and Fayzabad districts, while an area in the south of Khwajadukoh and another one in the west of Qarqin district are assessed as ‘low confidence Taliban support zones’ ⁽¹²³³⁾. The Taliban started to contest seven districts in Jawzjan province in March 2017 ⁽¹²³⁴⁾, by claiming to control 60 % or more of Aqcha, Fayzabad, Darzab, Khanaqa, Khwajadukoh, Qushtepa and Shiberghan districts, without controlling district centers. In Qarqin, Mingajik, Mardyan and Khamab districts, the Taliban claimed to only carry out guerilla attacks in March 2017 ⁽¹²³⁵⁾. However, the provincial police chief told AAN in September 2017 that the government and the Taliban both hold half of the territory in Khamab and Qarqin districts. Aqcha, Faizabad, Mangijik, Muradian and Khaniqa districts are heavily contested by the Taliban. Khwaja Duko and the district around Sheberghan city are relatively calm and under government control ⁽¹²³⁶⁾. According to Obaid Ali’s September 2017 analysis, the Taliban ‘have put in place administrative and military institutions in northern Jawzjan province that function relatively well’ ⁽¹²³⁷⁾.

Inroads in Northern Afghanistan, 28 June 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Four Daesh Militants Surrender To Jawzjan Police, 20 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁷⁾ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016: Cultivation and Production, 23 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁰⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³¹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³²⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³³⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁴⁾ New York Times (The), As Trump Rolls Out War Plan, Taliban Are Gaining, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); Ariana News, Khamab District of Jawzjan Collapses to Taliban, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁵⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁶⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁷⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Jawzjan Province counted 223 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽¹²³⁸⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	30
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	124
Explosions	22
Security enforcement	28
Non-conflict related incidents	17
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	223

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Jawzjan Province ⁽¹²³⁹⁾:

Aqcha	15	Khwaja Du Koh	4
Darzab	64	Mardyan	2
Fayzabad	16	Mingajik	10
Kham Ab	2	Qushtepa	57
Khaniqa	5	Shibirghan	48

In an e-mail conversation with the Norwegian Country of Origin Information (COI) center, Landinfo, a diplomatic source estimated that about 15 percent of all 1,362 civilian casualties UNAMA ⁽¹²⁴⁰⁾ recorded in the northern region in 2016 fell in Jawzjan province ⁽¹²⁴¹⁾. With 70 civilian casualties (27 deaths and 43 injured) recorded by UNAMA, Jawzjan province saw a 19 % increase in civilian casualties in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016. Ground engagements were the leading cause for civilian casualties in Jawzjan province in the first half of 2017 followed by targeted or deliberate killings and aerial attacks ⁽¹²⁴²⁾. At the same time, but in line with the general trend in 2017 in this regard, UNAMA noted a decrease in civilian casualties caused by pro-government armed groups in Jawzjan in the first half of 2017, recording five civilian casualties in the province ⁽¹²⁴³⁾.

There were several reports of civilian casualties, including child casualties, as a result of IED explosions in different districts of Jawzjan province, such as Darzab, Shiberghan, Khanaqa, Aqcha and Qushtepa in the last quarter of 2016 ⁽¹²⁴⁴⁾.

⁽¹²³⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹²³⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹²⁴⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp.4-5.

⁽¹²⁴¹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Jawzjan, 5 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁴²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹²⁴³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽¹²⁴⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Child, senior Taliban killed in separate Jawzjan incidents, 29 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Unexploded rocket kills teen boy in Jawzjan, 10 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 killed, as many hurt in Faryab, Jawzjan incidents, 5 December 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Six civilians killed in Jawzjan blast, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

Kidnappings of civilians were reported from Aqcha and Qushtepa districts in May 2017 and from Darzab district in December 2016 and February 2017. Some of the abductees were killed later ⁽¹²⁴⁵⁾. While the Taliban denied involvement in some of those abductions of civilians ⁽¹²⁴⁶⁾, they stated that 52 men abducted in February 2017 while irrigating their farm lands in Darzab district, were brought before a Taliban court to solve a land ownership dispute ⁽¹²⁴⁷⁾.

Clashes and operations backed by air strikes were reported in several districts, including Darzab, Qushtepa, Fayzabad, Khamab and Aqcha in September and October 2016 and between June and August 2017 ⁽¹²⁴⁸⁾.

There were reports of clashes between rival AGEs (Taliban versus ISKP-affiliated groups) and incidents or killings due to rivalry between AGE groups in Darzab ⁽¹²⁴⁹⁾ and Qushtepa ⁽¹²⁵⁰⁾ districts between February and August 2017, while in July 2017 local officials claimed that the groups sometimes cooperated in fighting against government forces ⁽¹²⁵¹⁾.

Darzab district

There were several reports of AGEs attacking, besieging and capturing villages and areas in Darzab district ⁽¹²⁵²⁾ between February and April 2017 and of operations to recapture and clear them from Taliban or suspected ISKP presence in October 2016 and July 2017 ⁽¹²⁵³⁾. In October 2016 and in March and April 2017, several people were reportedly killed by AGEs because they accused them of serving in ALP ranks, of being former ALP members, of assisting ALP, or of being related to ALP members ⁽¹²⁵⁴⁾. An imam was killed in Darzab district in October 2016, but the perpetrators and motives behind the murder were unclear ⁽¹²⁵⁵⁾. Police officers

⁽¹²⁴⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Residents protest against Daesh over killing youth, 27 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Quit if you can't stop kidnappings, Jawzjan police told, 2 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁴⁶⁾ Tolo News, Gunmen Kidnap Nine Farmers In Jawzjan Province, 16 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 civilians kidnapped by insurgents in Jawzjan, 17 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁴⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan farmers taken to Taliban court, says Mujahid, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Central Asia's anxious watch on the Afghan border, 21 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁴⁸⁾ WFP, Darz Ab District (Jawzjan) — Rapid Assessment, July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan: Taliban take control of Darzab district centre, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 20 Daesh Insurgents Killed In Jawzjan Clash, 21 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces recapture Jawzjan's Darzab district, 21 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Child, senior Taliban killed in separate Jawzjan incidents, 29 October 2016 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, At Least 13 Militants Killed In Afghan Air Strikes, Say Officials, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Daesh commanders killed in Jawzjan airstrike, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Nine Taliban insurgents killed in Jawzjan, 11 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban leader among 6 killed in Jawzjan gunbattle, 21 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 militants killed; attack on Faizabad thwarted, 24 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban leader among 6 killed in Jawzjan gunbattle, 21 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, District police chief among 17 killed in Jawzjan clashes, 22 October 2016 ([url](#)). New York Times (The), As Trump Rolls Out War Plan, Taliban Are Gaining, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Jawzjan Clashes, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok, Taliban judge, deputy governor killed in Jawzjan clash, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 rebels dead as Jawzjan clash goes on, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁴⁹⁾ KP, 91 killed in Taliban and ISIS militants clash in North of Afghanistan, 26 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Bodyguard kills Taliban shadow district chief in Jawzjan, 22 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 killed as Taliban, Daesh clash in Nangarhar, Jawzjan, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 killed as Taliban, Daesh fighters clash in Jawzjan, 16 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 killed as Daesh, Taliban clash in Jawzjan, 10 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh militants behead 10 Taliban rivals in Jawzjan, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commanders among 8 Daesh killed in Jawzjan, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Uprising group commander, bodyguard killed in Jawzjan clash, 9 April 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Daesh commander killed in Jawzjan, 28 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵³⁾ Tolo News, 20 Talibs and Daesh Insurgents killed in Jawzjan clashes, 9 October 2016 ([url](#)); Ariana News, 'KHALID' Operation Cleared Ten Districts of Terrorists: MoD, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants kill 6 people in Jawzjan, 6 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Commanders among 8 Daesh killed in Jawzjan, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh insurgents kill Jawzjan grower, 6 April 2017 ([url](#)); KP, ISIS execute 3 civilians on charges of supporting police in North of Afghanistan, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Prayer leader killed in Jawzjan's Darzab district, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)).

were ambushed by the Taliban while leaving a mosque in Darzab district in February 2017. At least ten policemen and the wife of a police commander were killed in the attack ⁽¹²⁵⁶⁾. A woman was killed during a clash in April 2017 when a rocket reportedly fired by AGEs struck a home ⁽¹²⁵⁷⁾. Militants reportedly destroyed at least two shrines and graveyards in Darzab district in March 2017 ⁽¹²⁵⁸⁾. ISKP affiliates were accused of destroying several schools in the same district and threatening students and teachers in July 2017 ⁽¹²⁵⁹⁾. In that same month, there were reports also of militants restricting people from watching television or listening to the radio and imposing sanctions on buying products, such as chicken meat and cigarettes ⁽¹²⁶⁰⁾. From 18 to 23 June 2017, UNAMA recorded 21 civilian casualties in Darzab caused by ground fighting between AGEs and pro-government forces and aerial operations ⁽¹²⁶¹⁾. The Darzab district hospital sustained damage during fighting in June 2017 ⁽¹²⁶²⁾. According to WFP (World Food Program) and UNOCHA assessments in July 2017, insecurity impacted access to food and livelihood opportunities in Darzab district ⁽¹²⁶³⁾, while health facilities and schools had been closed in previous weeks ⁽¹²⁶⁴⁾.

Qushtepa district

In September 2017, Afghan Local Police shot and killed a 17-year-old boy they suspected of being a Taliban fighter in Qushtepa district ⁽¹²⁶⁵⁾. During operations in October 2016, official sources claimed to have cleared several villages in Qushtepa district of AGEs after the Taliban had captured some security posts in the district, while the Taliban argued they still controlled the security posts ⁽¹²⁶⁶⁾. In January 2017, clashes broke out between AGEs and security forces after AGEs had stormed security checkpoints in Qushtepa district ⁽¹²⁶⁷⁾. There were reports of children being killed or injured in the district from mortar shell explosions; one incident occurred during clashes between security forces and AGEs ⁽¹²⁶⁸⁾. In February 2017, six staff members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were killed in Qushtepa district, while two other ICRC workers were abducted, when unknown armed men attacked their convoy ⁽¹²⁶⁹⁾. The Taliban denied any involvement in the attack in a statement issued after the incident ⁽¹²⁷⁰⁾. Official sources accused ISKP, in particular the group related to former Taliban commander Qari Hekmat ⁽¹²⁷¹⁾, of carrying out the attack ⁽¹²⁷²⁾. On 5 September 2017, the ICRC announced the release of the two staff members that had been abducted during the attack that had killed six of their colleagues ⁽¹²⁷³⁾. The February 2017 attack and two other attacks on ICRC staff since December 2016 led to the decision by ICRC in October 2017 to

⁽¹²⁵⁶⁾ RFE/RL, Ten Afghan police officers killed in ambush, officials say, 25 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP commander among 10 killed in Jawzjan clash, 25 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 woman, 13 militants killed in Jawzjan clashes, 10 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh militants set afire shrines in Jawzjan, 10 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁵⁹⁾ RFE/RL, IS War on Education in Restive Afghan District, 4 July 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo news, Daesh Threatens To Replace Curriculum In Jawzjan's District, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh militants impose restrictions on Darzab residents, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 49.

⁽¹²⁶²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 26 June to 2 July 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 10 July – 16 July 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁴⁾ WFP, Darz Ab District (Jawzjan) — Rapid Assessment, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 96.

⁽¹²⁶⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban key member dead in Jawzjan clash, 10 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 Taliban killed in Badakshan, Jawzjan, 10 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, UIM member killed in Jawzjan clash, 16 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁶⁹⁾ KP, 6 ICRC employees shot dead in northern Afghanistan by ISIS loyalists, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁰⁾ Ariana News, ICRC halts operations after 6 workers killed in Jawzjan, 9 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷¹⁾ Ariana News, Islamic State group shot dead six red cross workers in Jawzjan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷²⁾ Tolo News, ICRC confirms Six Staff Members Killed in Jawzjan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Six Red Cross Workers Killed In Afghan Attack, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷³⁾ ICRC, Afghanistan: Two abducted ICRC staff members released, 5 September 2017 ([url](#)).

reduce its presence in Afghanistan, in particular in the north ⁽¹²⁷⁴⁾. There were reports of killings by ISKP affiliated groups. In one incident, they reportedly killed three of their fighters on suspicion of collaborating with security forces ⁽¹²⁷⁵⁾, and in another, they shot dead a tribal elder for campaigning against ISKP ⁽¹²⁷⁶⁾.

Other districts

Security incidents were reported in other districts in Jawzjan province, including Fayzabad district, where a roadside bomb explosion killed a woman and two children and injured a man and two children in October 2016 ⁽¹²⁷⁷⁾. Security forces neutralised a roadside bomb in the district in January 2017 ⁽¹²⁷⁸⁾ and a clearing operation was carried out in July 2017 after a week of clashes with militants ⁽¹²⁷⁹⁾.

In 2017, a woman was reportedly killed by a self-identified ISKP member in Shiberghan city, for having refused to carry out a suicide attack ⁽¹²⁸⁰⁾.

In Khamab district, a shopkeeper was killed and three others civilians were injured when a magnetic IED placed by a pro-government armed group exploded in February 2017 ⁽¹²⁸¹⁾. Heavy clashes were reported in August 2017 and the district was said to be captured by the Taliban on 21 August 2017, but re-captured by Afghan Forces ⁽¹²⁸²⁾.

In Mingajik, IED explosions killed and injured local uprising group members in December 2016 ⁽¹²⁸³⁾ and in June 2017 ⁽¹²⁸⁴⁾. The governor of Jawzjan province claimed that 50 villages in Aqcha, Khanaqa and Mardyan districts were seized by the Taliban in August 2017 ⁽¹²⁸⁵⁾. Referring to a local media report, Obaid Ali stated in September 2017 that operations to push back the Taliban continued ⁽¹²⁸⁶⁾.

The Asia Foundation's 2016 Survey of the Afghan People stated that over the course of 2016, the road linking Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul, and the part of the Ring Road crossing through Balkh, Jawzjan and Faryab had become increasingly insecure ⁽¹²⁸⁷⁾. Parts of the highway between Shiberghan and Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province have reportedly fallen under Taliban control several times in 2016 and also in 2017, forcing the government to launch clearing operations ⁽¹²⁸⁸⁾. In July 2017, security officials claimed the Taliban abducted two senior health officials on that highway, while the Taliban denied any involvement ⁽¹²⁸⁹⁾. A clash between the Taliban and security forces was reported on the Shiberghan-Sar-e Pul highway after AGE attacks on security posts in Shiberghan district in January 2017 ⁽¹²⁹⁰⁾. Residents and security officials of

⁽¹²⁷⁴⁾ ICRC, Afghanistan: ICRC reduces its presence in the country, 9 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh kill 3 own fighters over 'links' with Afghan forces, 22 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan tribal elder gunned down by Daesh, 25 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News Afghan news, District police chief among 17 killed in Jawzjan clashes, 22 October 2016, ([url](#)); KP, Taliban Bomb Kill A Woman And 2 Kids In North Of Afghanistan, 22 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁸⁾ Bakhtar News Agency, Explosion prevented with discovering roadside mine, 22 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 rebels killed, 100 wounded in Balkh, Jawzjan operations, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽¹²⁸¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽¹²⁸²⁾ Ariana News, Khamab District of Jawzjan Collapses to Taliban, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Heavy clashes underway near Khamab district center in Jawzjan province, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo news, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Jawzjan's Khum Aab District, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)); Ali O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 uprising group members dead, 5 hurt in Jawzjan blast, 31 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 anti-Taliban gunmen killed in Jawzjan blast, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants lay siege to 3 Jawzjan's districts, 16 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁶⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁷⁾ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁸⁾ RFE/RL, New Turkmen Railway: First Stop, Aqina, Afghanistan. Next Stop...?, 29 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 rebels killed, 100 wounded in Balkh, Jawzjan operations, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 health officials abducted in Jawzjan, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan clash leaves 2 rebels dead, 8 wounded, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul provinces welcomed the reported detention of a notorious ISKP and former Taliban member who had been involved in anti-government activities on the highway between both provinces, hoping the security situation on the highway would improve ⁽¹²⁹¹⁾. WFP reported that AGEs had established checkpoints on the road between Qushtepa and Darzab districts in June 2017 and pointed to security concerns for people travelling to local food markets ⁽¹²⁹²⁾.

Displacements

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA recorded 4,494 conflict-induced IDPs (599 families) from Jawzjan province. The displaced groups mainly came from Darzab and Qushtepa districts with most of those IDPs displaced to Shiberghan, Jawzjan's provincial capital. A large group was displaced in December 2016 from Darzab district to Qushtepa district ⁽¹²⁹³⁾ and another large group from Darzab district to Shiberghan in April 2017 following clashes between AGEs and government forces ⁽¹²⁹⁴⁾.

Local residents, commenting on clashes between AGEs and security forces in Darzab and Fayzabad districts in October 2016, said that escalating insecurity and clashes in the area had caused many people to leave their houses ⁽¹²⁹⁵⁾. In June and July 2017, displacement was reported in Darzab district due to insecurity and conflict ⁽¹²⁹⁶⁾. The governor of Jawzjan claimed that 5,000 families from Aqcha, Khanaqa and Mardyan districts had started leaving their homes after the capture of 50 villages in those districts by the Taliban in August 2017 ⁽¹²⁹⁷⁾.

Jawzjan province received 7,469 conflict-induced IDPs between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, according to UNOCHA records, most of them displaced to Shiberghan ⁽¹²⁹⁸⁾.

⁽¹²⁹¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, key Daesh member arrested in Jawzjan, 27 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹²⁾ WFP, Darz Ab District (Jawzjan) — Rapid Assessment, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹³⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 09 to 15 April 2017, April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 insurgents killed, weapons seized in Jawzjan, 20 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 rebels killed in Jawzjan clashes, 23 October 2016 ([url](#)).

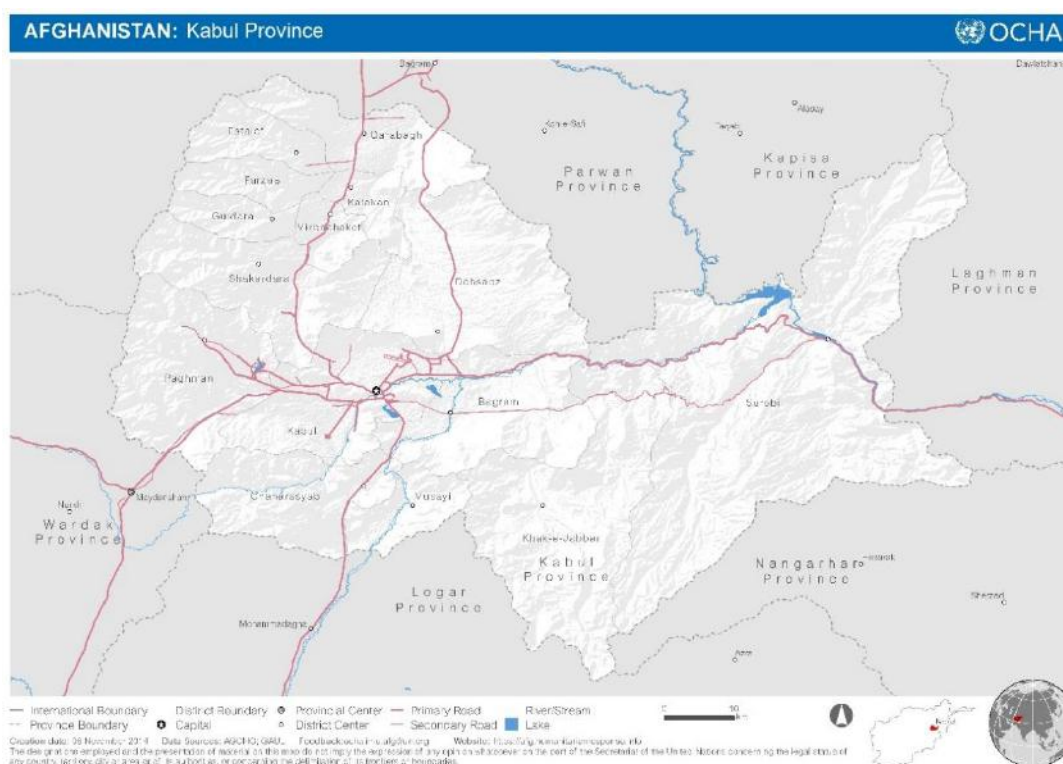
⁽¹²⁹⁶⁾ WFP, Darz Ab District (Jawzjan) — Rapid Assessment, July 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 26 June to 2 July 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 19 to 25 June 2017, June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants lay siege to 3 Jawzjan's districts, 16 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁹⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.15 Kabul Province

General description of the province



Kabul Province is made up of 15 districts with the district of Kabul City at the centre: Bagrami, Chaharasyab, Deh Sabz, Istalif, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khak-e Jabbar, Mir Bacha Kot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara, Surobi⁽¹²⁹⁹⁾. According to UNOCHA, the province is estimated to have roughly 4.4 million inhabitants, of which about 3.6 million live in Kabul City, though this number remains disputed⁽¹³⁰⁰⁾. For information on these population estimates, please refer to the [subchapter on Kabul City](#).

Kabul Province is located in the Central Region bordering the provinces of Parwan to the north-west, Kapisa to the north-east, Laghman in the east, Nangarhar in the south-east, Logar in the south, and Wardak in the south-west. More than half of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain, while more than one third of the area is made up of flat land⁽¹³⁰¹⁾. Major roads depart from Kabul City north toward Kunduz and Mazar-e Sharif through the districts of Shakardara, Mir Bacha Kot, Kalakan and Qarabagh in the Shomali plain, east to Jalalabad through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e Jabbar and Surobi and south to Kandahar through Paghman and to Pul-i Alam and Gardez through Bagrami and Chahar Asayab⁽¹³⁰²⁾.

Major ethnic groups in Kabul province are Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara. According to UNHCR district profiles dating from 2002, Pashtuns dominated the southern and eastern districts of Surobi, Paghman, Chaharasyab, Bagrami, Deh Sabz, Khak-e Jabbar and Musayi, and Tajik dominated the northern districts of Istalif, Kalakan, Mir Bacha Kot, Shakardara and Qarabagh.

⁽¹²⁹⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰¹⁾ WFP, Provincial Profile. Kabul, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

In other districts, no ethnic group is clearly dominant ⁽¹³⁰³⁾. North of Kabul City lies the Shomali plain which stretches for 70 kilometres from the outskirts of the city to the Salang pass. The inhabitants of the Shomali plain are mainly Tajik and, to a lesser extent, Uzbek, Hazara and Pashtun ⁽¹³⁰⁴⁾. It is a fertile and comparatively rich area and, because of its developed agriculture, considered the ‘orchard’ of Kabul. The area has been a central part in Afghan economy and politics for a long time ⁽¹³⁰⁵⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 15.9 % of Kabul’s population live in rural areas and 17.4 % of its inhabitants is engaged in agricultural work ⁽¹³⁰⁶⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kabul Province

AGEs reported to be active in the province in 2014 included the Taliban and the Haqqani Network ⁽¹³⁰⁷⁾. According to AAN analysts Fabrizio Foschini, in July 2015, ‘security observers report declining numbers of ANSF troops and decreased effectiveness of the ANSF operations in [Surobi], due to a lack of resources and poor coordination. [...] The government’s sway over the whole of [Surobi] had grown weaker in recent years. Not only is all of upper Uzbin completely beyond the control of the ANSF; other areas in the districts do not fare much better’⁽¹³⁰⁸⁾. In July 2015, fighters from Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) and the Taliban were consistently present in Surobi, although Hezb-e Islami was traditionally stronger in Surobi ⁽¹³⁰⁹⁾. According to a source in Kabul, it is tensions between Jamiaat and Hezb-e Islami that facilitate insurgent infiltration in Surobi district ⁽¹³¹⁰⁾. In September 2016, the Afghan government and Hezb-e Islami signed a peace agreement ⁽¹³¹¹⁾.

In March 2017, the Taliban claimed to maintain a presence in 20 % of the area of Musayi, Khak-e Jabbar, Chahar Asyab, Paghman, Shakardara, Qarabagh, Dih Sabz and Bagrami districts and claimed that 40 % of the Surobi district was under their control ⁽¹³¹²⁾. As of March 2017, according to ISW, a stretch covering the eastern part of Kabul and Chaharasyab districts is a ‘low confidence Taliban support zone’. The same qualification occurs for the stretch running through the North of Bagrami and Khak-e Jabbar districts which connects this area with the part of Surobi district qualified as ‘Taliban control and high confidence support zones’. Musayi district is also considered as a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ ⁽¹³¹³⁾. In September 2017, 350 ALP were deployed in three districts – Surobi (250 men), Musayi and Paghman (100 men each) ⁽¹³¹⁴⁾.

⁽¹³⁰³⁾ UNHCR, Kabul District Profiles, 2002 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰⁴⁾ OSI, Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001, 2005 ([url](#)), p. 127.

⁽¹³⁰⁵⁾ Foschini, F., Elections 2014 (6): Two types of security in Shomali, 7 April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰⁶⁾ Ministry of Economy/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 29-30.

⁽¹³⁰⁷⁾ Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., ‘Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency’, 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 25-41.

⁽¹³⁰⁸⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁰⁹⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹³¹¹⁾ Guardian (The), Butcher of Kabul pardoned in Afghan peace deal, 22 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹²⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹³⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

In 2016, security on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway remained unstable. Various anonymous sources contacted by the Norwegian Center for Country of Origin Information (Landinfo) stated that road safety from Kabul to Jalalabad deteriorated during 2016 ⁽¹³¹⁵⁾, which is confirmed by the Asia Foundation whose surveys stated in December 2016 that there was a rising numbers of security incidents ⁽¹³¹⁶⁾. During 2016, the road was closed at times due to clashes between AGEs and ANSF, such as attacks on military convoys and checkpoints ⁽¹³¹⁷⁾. Insurgents also organized their own check points to search travelers to find people linked to the government. For this reason passengers and workers prefer to travel during the day ⁽¹³¹⁸⁾.

The security situation in Kabul City is outlined in section [2.1 Kabul City](#).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Kabul Province, including the city, counted 448 security incidents. These include 290 incidents in Kabul City alone. Excluding the figures for Kabul City, as discussed section 2.1, Kabul Province accounts for 160 incidents ⁽¹³¹⁹⁾. While suicide attacks and IED explosions are much less common in the province than in the city, the majority of armed confrontations and airstrikes occurred in the rest of the province. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

	Including Kabul City	Excluding Kabul City
Violence targeting individuals	36	12
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	105	84
Explosions	82	19
Security enforcement	68	19
Non-conflict related incidents	133	21
Other incidents	24	5
Total security incidents	448	160

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kabul Province ⁽¹³²⁰⁾:

Bagrami	11	Musayi	12
Chahar Asyab	10	Paghman	15

⁽¹³¹⁵⁾ Landinfo, Afghanistan: The security situation in Nangarhar province, 13 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹⁶⁾ Asia Foundation, A Survey of the Afghan People. Afghanistan in 2016, 5 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹⁷⁾ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Kabul, 25 November 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Concerns raised over Taliban on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 27 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³¹⁸⁾ Tolo News, Concerns raised over Taliban on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 27 August 2016 ([url](#)); Landinfo, Afghanistan: The security situation in Nangarhar province, 13 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 20.

⁽¹³¹⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹³²⁰⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Dih Sabz	6	Qarabagh	20
Khaki Jabbar	6	Shakardara	4
Mir Bacha Kot	4	Surobi	72

For 2016, Kabul province recorded 1,758 civilian casualties (376 deaths and 1,382 injured), making it the province with the highest casualty rate of the 34 Afghan provinces in term of casualties ⁽¹³²¹⁾. For the six first month of 2017, UNAMA documented 1,048 civilian casualties (219 deaths and 829 injured) for Kabul province, including Kabul district, where 94 % of casualties occurred and were caused by suicide attacks and IEDs ⁽¹³²²⁾.

Multiple ground operations were led by the ANSF against the insurgents in Surobi district ⁽¹³²³⁾.

In Qarabagh district, an NDS operation against AGE was carried out in September 2016, killing 8 insurgents ⁽¹³²⁴⁾. In January 2017, the Ministry of Defence announced that ANSF had planned several operations against AGEs in Qarabagh district ⁽¹³²⁵⁾ where a NATO-led Resolute Support Mission convoy was the target of a suicide attack on August 2017 ⁽¹³²⁶⁾.

In Bagrami district, a magnetic IED was used to kill a Ministry of Defense commander in November 2016 ⁽¹³²⁷⁾.

In Paghman district, in December 2016, unknown gunmen attacked an NDS compound. Three people, including an intelligence official, were killed and two others sustained injuries during the attack ⁽¹³²⁸⁾.

In January 2017 the Ministry of Defence announced ANSF had planned several operations against AGEs in Paghman district ⁽¹³²⁹⁾.

In July 2017, for the second time of this year, Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf's residence was the target of rockets. No casualties nor damages were reported ⁽¹³³⁰⁾.

Displacement

In December 2016, UNOCHA assessed 49 displaced persons from Surobi district and 15 from Paghman district who respectively went to Charikar district (Parwan province) and Gardez

⁽¹³²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of civilians in armed conflict – Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽¹³²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽¹³²³⁾ KP, Coordinated Taliban attack repulsed in Kabul province, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Enemy pushed back in Kabul, 11 May 2017 ([url](#)); KP, 45 including 19 ISIS loyalists, 1 Arab militant killed in East of Afghanistan, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 131 kg of drugs seized in Nangarhar, militants killed in Kabul, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), 10 U.S.-puppets killed as joint raid warded off, 1 November 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban leader killed with his fighters in Kabul operation, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Afghan forces battle insurgents on multiple fronts, 4 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³²⁴⁾ KP, 8 Taliban militants killed in Kabul by Afghan intelligence operatives, 18 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³²⁵⁾ Tolo News, Afghan forces battle insurgents on multiple fronts, 4 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³²⁶⁾ KP, Suicide attack in Kabul leaves 6 NATO soldiers dead, wounded, 4 August 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Georgian soldier killed, 3 injured in Kabul suicide blast, 4 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³²⁷⁾ Tolo News, IED blast kills commander as nation reels from mosque attack, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Early morning blast leaves 2 injured in Kabul, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³²⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 killed in gun attack on NDS building in Paghman, 17 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³²⁹⁾ Tolo News, Afghan forces battle insurgents on multiple fronts, 4 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³³⁰⁾ KP, Six rockets land near Sayyaf's residence in Kabul, 20 July 2017 ([url](#)).

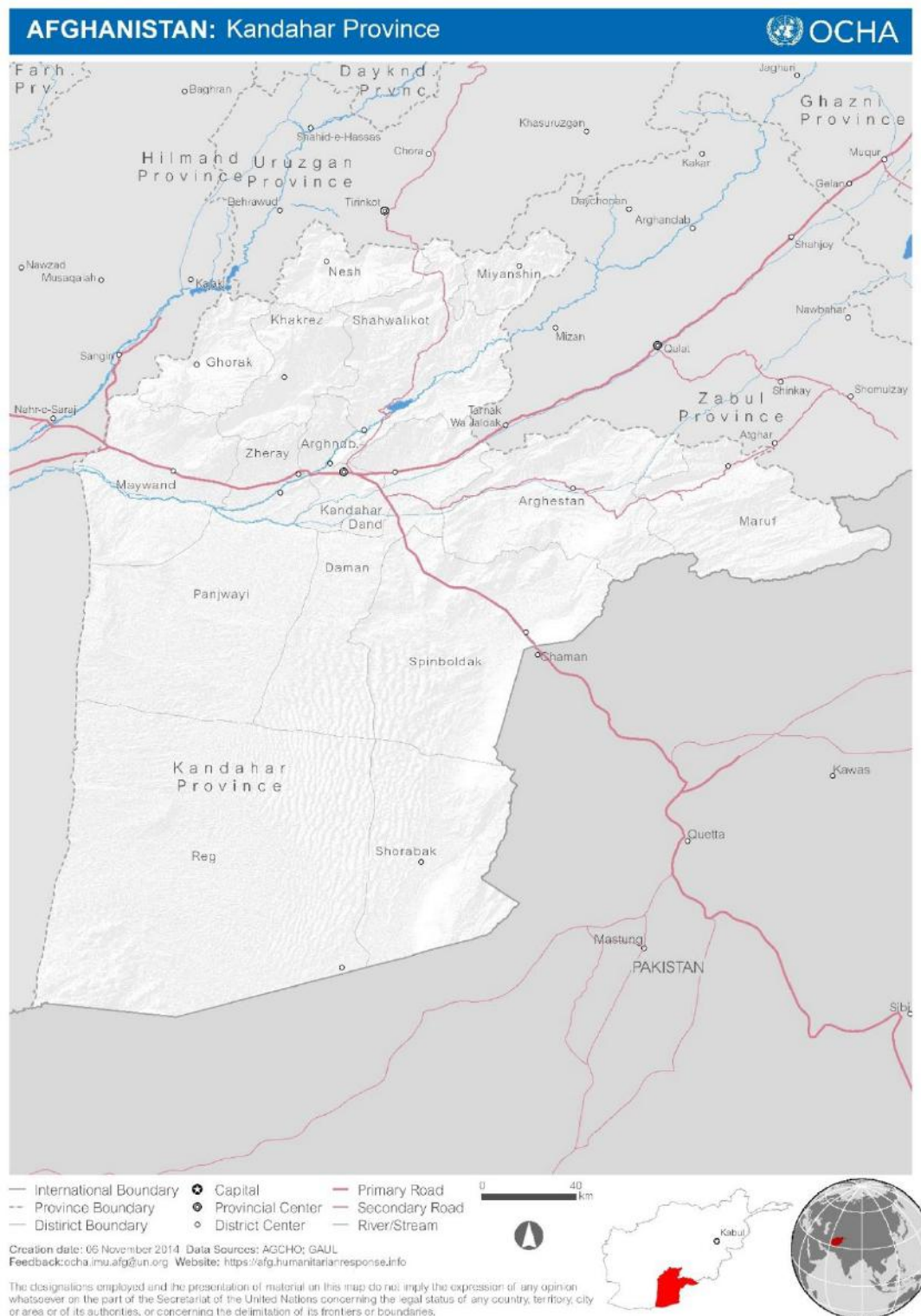
district (Paktia province) ⁽¹³³¹⁾. In the first 6 months of 2017, 641 IDPs arrived in Bagrami, Dehsabz and Qarabgh districts from Baghlan, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces ⁽¹³³²⁾.

⁽¹³³¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³³²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.16 Kandahar

General description of the province



Kandahar province is located in southern Afghanistan and has borders with Uruzgan, Zabul and Helmand provinces. Kandahar also borders Pakistan ⁽¹³³³⁾. Kandahar province comprises

⁽¹³³³⁾ UNOCHA, Kandahar Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

16 administrative units: the provincial capital of Kandahar City (including semi-official district Dand), Arghandab, Arghistan, Daman, Ghorak, Khakrez, Maruf, Maywand, Miya Nishin, Nesh, Panjwayi, Registan (also known as Rig), Shah Wali Kot, Shorabak (including semi-official district Takhta Pol), Spin Boldak, and Zhari ⁽¹³³⁴⁾.

Kandahar has an estimated population of 1,279,520, of which 563,885 live in the provincial capital of Kandahar City (and 47,354 who live in Dand area) ⁽¹³³⁵⁾. Provincial authorities, however, estimate the population of Kandahar to be around 2.3 to 2.5 million ⁽¹³³⁶⁾. Kandahar's population is overwhelmingly Pashtun and 98% of its residents speak the Pashtun language. Small numbers of Baluchis, Hazaras, and Tajiks also live in the province ⁽¹³³⁷⁾. The desert district of Registan on the border of Pakistan is mostly inhabited by Baluchis and serves as a major transit and smuggling corridor ⁽¹³³⁸⁾.

Kandahar City is the political and economic centre of the south of Afghanistan ⁽¹³³⁹⁾. Kandahar is described as one of Afghanistan's richest provinces and a major receiver of development funds, with poverty rates the second lowest in the country after Farah, but at the same time Kandahar's deeply conservative culture makes it one of the provinces where girls' access to education and women's access to antenatal care are among the worst in Afghanistan ⁽¹³⁴⁰⁾. Most of the province is flat or semi-flat desert, although the northern part of the province is mountainous ⁽¹³⁴¹⁾. Kandahar is Afghanistan's third major opium cultivating province after Helmand and Badghis ⁽¹³⁴²⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 65.2% of Kandahar's population live in rural areas and 48.5% of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹³⁴³⁾.

The Kandahar to Kabul and Kandahar to Herat sections of the Afghan Ring Road go through the province. Another highway runs southeast from Kandahar to the Spin Boldak-Chaman border crossing, leading to Quetta, Pakistan ⁽¹³⁴⁴⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kandahar

Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban, and the province has remained strategically important to the movement ⁽¹³⁴⁵⁾. As Afghanistan's cultural and political heartland, Kandahar is also of key importance to the Afghan government forces ⁽¹³⁴⁶⁾. According to a 2016 source,

⁽¹³³⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Kandahar Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³³⁵⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽¹³³⁶⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Kandahar Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹³³⁷⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³³⁸⁾ Gopal, A., New America Foundation Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar, November 2010 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽¹³³⁹⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁴⁰⁾ Pain, A. et al., Livelihood trajectories in Afghanistan: Silent violence in Kandahar Province, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 10-11.

⁽¹³⁴¹⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁴²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽¹³⁴³⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 31-32.

⁽¹³⁴⁴⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁴⁵⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁴⁶⁾ Gopal, A., New America Foundation Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar, November 2010 ([url](#)), p. 1.

Kandahar has been partly spared the Taliban resurgence seen in the neighbouring provinces⁽¹³⁴⁷⁾.

The security environment of Kandahar is characterised by the presence of a powerful police chief, General Abdul Raziq, who has established relative security in Kandahar City and its surroundings though he is known for his 'brutality' and alleged involvement in abuses, harassment of civilians and disappearances⁽¹³⁴⁸⁾. According to The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee against Torture (UNCAT), following the Committee's review of Afghanistan, there have been 'numerous and credible allegations indicating [the] ANP Commander in Kandahar, as being widely suspected of complicity, if not of personal implication, in severe human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and settlement of secret detention centres'⁽¹³⁴⁹⁾. According to reports from the UN and local human rights organisations, as many as 91 % of detainees in Kandahar region experience torture⁽¹³⁵⁰⁾. Despite Abdul Raziq's success in decreasing the violence in Kandahar City and the surrounding areas significantly, the countryside has remained increasingly volatile. Competition over the routes connecting the capital to opium cultivation areas has caused the area immediately to the west of Kandahar City to suffer from high levels of violence⁽¹³⁵¹⁾.

The districts of Arghandab, Panjwayi, Maywand, Maruf, Nesh, and Arghistan are described as marginalised and neglected as opposed to the well-off districts of Kandahar City, Dand, and Spin Boldak⁽¹³⁵²⁾. Among the districts surrounding Kandahar city, Panjwayi and Zhari are known as the birthplace of the Taliban. They have remained Taliban strongholds also during the insurgency⁽¹³⁵³⁾. The western districts of Panjwayi, Zhari, and Maywand have been volatile for years and the districts of Ghorak, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot, and Miya Nishin have served as transit routes for insurgent operations. Arghandab district, located just 15 kilometres north from Kandahar City, also has strategic value as a Taliban gateway to the city of Kandahar⁽¹³⁵⁴⁾.

According to LWJ, based on open sources, the southernmost districts Registan and Shorabak are controlled by the Taliban, while Maywand, Ghorak, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot, Arghistan, and Maruf districts are contested between Taliban and government forces. Ghorak has changed hands several times since August 2016 when Taliban overran the district centre. Other contested districts have faced repeated Taliban attacks against security force checkpoints⁽¹³⁵⁵⁾. All schools are reportedly closed in the Taliban-dominated Khakrez, Nesh and Shah Wali Kot districts⁽¹³⁵⁶⁾. Large al Qaeda training camps were operating in Shorabak district in 2016. al Qaeda media cell was also placed there⁽¹³⁵⁷⁾.

Recent security trends

⁽¹³⁴⁷⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials Worried Over Spike In Violence Threatening Kandahar, 7 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁴⁸⁾ HRW, 'Today We Shall All Die': Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁴⁹⁾ UNCAT, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Afghanistan, 12 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽¹³⁵⁰⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan's National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 31-34.

⁽¹³⁵¹⁾ Jackson A., Politics and governance in Afghanistan: the case of Kandahar, AREU, June 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 17-20.

⁽¹³⁵²⁾ Jackson A., Politics and governance in Afghanistan: the case of Kandahar, AREU, June 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 26-27.

⁽¹³⁵³⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁵⁴⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁵⁵⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁵⁶⁾ Rubin, B. and Rudeforth, C., Enhancing Access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽¹³⁵⁷⁾ LWJ, Afghan Intelligence Service Destroys al Qaeda Base in Zabul, 19 September 2016 ([url](#)).

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Kandahar Province counted 1,762 security incidents⁽¹³⁵⁸⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	69
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1,036
Explosions	184
Security enforcement	379
Non-conflict related incidents	61
Other incidents	33
Total security incidents	1,762

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kandahar Province⁽¹³⁵⁹⁾:

Arghandab	44	Miya Nishin	168
Arghistan	89	Nesh	85
Daman	40	Panjwayi	36
Dand	13	Reg	5
Ghorak	47	Shah Wali Kot	280
Kandahar	272	Shorabak	37
Khakrez	91	Spin Boldak	108
Maruf	106	Zhari	56
Maywand	285		

Kandahar was regarded by UNOCHA in the first quarter of 2017 as a ‘high-combat area’ with a high intensity of security incidents⁽¹³⁶⁰⁾. According to a UNOCHA assessment in May 2017, the districts of Nesh, Ghorak, Miya Nishin, Maywand, Khakrez, and Shah Wali Kot were the hot-spot areas of the conflict in Kandahar⁽¹³⁶¹⁾. In the first six months of 2017, UNOCHA classified Maywand, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot, and Maruf districts among areas in Afghanistan where the conflict was most severe in terms of the number of incidents, the amount of civilian casualties, and the numbers of IDPs originating from the area. The conflict was severe also in Shorabak, Arghistan, Arghandab and Ghorak districts⁽¹³⁶²⁾. UNOCHA prioritized the districts of Ghorak, Khakrez, Maywand, Nesh, and Shah Wali Kot in the first quarter of 2017 as areas for integrated protection programming meant for high combat intensity areas, as well as populations under armed opposition group control⁽¹³⁶³⁾. According to UNOCHA, many of

⁽¹³⁵⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹³⁵⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹³⁶⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁶¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - First Quarter Report (January - March 2017), updated 18 May, original publication date 9 May ([url](#)), p. 31.

⁽¹³⁶²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹³⁶³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

Kandahar's districts are inaccessible to the government, UN agencies and national and international organisations ⁽¹³⁶⁴⁾.

Pajhwok Afghan News reported a total of 146 attacks in Kandahar during a 12 month period from August 2016 to July 2017. Kandahar had the most attacks of all provinces after Nangarhar, Faryab, and Helmand. Pajhwok reported a total of 1,592 casualties for the same period in Kandahar, which was the sixth highest figure of all provinces ⁽¹³⁶⁵⁾.

Kandahar has the highest numbers of civilian casualties in Afghanistan after Kabul and Helmand. UNAMA noted a total of 395 civilian casualties (162 deaths and 233 injured) during the first six months of 2017 in Kandahar, a ten % decrease compared to the same period in 2016. IEDs constituted the leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries, followed by ground engagements and explosive remnants of war ⁽¹³⁶⁶⁾. Despite experiencing comparatively less civilian casualties from indirect and/or explosive weapons during 2016 and the first half of 2017, Kandahar province recorded the highest number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance in all Afghan provinces: 76 civilian casualties (20 deaths and 56 injured) in the first six months of 2017 ⁽¹³⁶⁷⁾.

On 31 October 2016, the Taliban attacked an army post and killed more than 30 Afghan troops, taking over the district of Ghorak, near the border of Helmand and Uruzgan provinces. It was the biggest single-day loss to Afghan forces in Kandahar that year. In addition to Ghorak, the Taliban have attacked Afghan security forces and seized villages, and attempted to overrun district centres repeatedly in Nesh, Miya Neshin, Shorabak, Shah Wali Kot, Khakrez, and Arghandab districts. By attacking these districts, the insurgents seem to be trying to surround the provincial capital. The major road connecting Kandahar with Uruzgan was blocked twice in 2016 ⁽¹³⁶⁸⁾.

Kandahar saw increased clashes in May 2017 after the start of the Taliban's spring offensive, launched on 28 April 2017. During May 2017, the Taliban attacked military bases and checkpoints in Shah Wali Kot, Maywand, Khakrez, Arghistan, and Miya Nishin districts, killing more than 50 Afghan soldiers in total ⁽¹³⁶⁹⁾. On 26 July 2017, Taliban militants attacked a military base in Khakrez district killing 26 soldiers and injuring 13 ⁽¹³⁷⁰⁾. According to a Tolo News report in August 2017, a number of residents in Shah Wali Kot district were forcibly expelled from their villages for cooperating with the government. The residents also claimed that the Taliban had kidnapped at least 70 residents of the district while travelling on the Kandahar-Zabul highway. At least seven of the kidnapped were killed ⁽¹³⁷¹⁾. The Taliban overran Maruf district centre for a couple of hours on 27 September 2017 ⁽¹³⁷²⁾.

In contrast to 2016, in 2017, UNAMA documented casualties from cross-border shelling in the Spin Boldak district. On 18 April 2017, a rocket fired by Pakistan Military Forces impacted an Afghan National Border Police (ANBP) base in Spin Boldak, injuring seven civilians in an adjacent civilian hospital. On 5 May 2017, rockets and mortar rounds fired by Pakistani military forces into Spin Boldak killed five civilians and injured 12 others during clashes with

⁽¹³⁶⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽¹³⁶⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 24,500 people lost lives, suffered injuries in last 12 months, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁶⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹³⁶⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 20.

⁽¹³⁶⁸⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials Worried Over Spike In Violence Threatening Kandahar, Gandhara, 7 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁶⁹⁾ Al Jazeera, Deadly Taliban raid hits Kandahar's Shah Wali Kot, 26 May 2017 ([url](#)); IISS Armed Conflict Database, Afghanistan Military & Security, May 2017, available by subscription ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁷⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Dozens Killed in Taliban Attack on Afghan Military Base, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁷¹⁾ Tolo News, Taliban Ousts Residents From Kandahar Villages, 3 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁷²⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

ANBP. During the same clashes, in addition to the civilian casualties caused by rockets and mortars, shooting by Pakistani military forces also caused ten civilian casualties (two deaths and eight injured) ⁽¹³⁷³⁾.

Between January and March 2017, ANP deliberately killed four civilians perceived to be AGE supporters in Nesh district. According to UNAMA, the killings may have been carried out in revenge for a coordinated AGE attack in Nesh district on 1 December 2016 during which the insurgents attacked Nesh district police chief and killed 18 of his guards and caused 16 civilian casualties (12 deaths – all women and children – and four injured) ⁽¹³⁷⁴⁾. Again, as revenge, AGE shot dead 30 adult male civilians in the northern villages of Nesh district in 13 incidents between March and April 2017. The executions happened after the insurgents took control of territory in proximity to the district administrative centre. AGE deliberately sought out civilian men in areas newly under their control who they believed had links to the government or prior employment with the ANSF ⁽¹³⁷⁵⁾. Nawa, a small village in Nesh district, which borders Uruzgan province, violently changed hands four times between government forces and members of insurgency in March 2017, which caused 700 families to flee the area. Each time that the control of the village went from one faction to the other, villagers faced suspicion of having colluded with the previous occupying force ⁽¹³⁷⁶⁾.

There have been many targeted killings in Kandahar City. For example, on 17 December 2016, AGE killed five women employees of a private security company. The Taliban denied responsibility for the killings, describing the incident as ‘an internal matter for the Kandahar authorities.’ The incident followed a pattern of execution-style killings in Kandahar city. Information received by UNAMA suggests that the attackers may have killed the women simply because they worked outside their homes. The Kandahar authorities arrested two suspects a few weeks after the killings, although the precise circumstances of the killings remain unclear ⁽¹³⁷⁷⁾. The Taliban claimed responsibility for assassinating the Kandahar provincial governor’s media advisor, who was also known as an influential religious scholar, on 7 May 2017, and for killing a leading religious scholar, on 9 May 2017, also in Kandahar City ⁽¹³⁷⁸⁾.

On 10 January 2017, senior Afghan officials and five diplomats from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were killed in a high-profile suicide bombing in Kandahar City. The incident was unusual for appearing to target UAE nationals, but there was speculation that the provincial police chief, Abdul Raziq, who had left the meeting early, was the intended target. The Taliban denied responsibility for the attack ⁽¹³⁷⁹⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, 770 individuals from Kandahar province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA. All of them originated from Nesh district and were displaced to Arghandab district in Zabul ⁽¹³⁸⁰⁾. Approximately 700 people were

⁽¹³⁷³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽¹³⁷⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 56-57.

⁽¹³⁷⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 42-43.

⁽¹³⁷⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 64, 1-31 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹³⁷⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 24.

⁽¹³⁷⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 47.

⁽¹³⁷⁹⁾ IISS Armed Conflict Database, Afghanistan Human Security, January 2017, available by subscription ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

displaced from Shah Wali Kot in the beginning of September 2017 due to intensified fighting between government forces and the insurgents ⁽¹³⁸¹⁾.

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 11,246 individuals from Kandahar province displaced by conflict, most of them in January and March 2017:

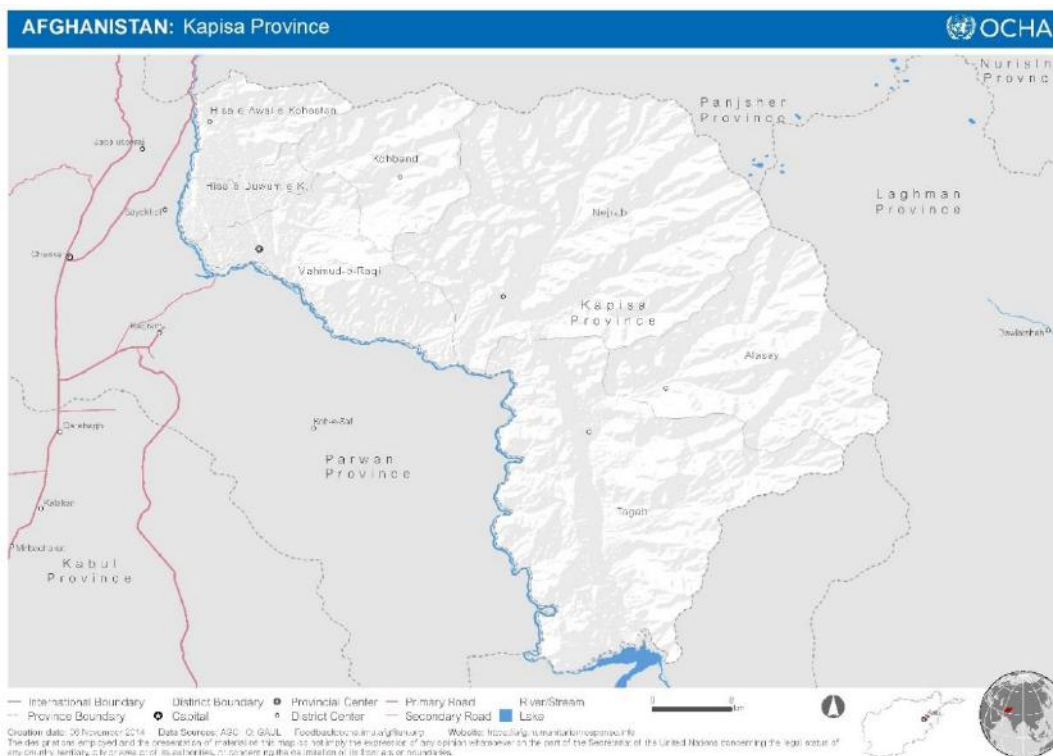
- 7,553 from Nesh;
- 1,747 from Shah Wali Kot;
- 622 from Khakrez;
- 580 from Ghorak;
- 401 from Miya Nishin;
- 245 from Arghistan;
- 63 from Daman, and;
- 35 from Arghandab.

Of these, 5,632 were displaced to Kandahar City and 3,101 were displaced within Nesh district; others went to Maywand, Tirin Kot in Uruzgan and Mizan in Zabul ⁽¹³⁸²⁾.

The humanitarian situation in Kandahar City has been described by the UN as complex and difficult, with displaced families widely dispersed and living among local communities ⁽¹³⁸³⁾.

2.17 Kapisa

General description of the province



⁽¹³⁸¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, Week of 4 - 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸³⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 64, 1-31 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

Kapisa is a province in central Afghanistan. According to UN OCHA, the population is 441,010⁽¹³⁸⁴⁾. Kapisa is bordered by Panjshir, Laghman, Kabul and Parwan provinces and is divided into seven districts: Tagab, Nejrab, Alasay, Mahmud-e Raqi, Hisa-e Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-e Duwum-e Kohestan, and Koh Band⁽¹³⁸⁵⁾. The capital is Mahmud-e Raqi. The province comprises diverse ethnic groups, mainly Tajik, also Pashtun, Pashai, Hazara, Nuristani and Kuchi⁽¹³⁸⁶⁾. Tajik live predominantly in the northern districts of Mahmud-e Raqi, Hisa-e Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-e Duwum-e Kohestan and Nejrab, while Pashtun predominantly live in Tagab and also Nejrab. Pashai live predominantly in Alasay and Kohband⁽¹³⁸⁷⁾. Agriculture is the main source of income⁽¹³⁸⁸⁾. According to UNODC, in October 2016, 608 hectares of opium poppy were cultivated in Kapisa, which represents a 32 % increase from 2015⁽¹³⁸⁹⁾.

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 99.6 % of Kapisa's population lives in rural areas and 43.8 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work⁽¹³⁹⁰⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kapisa

According to AAN, in April 2015, Kapisa was sociologically divided between the southern part where the population sympathises with the AGEs, and the northern part, loyal to Jamiat-e Islami, making community support for the Taliban less likely⁽¹³⁹¹⁾.

According to AAN analyst Obaid Ali, in April 2015, the three districts with the worst security issues were Alasai, Tagab and Nejrab⁽¹³⁹²⁾. In 2015, these southern districts accounted for most of the incidents causing civilian casualties in Kapisa⁽¹³⁹³⁾. The southern district of Tagab is connected to the districts of Surobi in Kabul and Badpakh in Laghman through relatively easily traversable passes. Therefore, the region has become an important crossing point and sanctuary for AGEs moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area⁽¹³⁹⁴⁾. Infiltration through this 'Tagab-Surobi corridor', but also resentment at the dominance in provincial politics and security organs of northern Tajiks, has fuelled the insurgency in Kapisa⁽¹³⁹⁵⁾. According to the New York Times, in 2014 the Taliban controlled a crucial stretch of a highway leading into Kabul⁽¹³⁹⁶⁾.

According to US forces quoted in the New York Times in 2014, the Taliban in the area were described as 'disciplined forces that had been able to operate freely', able to 'issue and execute orders' with 'exacting' capability and precision in southern Kapisa⁽¹³⁹⁷⁾. In 2014 and early 2015, it was reported that in Tagab and Alasay, the Taliban control was such that ANSF

⁽¹³⁸⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁵⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Kapisa Provincial Profile, March 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁶⁾ Tolo News, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁷⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹³⁸⁸⁾ ISW, Regional Command East, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁹⁾ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹⁰⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 33-34.

⁽¹³⁹¹⁾ Foschini, F., In Kabul's Shadow: the attacks in the provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹²⁾ Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹³⁹⁴⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹³⁹⁶⁾ New York Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹⁷⁾ New York Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014 ([url](#)).

were allowed by the Taliban to go out of their bases only one hour a day to go to the bazaar, unarmed ⁽¹³⁹⁸⁾. In April 2015, AAN analyst Obaid Ali stated that the Taliban had established an administrative system governing Alasay district, including a military council, a finance department and even a detention centre ⁽¹³⁹⁹⁾. In Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab, the government was said to ‘operate in the shadows’ ⁽¹⁴⁰⁰⁾. In 2015, Tagab and Alasay judiciary moved to the provincial capital because of security risks ⁽¹⁴⁰¹⁾. Instead, the Taliban were running courts in mosques or private houses ⁽¹⁴⁰²⁾. According to the U.S. Department of State (USDOS), in some areas of Kapisa province, Taliban enforced a parallel judicial system based on a strict interpretation of *sharia*. Punishments could include execution or mutilation. In August 2016, the Taliban accused a 20-year-old student of spying, kidnapped him, and killed him a week later ⁽¹⁴⁰³⁾. Insurgent presence and security problems in Tagab, Alasay and parts of Nejrab also prevented humanitarian access to the population ⁽¹⁴⁰⁴⁾. In 2015, residents of Tagab and Alasay complained about the lack of medical facilities, posing serious problems, especially for pregnant women ⁽¹⁴⁰⁵⁾.

In 2015, the 201 Corps of the ANA was also active in Tagab, according to Pajhwok Afghan News. In October 2015 heavy fighting took place in Tagab and Alasay. The 201 Corps conducted a large-scale operation in Tagab district, called ‘Khanjar 13’ ⁽¹⁴⁰⁶⁾.

A *tashkeel* ⁽¹⁴⁰⁷⁾ of 700 ALP was allocated to Kapisa, 300 to Tagab and Alasay each and 100 to Nejrab. There were concerns about accountability and the capture of the ALP programme by particular strongmen and political factions. In Alasay, the ALP remained cantoned in the ANA base in the district centre because of security fears ⁽¹⁴⁰⁸⁾.

After ISKP fighters came under increasing pressure in Nangarhar, rumours spread about an IS presence in Tagab in December 2015. Government sources said IS was distributing night letters and an IED carrying the flag of IS was defused in the bazaar ⁽¹⁴⁰⁹⁾.

Violence in the northern districts in 2015, was more linked to political tensions between Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami ⁽¹⁴¹⁰⁾. Kohband district, despite not hosting many supporters of the Taliban, was also said to host a variety of illegal armed groups that carry out assassinations and targeted killing on a daily basis, according to Obaid Ali. Commanders affiliated to Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami continuously fight each other. In the Durnama valley of the district, a lasting feud between competing commanders has disrupted people’s lives. Girls were said

⁽¹³⁹⁸⁾ Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Hour’s Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹⁹⁾ Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁰⁾ New York Times (The), Hour’s Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁰²⁾ Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Hour’s Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰³⁾ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016 – Afghanistan, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province Humanitarian Profile, June 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Alasay, Tagab residents desperate for health facilities, 17 December 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 Taliban, 2 ANA troops killed in Tagab offensive, 3 October 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁷⁾ The Ministry of Interior staffing structure that lists the number of policemen designated to each area of the Afghan National Police and across the country.

⁽¹⁴⁰⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁰⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Daesh fighters dead in airstrike, clash with Taliban, 28 December 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

to be kept at home from school because parents had feared they might be get caught in fire fights and schools often close altogether ⁽¹⁴¹¹⁾.

According to information in 2016, Kapisa was considered one of Hezb-e Islami's strongholds. The movement controlled fighters in the province, but did not consolidate any significant territorial control or parallel administration-like structures, like the Taliban ⁽¹⁴¹²⁾. In September 2016, the Afghan government and Hezb-e Islami signed a peace agreement ⁽¹⁴¹³⁾.

According to ISW, as of March 2017, much of Tagab and small parts of Nijrab and Alasay were under Taliban control. Large parts of these three districts were considered as 'high confidence Taliban support zones'. A stretch running through the remaining four districts of the province connected these areas with Parwan and Baghlan, and was considered a 'low confidence support zone' ⁽¹⁴¹⁴⁾.

In March 2017, the Taliban claimed, through their media site, Voice of Jihad, to control 95 % of the territory in Alasay district, 70 % in Tagab, 50 % in Nijrab, and to carry out guerilla attacks in the remaining four districts ⁽¹⁴¹⁵⁾.

In May 2017, a school for girls was opened in Shinkai area in Tagab district with the help of the tribal elders, after 16 years of lack of such schools. Two girls' schools had been destroyed in the early years of Karzai's presidency by insurgents ⁽¹⁴¹⁶⁾. Also in Tagab district, during Eid-ul Adha days, in September 2017, the Taliban reportedly barred women from going to bazaar and warned the shopkeepers that they will be punished if they sell things to women. However, a police spokesman stated that this Taliban ban on women remained rejected in Kapisa where security forces existed ⁽¹⁴¹⁷⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Kapisa Province counted 1,762 security incidents ⁽¹⁴¹⁸⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	2
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	97
Explosions	25
Security enforcement	6
Non-conflict related incidents	6
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	137

⁽¹⁴¹¹⁾ Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians suffer from fight between illegal armed groups, 24 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹²⁾ Van Bijlert, M. and Ruttig, T., Almost Signed? The peace agreement with Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 21 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹³⁾ Guardian (The), Butcher of Kabul pardoned in Afghan peace deal, 22 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁴⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁵⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, In 16 years, 1st girls' school opens in Tagab district, 12 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban ban women from shopping in Kapisa's Tagab, 8 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴¹⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kapisa Province ⁽¹⁴¹⁹⁾:

Alasay	9	Mahmudi Raqi	10
Hisa-i-Awali Kohistan	4	Nijrab	40
Hisa-i-Duwumi Kohistan	4	Tagab	67
Koh Band	3		

According to UNAMA, between 1 January and 30 June 2017, 16 civilians were killed and 43 injured in Kapisa mainly by ground engagements but also by IED and targeted and deliberated killings ⁽¹⁴²⁰⁾.

During the reporting period, several clashes between security forces and AGEs occurred in the southern districts of Kapisa province. In October 2016, two Taliban militants were killed and a third wounded in a counterattack by security personnel in Tagab district, after the Taliban attacked security posts. According to a local resident, a civilian was injured during the Taliban attack on the security posts ⁽¹⁴²¹⁾.

In early January 2017, security forces launched a large clearing operation in Tagab and Nijrab districts, called ‘Ghubar 7’. According to government sources, dozens of AGEs were killed or wounded during this offensive. Many local residents were affected by the violence. According to local sources quoted by Tolo News, more than a thousand families in Tagab district were displaced due the ongoing operation and were in need of emergency assistance. Other local residents said three civilians sustained injuries when a mortar hit a civilian house in Tagab district during the operation. Security officials, however, rejected the claim. The Tagab-Surobi highway was reportedly blocked when fighting took place ⁽¹⁴²²⁾. According to a police spokesman, the operation in Tagab was ongoing in February 2017. He claimed that at least 27 villages of Tagab had been cleared of insurgents during the operation. ALP were deployed to the villages that were cleared ⁽¹⁴²³⁾.

In June 2017, eleven insurgents, including Taliban’s shadow governor for Kapisa, were reportedly killed in an air strike ⁽¹⁴²⁴⁾. In the same month, according to the Kapisa police chief, 22 Taliban fighters were killed and 14 wounded during a clash with the residents of Baba Khail village ⁽¹⁴²⁵⁾.

In September 2017, a religious council chief was killed by unknown gunmen in Kapisa ⁽¹⁴²⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁴¹⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁴²⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 insurgents killed in Nangarhar, Kapisa incidents, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Former jihadi commander killed in Kapisa blast, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Military operation ongoing against Taliban in Kapisa district, 6 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Forces, Taliban claim inflicting casualties on each other in Kapisa offensive, 7 January 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Four Taliban insurgents killed in Kapisa operation, 12 January 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Five insurgents killed in Kapisa operation, 19 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 53 insurgents eliminated in past 24 hours, claims MoD, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 insurgents killed, many injured in Tagab ambush, 14 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²⁴⁾ Tolo News, Taliban Shadow Governor for Kapisa Killed in Airstrike, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²⁵⁾ Tolo News, 11 Taliban Including Their Commanders Killed In Kapisa, 14 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²⁶⁾ RFE/RL, Gunmen Kill Chief Of Religious Council In Northeastern Afghanistan, 9 September 2017 ([url](#)); Bakhtar News, President Ghani Slams Terrorist Attack On Kapisa Provincial Ulema Council Chief, 11 September 2017 ([url](#)).

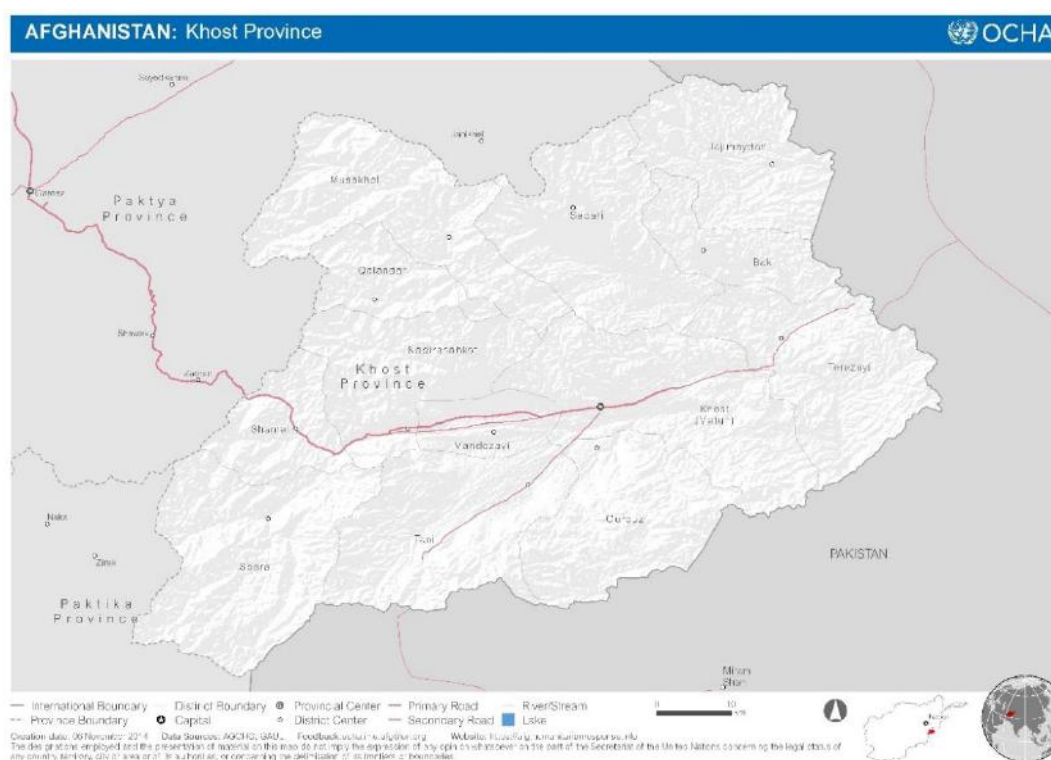
In the reported period, the use of explosives increased in Kapisa among AGEs. They were regularly injured or killed by their own IED blasts. Civilians were also victims of roadside mines and other devices ⁽¹⁴²⁷⁾.

Displacement

According to UNOCHA, between 1 January and 20 September 2017, a total of 2,847 persons from Kapisa were displaced due to conflict inside their own province (2,324), in Kabul (378), and Parwan (145). In Kapisa, the conflict induced displacements were recorded mainly in Tagab district ⁽¹⁴²⁸⁾.

2.18 Khost

General description of the province



Khost province is located in the southeastern part of Afghanistan, borders Paktia and Paktika provinces and has a border with Pakistan in the south and east ⁽¹⁴²⁹⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 574,582 ⁽¹⁴³⁰⁾. Khost province

⁽¹⁴²⁷⁾ KP, Deadly explosion rips through Taliban gathering in Kapisa, 11 September 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, car full of explosives seized in Kapisa, 5 September 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Explosives found in front of Kapisa university, 13 September 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 civilians injured in Kapisa explosion, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Roadside bomb kills 4 including civilians in Kapisa, 24 August 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Two children killed in Kapisa Roadside Mine Blast, 17 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2017 and 20 September 2017, 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴²⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Khost Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴³⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)); according to Office of the President of Afghanistan, Khost Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)), the province has 1.5 million inhabitants.

comprises 13 administrative units: the provincial capital Khost (Matun) and the districts Ismail Khil and Mandozi (Mandozayi), Nadir Shah Kot (Nadirshahkot), Spira (Spera), Dwa Manda Shamal (Shamal), Musa Khil (Musakhel), Qalandar, Tani, Gurbaz (Gurbuz), Ali Shir Tirizai (Terezayi), Bak, Yaqoobi Sabari (Sabari) and Jaji Maidan (Jajimaydan) ⁽¹⁴³¹⁾. The province was formed from parts of Paktya and Paktika in 1995 ⁽¹⁴³²⁾. In geographic terms, Khost is characterised by extended centralised arid and semi-arid plains (the Khost 'bowl') surrounded by rugged mountains. The province borders the tribal areas in Pakistan and shares cultural, commercial and political ties with Pakistan ⁽¹⁴³³⁾.

Khost is predominantly inhabited by Pashtuns ⁽¹⁴³⁴⁾, and there is a sizeable population of Pashtun (semi-)nomadic Kuchis ⁽¹⁴³⁵⁾. Prominent tribes are, among others, the Zadran, Mangal, Tani, Gurbuzi, Babakar Khel, Jaji, Sabari, Terezayi, Mandozayi, Moqbil and Ismael Khel ⁽¹⁴³⁶⁾. Small numbers of Tajiks and Hazaras are reported to live in Khost City alongside Pashtuns ⁽¹⁴³⁷⁾.

Economically, Khost predominantly depends on agriculture and livestock ⁽¹⁴³⁸⁾. According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 98 % of Khost's population live in rural areas and 55.8 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁴³⁹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Khost

As noted by an international organisation, the long and porous border makes Khost province of great strategic importance as many insurgents have found a safe haven across the border in Pakistan. The Haqqani network is named as the dominant insurgent actor in the province ⁽¹⁴⁴⁰⁾. According to an August 2017 UN Secretary-General report, there are 'individuals associated with the Al-Qaida core' active in Khost ⁽¹⁴⁴¹⁾, while a source noted in 2013 that it had never been a stronghold of the Taliban ⁽¹⁴⁴²⁾. Local tribal structure and tribal leaders are influential and the Pashtun tribal customary law (*Pashtunwali*) is a key institution for the population ⁽¹⁴⁴³⁾. The Tribal Analysis Center noted in 2013 that contemporary insecurity had weakened the tribal and elder system ⁽¹⁴⁴⁴⁾.

As an international organisation noted in September 2017, Qalandar district is reported to be completely under the control of insurgents, while Musakhel, Bak, Spera and Sabari districts

⁽¹⁴³¹⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Khost Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to UNOCHA, Khost Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴³²⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽¹⁴³³⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽¹⁴³⁴⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 5; Office of the President of Afghanistan, Khost Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴³⁵⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 9; The Liaison Office, Major Land Disputes and Land Titling Systems of Khost Province, October 2014 ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽¹⁴³⁶⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽¹⁴³⁷⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽¹⁴³⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost agro, livestock need to be developed on modern lines', 8 July 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴³⁹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 35-36.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁴¹⁾ UN Security Council, Twentieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁴⁴²⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽¹⁴⁴³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁴⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 5.

are described as insurgency strongholds and Terezayi, Tani and Gurbuz districts as having a weak government presence. In all districts there are reportedly shadow insurgent administrations ⁽¹⁴⁴⁵⁾. The Tribal Analysis Center mentions in 2013 that a conflict between the Mangal and Moqbil tribes was among other factors driven by lack of government presence in Nadirshahkot, Qalandar and Musakhel districts ⁽¹⁴⁴⁶⁾.

A special counter-insurgency force named the Khost Protection Force (KPF) is described by an US official as ‘one of the most effective elements fighting the Taliban’, that might have prevented the province from falling into the hands of the Haqqani network. A former KPF fighter states that the group is formally linked to the Afghan intelligence service, the NDS, but (as of 2015) was actually still working for the CIA ⁽¹⁴⁴⁷⁾. According to the website Afghan Biographies, KPF is controlled by CIA and NDS operatives from former military base Chapman next to Khost city. KPF patrols the border region to Pakistan’s Waziristan province, ‘an area so heavily populated by Taliban, the Haqqani Network, al Qaeda and other militant networks that it’s frequently targeted by CIA drone strikes’ ⁽¹⁴⁴⁸⁾. The KPF is estimated to have around 4,000 fighters and are accused of torture and extrajudicial killings ⁽¹⁴⁴⁹⁾.

According to Colonel Getz, former director of the NATO Special Operations Advisory Group, which mentors the Afghan Local Police (ALP), the ALP was folded in Khost because of command and control problems and because of political interference. Jaji Maidan district, however, has been selected to be one of the districts to contribute new ALP units ⁽¹⁴⁵⁰⁾.

According to an LWJ map based on an evaluation of Taliban’s claims of control, Qalandar district was under full Taliban control as of late March 2017 and Sabari district is described as being heavily contested ⁽¹⁴⁵¹⁾. According to a map published by the ISW, parts of Bak, Khost, Sabari, Jajimaydan, Mandozayi, and Terezayi districts are ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’, while most of Nadirshahkot, Spera, Shamal, Musakhel, Qalandar, Tani, and Gurbuz districts are reported as ‘low confidence Taliban support zones’ ⁽¹⁴⁵²⁾. The Taliban claim in a March 2017 article on their website that Qalandar district was under their control, while Khost city and the districts Dwa Manda Shamal, Tani, Jaji Maidan and Mandozi were under ‘enemy control’. They further claim that they have a 50 % control over Spera, Mestarbali, Lagan, Nadirshahkot and Musakhel, a 10 % control of Gurbuz, a 30 % control of Ali Shir Tirizai, a 70 % control of Sabari, a 40 % control of Bak, and a 20 % control of Babrak Tanha ⁽¹⁴⁵³⁾.

Recent security trends

⁽¹⁴⁴⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁶⁾ Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013 ([url](#)), p. 55.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁷⁾ Washington Post, CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015 ([url](#)); this recent article also mentions the KPF reportedly still being run by the CIA: Clark, K., More Militias? Part 1: Déjà vu double plus with the proposed ‘Afghan Territorial Army’, 21 September 2017 ([url](#)); see also Thomas Ruttig in: ACCORD, Dokumentation des Expertengesprächs mit Thomas Ruttig und Michael Daxner, June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁸⁾ Afghan Biographies, CIA Afghan counterterrorist forces, last modified 18 September 2017 ([url](#)); see also New York Times (The), Taliban Car Bomb Targeting Elite Afghan Force Kills at Least 12, 27 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁴⁹⁾ France24, CIA-backed Afghan militia targeted in deadly suicide car bomb, 27 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁰⁾ Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid and exist, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵¹⁾ LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists ‘Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen’, 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵²⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵³⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Khost province counted 483 security incidents ⁽¹⁴⁵⁴⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	9
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	162
Explosions	86
Security enforcement	214
Non-conflict related incidents	12
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	483

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Khost province ⁽¹⁴⁵⁵⁾:

Bak	38	Qalandar	8
Gurbuz	32	Sabari	56
Jaji Maydan	20	Shamal	2
Khost(Matun)	113	Spera	16
Mando Zayi	25	Tani	4
Musa Khel	57	Tere Zayi	80
Nadir Shah Kot	32		

UNAMA noted a total of 104 civilian casualties (22 deaths and 82 injured) during the first half of 2017 in Khost, a 58 % increase over the same period in 2016. Suicide/complex attacks constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by targeted/deliberate killings ⁽¹⁴⁵⁶⁾.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for three out of four suicide attacks documented by UNAMA during the first half of 2017. Two of these attacks were targeting the KPF and one attack an ANA base. The fourth attack also targeted the KPF. All four suicide attacks resulted in 35 civilian casualties (five deaths and 30 injured) ⁽¹⁴⁵⁷⁾. A district chief said on 17 March 2017 that a Taliban suicide car bombing in front of the military base in Sabari district killed one soldier and wounded several others ⁽¹⁴⁵⁸⁾. On 1 April 2017, three security forces were killed and six school children wounded after a suicide car bomb attack on a military convoy near a military base in Mandozayi district ⁽¹⁴⁵⁹⁾ which reportedly targeted the KPF ⁽¹⁴⁶⁰⁾. According to police sources, another Taliban suicide car bombing on 24 April 2017 killed five

⁽¹⁴⁵⁴⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁵⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁴⁵⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽¹⁴⁵⁸⁾ RFE/RL, One Soldier Killed As Taliban Attacks Army Base In Eastern Afghanistan, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁹⁾ Tolo News, Explosion Leaves One Dead In Khost, 1 April, 2017 ([url](#)); Xinhua News Agency, 5 killed in car bomb near military base in E. Afghan province, 24 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

people and wounded eight others at a security checkpoint outside Camp Chapman, a military base on the outskirts of Khost city ⁽¹⁴⁶¹⁾. Camp Chapman had already become a target of attacks against the KPF in 2015 and 2009 ⁽¹⁴⁶²⁾. UNAMA notes that one Taliban car bomb attack targeting the KPF took place on 27 May 2017 in Khost City, killing five civilian men and injuring seven others. It is estimated that at least eight KPF members were killed and three wounded in the attack ⁽¹⁴⁶³⁾. The attack was conducted at the beginning of Ramadan ⁽¹⁴⁶⁴⁾.

Other incidents in Khost province include an airstrike on 3 September 2016, killing at least 11 foreign insurgents in Speera District ⁽¹⁴⁶⁵⁾, an attack on a military air base by militants on 11 March 2017 ⁽¹⁴⁶⁶⁾, the killing of three Special Provincial Forces on 24 June 2017 when a comrade opened firing at them ⁽¹⁴⁶⁷⁾, the killing of a tribal elder on 26 June 2017 inside a mosque in the Alisher Tirizai district by unknown gunmen ⁽¹⁴⁶⁸⁾, and a coalition airstrike against Taliban militants in Musa Khil district on 4 August 2017 ⁽¹⁴⁶⁹⁾.

UNAMA notes that ISKP claimed responsibility for two attacks in Khost, one of them targeting the ANP in June 2017 and the other targeting a 'Shiite Sorcerer' in July 2017 ⁽¹⁴⁷⁰⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 161 individuals from Khost province displaced by conflict, with individuals displaced from Tani, Spera, Sabari, Terezayi and Musakhel districts ⁽¹⁴⁷¹⁾. In March 2017, UNOCHA notes that there was an increase in security incidents in Khost, with reports of 1,200 unverified individuals recently displaced ⁽¹⁴⁷²⁾. No individuals from Khost province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016 ⁽¹⁴⁷³⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁶¹⁾ Xinhua News Agency, 5 killed in car bomb near military base in E. Afghan province, 24 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶²⁾ New York Times (The), 25 Killed in Suicide Bombing Outside U.S. Base in Afghanistan, 12 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 40.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁴⁾ France24, CIA-backed Afghan militia targeted in deadly suicide car bomb, 27 May 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, At Least 12 Killed In Afghan Car Bombing, 27 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶⁵⁾ KP, 11 Foreign terrorists killed in airstrikes in Southeast of Afghanistan, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶⁶⁾ Reuters, Gunmen attack military airport in eastern Afghanistan, 11 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶⁷⁾ Pahwok Afghan News, 3 security personnel killed by comrade in Khost, 25 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost tribal elder gunned down in mosque, 26 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁶⁹⁾ Xinhua News Agency, 50 Taliban militants killed in E. Afghanistan airstrike, 5 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 49, footnote 183.

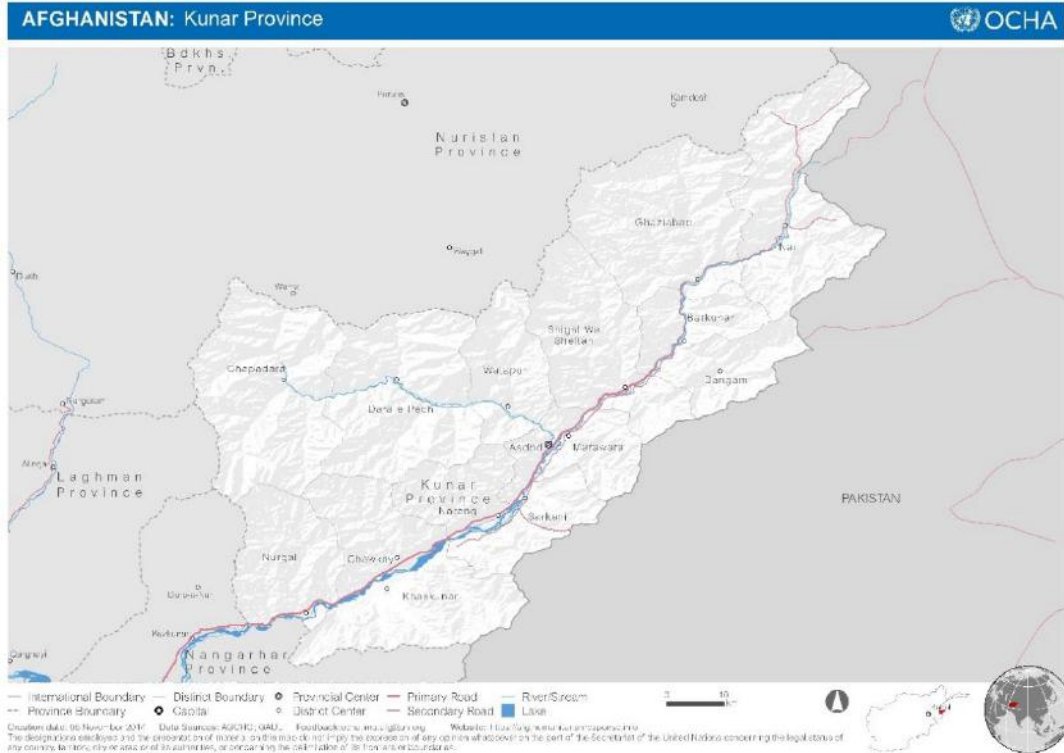
⁽¹⁴⁷¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 19 to 25 March 2017, 25 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽¹⁴⁷³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

2.19 Kunar

General description of the province



Kunar province is located in eastern Afghanistan. The province borders Nuristan, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces and has a border with Pakistan in the east ⁽¹⁴⁷⁴⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, Kunar has a population of 450,652 ⁽¹⁴⁷⁵⁾ though Afghan official sources stated the population is about 700,000 ⁽¹⁴⁷⁶⁾.

Kunar province comprises 15 administrative units: the provincial capital Assad Abad (Asadabad) and the districts Noor Gull (Nurgal), Khas Kunar (Khaskunar), Sawkay (Chawkay), Narang, Sarkano (Sarkani), Manawara (Marawara), Shigal (Shigal wa Sheltan), Asmar (Barkunar), Dangam, Ghazi Abad (Ghaziabad), Narri (Nari), Watapoor (Watapur), Manogay (Dara-e-Pech) and Chapa Dara (Chapadara) ⁽¹⁴⁷⁷⁾.

Kunar's population is primarily Pashtun, with a small number of Nuristani and other minorities ⁽¹⁴⁷⁸⁾. The Nuristani and Gavar settle in high mountain valleys ⁽¹⁴⁷⁹⁾. The Pashtun tribes include the Safi as the largest tribe in the area, the Tarkalanri, Mohmand, and Shinwari

⁽¹⁴⁷⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Kunar Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷⁶⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Kunar Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷⁷⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Kunar Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to, UNOCHA, Kunar Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)); compare also iMMAP, Kunar Province, 27 November 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁷⁸⁾ NPS, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d. ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017 mentions Nuristani and Gojar as minorities.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁹⁾ Rzehak, L., Ethnic groups and structures, In BFA Staatendokumentation (Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, COI Unit): AfPak Principals of the tribal and clan structure, 5 April 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 17, 19.

Pashtuns. These groups also have a presence at the Pakistani side of the border ⁽¹⁴⁸⁰⁾. The province is known for hosting a high number of Salafists ⁽¹⁴⁸¹⁾.

Almost 90 % of the area of Kunar is covered by mountains and the province is rich in timber and mineral resources; the population engages mainly in farming and animal husbandry ⁽¹⁴⁸²⁾. There are several mines of precious and semi-precious stones in the province ⁽¹⁴⁸³⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 96.9 % of Kunar's population live in rural areas and 61.3 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁴⁸⁴⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kunar

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes in a November 2016 report that Kunar has been one of the most contested provinces for years. There is a 170-kilometre-long border with the tribal areas in Pakistan, and various insurgent groups including Laskar-e Taiba and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan concentrate their activities in Kunar. The Taliban have a strong presence in the province, and there is also a training camp of al Qaeda. Foreign fighters, including Uzbeks, have joined the insurgency in the province ⁽¹⁴⁸⁵⁾. An international organisation noted in September 2017 that the security situation remained volatile, mentioning a permanent presence of numerous insurgent groups (particularly the Afghan Taliban, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), remnants of al Qaeda, Hezb-e-Islami, Lashkar-e-Taeba, and local Salafist groups) and regular infiltration of insurgents from Pakistan conducting hit-and-run attacks and fleeing back. There were cross-border shellings from Pakistan targeting the TTP in Dangam, Nari, Sirkani, Marawara and Khas Kunar. The international organisation also mentioned illegal armed groups, poor governance, and a limited ANSF presence in remote areas as key issues. Security incidents have been reported throughout the province, however, such incidents were particularly concentrated in border districts such as Nari, Dangam, Marawara and Chapadara districts and the Pech valley ⁽¹⁴⁸⁶⁾.

Kunar's provincial governor said in March 2017 that there were at least 15 terrorist organizations active in Kunar, among them ISKP, al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba ⁽¹⁴⁸⁷⁾. Reports to the UN Security Council noted in January 2017 that there were about 200 ISKP fighters based in the province ⁽¹⁴⁸⁸⁾, and in August 2017 that 'individuals associated with the al Qaeda core' are active in Kunar ⁽¹⁴⁸⁹⁾. The UN Secretary-General stated in September 2017 that ISKP

⁽¹⁴⁸⁰⁾ ISW, Regional Command East Overview, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁸¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁸²⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁸³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Eastern Kunar Province Introduction, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁸⁴⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 37-38.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁵⁾ Netherlands, MFA, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Afghanistan, 15 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 45.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁷⁾ Tolo News, Daesh, Al-Qaeda Among 15 Terror Groups in Kunar, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁸⁸⁾ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 January 2017 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁹⁾ UN Security Council, Twentieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2017/573], 7 August 2017 ([url](#)).

had consolidated its presence in the province ⁽¹⁴⁹⁰⁾. Also in September 2017, an international organisation noted intensifying mobilisation activities by ISKP which concentrates recruitment efforts on local Taliban groups and Salafist *madrassas* using their networks in Chapadara, Dara-e-Pech and Watapur districts ⁽¹⁴⁹¹⁾.

The Kunar police chief is quoted as saying in July 2017 that there were hundreds of IS militants in the province. They had started their activities in Chapadara district and maintain training centers in Batash area of Nari district. IS fighters have also appeared in Mazar Dara area of Nurgal district and in Watapur and Manogay districts. NATO has carried out 14 airstrikes on IS militants in the province between the end of March and the beginning of July 2017; the group was targeted in joint air and ground operations in Manogay, Chapadara and other parts of the province; hundreds of their fighters and commanders were killed ⁽¹⁴⁹²⁾.

As reported by the magazine *The Diplomat* in April 2017, there is a local chapter of Hezb-e Islami controlling the upper Shigal valley; the bodyguard of the local leader claimed that no army (neither the Soviets, the Taliban, the Americans nor the current Afghan government) had ever set foot into the area ⁽¹⁴⁹³⁾.

An international organisation stated in September 2017 that while all district administration centres are nominally controlled by the government, Taliban frequently attacked them (e.g. those of Ghaziabad, Watapur, Chapadara, Barkunar, Shigal and Dangam districts) ⁽¹⁴⁹⁴⁾. According to an LWJ map based on an evaluation of Taliban claims of control, in September 2017 Chapadara district was under full Taliban control and Ghaziabad, Nari, Dangam, Khaskunar, Sarkani, Marawara and Barkunar districts are described as being contested. Dara-e-Pech, Chawkay, Narang, Nurgal and Shigal wa Sheltan districts are described as 'unconfirmable Taliban claim' ⁽¹⁴⁹⁵⁾. According to a map published by the ISW in March 2017, northern parts of Ghaziabad district and some areas at the Pakistani border were 'Taliban control zones', while parts of Nari districts and some eastern parts of the province were 'high confidence Taliban support zones' and some areas in the southeast and in the northwest of the province were reported as 'low confidence Taliban support zones' ⁽¹⁴⁹⁶⁾.

The Taliban claimed in a March 2017 article on their website that they controlled 20 % of the provincial capital Asadabad, while 80 % was controlled by the government. They further claimed to control 80 % of the district areas of Marawara, Khas Kunar, Sarkano, Shigal, Dangam, Asmar, Nari, Nurgal, Sawkay, Narang, Watapur and Chapa Dara (Kandi), while the remaining territory of these districts including district centers are under government control ⁽¹⁴⁹⁷⁾.

As noted by Antonio Giustozzi in August 2017, the Taliban's Quetta Shura claimed authority over eastern Afghanistan, including Kunar province ⁽¹⁴⁹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁰⁾ UN Secretary-General, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, Report of the Secretary-General, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽¹⁴⁹¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, *Hundreds of Daesh rebels emerge in Kunar: Police chief*, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁹³⁾ *Diplomat* (The), *Afghan Jihad Frozen in Time? A visit to Hezb-i Islami in the field*, 25 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁹⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁵⁾ LWJ, *LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts*, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁹⁶⁾ ISW, *Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017*, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁹⁷⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), *Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate*, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁹⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A., *Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure*, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Kunar province counted 1,808 security incidents⁽¹⁴⁹⁹⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	44
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1617
Explosions	67
Security enforcement	58
Non-conflict related incidents	17
Other incidents	5
Total security incidents	1,808

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kunar province⁽¹⁵⁰⁰⁾:

Asadabad	37	Marawara	140
Bar Kunar	40	Narang	32
Chapa Dara	164	Nari	200
Chawkay	19	Nurgal	9
Dangam	128	Shaygal wa shiltan	81
Dara-I-Pech	160	Sirkanay	430
Ghaziabad	206	Wata Pur	124
Khas Kunar	38		

UNAMA noted a total of 100 civilian casualties (34 deaths and 66 injured) during the first six months of 2017 in Kunar, a 47 % decrease over the same period in 2016. Ground engagement constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by targeted/deliberate killings⁽¹⁵⁰¹⁾.

UNAMA recorded 13 civilian casualties (seven deaths and six injured) from cross-border shelling in Kunar province during the first six months of 2017. UNAMA mentions a cross-border shelling incident on 26 February 2017 that killed a boy and a girl at their home in Khas Kunar district. It further noted the displacement of more than 400 families and the destruction of at least 15 civilian homes due to cross-border shelling in Khas Kunar and Lalpur districts and the killing of a shepherd by Pakistan military forces near the border in Nari district⁽¹⁵⁰²⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁵⁰⁰⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁵⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁵⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

A woman and her daughter were killed in Dangam district on 31 October 2016, when artillery fired by the ANA in response to an Taliban attack hit a residential area ⁽¹⁵⁰³⁾. An air strike killed up to 23 Taliban in Shigal district on 7 September 2016 ⁽¹⁵⁰⁴⁾ and two drone strikes killed al Qaeda leader Faruq al-Qatani and his lieutenant Bilal al-Utubi on 23 October 2016 ⁽¹⁵⁰⁵⁾. Military sources report the killing of an IS member in Shigal district on 23 February 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁰⁶⁾ and the killing of Abdul Rahman, IS *emir* for Kunar province, and three other senior IS members in a strike in Pech Valley on 10 August 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁰⁷⁾.

UNAMA mentions the abduction of two local drivers from a main road in Bar Kunar district on 19 February 2017. The men were shot dead on 1 May 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁰⁸⁾. UNAMA recorded a suicide attack at a gathering of tribal elders in Asadabad district on 27 February 2017, which killed 14 civilians and injured 37 others, and an attack on the centre of Asadabad city during Independence Day celebrations on 18 August 2017 which killed three civilians and injured 53 others ⁽¹⁵⁰⁹⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 7,028 individuals from Kunar province displaced by conflict. During this period, Khaskunar district produced the highest number of displaced persons (2,967), followed by Sarkani (2,256) and Watapur (405) districts ⁽¹⁵¹⁰⁾. As reported by UNOCHA in August 2017, due to insecurity and intimidation by armed groups there was displacement from Dara-e-Pech ⁽¹⁵¹¹⁾ and several other districts in Kunar ⁽¹⁵¹²⁾. In March 2017, UNOCHA reported cross-border shelling on a daily basis leading to displacement ⁽¹⁵¹³⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016 1,361 individuals from Kunar province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA. During this period, Ghaziabad district produced the highest number of displaced persons (423), followed by Marawara (186), Watapur (148) and Dangam (138) districts ⁽¹⁵¹⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁰³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 53.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁴⁾ Bakhtar News, Taliban Local Commander Among 23 Insurgents Killed In Kunar, 7 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁰⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Pentagon Confirms Death Of Top Al-Qaeda Leader In Afghanistan, 5 November 2016 ([url](#))

⁽¹⁵⁰⁶⁾ Ministry of Defense, Press release Issuance number 430, 23 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁰⁷⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan IS Leader, Top Commanders Killed, U.S. Says, 13 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁰⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 43.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 53, 80.

⁽¹⁵¹⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵¹¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 21 to 27 August 2017, 27 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

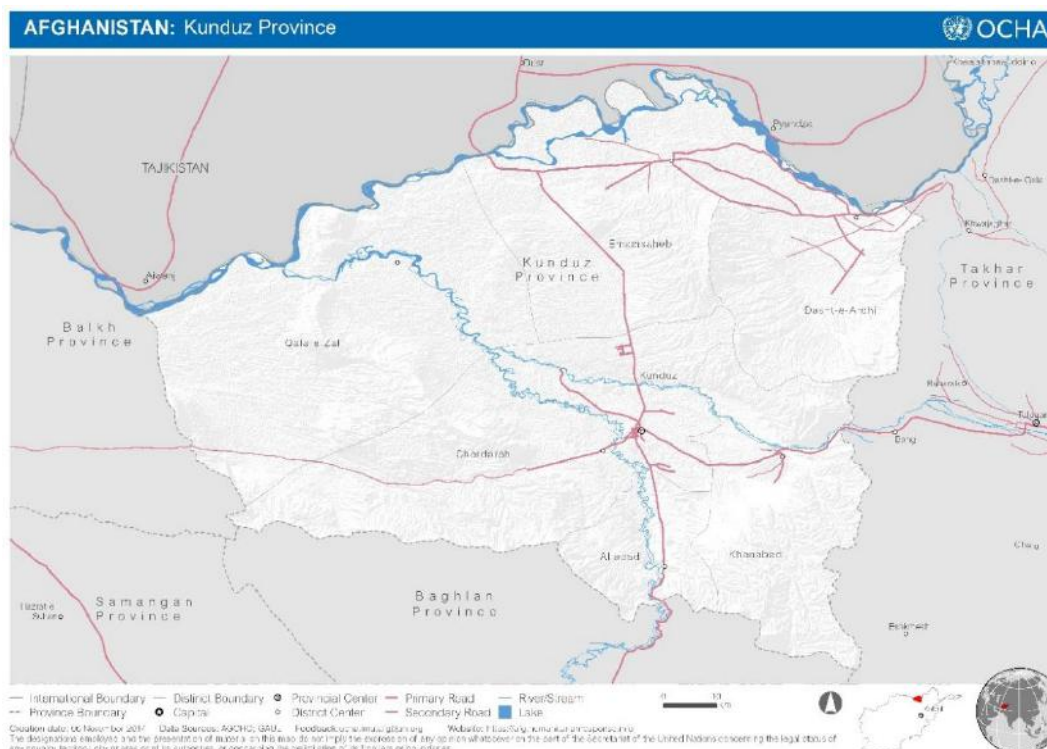
⁽¹⁵¹²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 14 to 20 August 2017, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 7 to 13 August 2017, 13 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 3 to 9 July 2017, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽¹⁵¹³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 19 to 25 March 2017, 25 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 12 to 18 March 2017, 18 March 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report | 26 February to 4 March 2017, 4 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵¹⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

2.20 Kunduz

General description of the province



Kunduz province is located in the northeast of the country. The province shares a border with Tajikistan to the north, and the province of Balkh to the west, Baghlan to the south, and Takhar to the east. Kunduz province comprises seven administrative units: the provincial capital Kunduz (including the area of Gor Tapa) and the districts Aliabad, Chahar Dara, Dashti Archi, Imam Sahib (including the area of Kalbad), Khanabad (including the area of Aqtash), and Qala-i-Zal⁽¹⁵¹⁵⁾. According to population estimates for the years 2017-2018, the province has 1,049,249 inhabitants, of which 331,517 live in Kunduz City⁽¹⁵¹⁶⁾.

The population of Kunduz is diverse, consisting of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kazakhs, Aimaqs, Arabs, Gujar, Baluch, Nuristani, Hazara, Kuchi and Hindu⁽¹⁵¹⁷⁾. The major ethnic groups are the Pashtuns (34%), which form the majority of population in most districts, Uzbeks (18%) and Tajiks (20% including Aimaqs and Arabs). The most significant minorities are Hazara (10%) and Turkmen (17%), the latter forming the majority of the population in Qala-i-Zal district. Uzbeks are concentrated in Imam Sahib district, comprising almost half of the population there. Kunduz is an economically important province, traditionally known as ‘the bread basket of Afghanistan’ because of its fertile agricultural land⁽¹⁵¹⁸⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and

⁽¹⁵¹⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Kunduz Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵¹⁶⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽¹⁵¹⁷⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Kunduz Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background of Kunduz Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵¹⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons; CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 ([url](#)).

2014, 74.9% of Kunduz's population live in rural areas and 44.0% of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work and 21.4% in services ⁽¹⁵¹⁹⁾).

Background on the conflict and actors in Kunduz

Kunduz is a strategically important province, serving as the gateway to Central Asia through its border crossing to Tajikistan at Shir Khan Bandar ⁽¹⁵²⁰⁾. Kunduz has served as the main battlefield for Taliban in northern Afghanistan ⁽¹⁵²¹⁾, and it has been a focal point of Taliban operations since 2015. The Taliban has put significant effort and resources in its efforts to take control of the province ⁽¹⁵²²⁾.

Kunduz was the last major city to be held by the Taliban before it was overthrown by the US-backed Northern Alliance in November 2001 ⁽¹⁵²³⁾. Kunduz was also the first provincial capital in Afghanistan that was captured by the insurgents since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Kunduz City remains the only provincial capital that the Taliban has been able to capture and hold ⁽¹⁵²⁴⁾. The Taliban entered Kunduz City twice since 2015, fully controlling it for two weeks in the autumn of 2015, and seizing half the city for more than a week in October of 2016 ⁽¹⁵²⁵⁾. During the fighting, the main routes leading to Kunduz City from the districts were blocked ⁽¹⁵²⁶⁾.

Imam Sahib is the second largest district in Kunduz after the provincial capital. Uzbeks are the biggest ethnicity, comprising approximately 45 % of the population, with Pashtuns and Tajiks both estimated to form 25 % each ⁽¹⁵²⁷⁾. Khanabad was described in 2013 as a rural district that had been a site of considerable insurgency for several years. Khanabad was believed to have the largest concentration of militia groups in Kunduz province in 2013 with local warlords or other non-state actors controlling most areas of the district ⁽¹⁵²⁸⁾. The unofficial district of Aqtash, officially part of Khanabad, was reported in 2013 to be a site of numerous armed groups with no government presence ⁽¹⁵²⁹⁾. The area reportedly came under Taliban control in July 2017 ⁽¹⁵³⁰⁾. The area of Gor Tapa, officially part of Kunduz City, was described in October 2016 as a Taliban stronghold controlled by the insurgents since April 2015 ⁽¹⁵³¹⁾. Chahar Dara was described in 2013 as a small, mostly rural district that had been a hub of insurgent activity since Taliban and other armed opposition groups began to re-emerge in Kunduz in 2008-2009. The majority of the district's population was reported to be Pashtun. Much of the district has been under Taliban control for years ⁽¹⁵³²⁾. In Chahar Dara district, the local governance is described by the district governor as 'paralysed'. The district governor estimated that the Taliban controlled 80 % of the district in August 2017 and were heavily active in the area ⁽¹⁵³³⁾.

⁽¹⁵¹⁹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016, [\(url\)](#), pp. 39-40.

⁽¹⁵²⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁵²¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Retake Villages In Northern Province, 10 June 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵²²⁾ LWJ, Taliban back on the offensive in Kunduz, 9 May 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵²³⁾ CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵²⁴⁾ Sweden, Lifos, Lägesanalys: Afghanistan, June 2017 [\(url\)](#), p. 5.

⁽¹⁵²⁵⁾ LWJ, Taliban back on the offensive in Kunduz, 9 May 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵²⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 [\(url\)](#), p. 41.

⁽¹⁵²⁷⁾ CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵²⁸⁾ CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵²⁹⁾ CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵³⁰⁾ Ali, O. New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordinated, still well-placed to threaten the city, 9 July 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵³¹⁾ Ali O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, 12 October 2016 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵³²⁾ CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 [\(url\)](#).

⁽¹⁵³³⁾ Tolo News, Local Government in Chahardara District of Kunduz 'Paralysed', 7 August 2017 [\(url\)](#).

Aliabad was described in 2013 as a rural and the least populated district in Kunduz, Pashtuns comprising half of the population, Tajiks one third, Hazaras 12 %, and Uzbeks just under 10 %⁽¹⁵³⁴⁾. Dashti Archi is described as a hub for insurgency. The district has changed hands between the Afghan security forces and Taliban several times between 2015 and 2017⁽¹⁵³⁵⁾.

According to LWJ's assessment, all districts in Kunduz are contested between the Taliban and government forces⁽¹⁵³⁶⁾. According to HRW in 2016, the Taliban had recruited more than 100 children to fight in their ranks in Kunduz⁽¹⁵³⁷⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Kunduz Province counted 488 security incidents⁽¹⁵³⁸⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	34
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	314
Explosions	37
Security enforcement	67
Non-conflict related incidents	29
Other incidents	7
Total security incidents	488

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kunduz Province⁽¹⁵³⁹⁾:

Aliabad	12	Khanabad	95
Chahar Dara	44	Kunduz	237
Dashti Archi	44	Qala-i-Zal	27
Imam Sahib	29		

Kunduz is regarded by UNOCHA as a 'high-combat area' with a high intensity of security incidents⁽¹⁵⁴⁰⁾. All Kunduz's districts are insecure and volatile⁽¹⁵⁴¹⁾. Kunduz City, one of Afghanistan's largest cities, is one of the provincial capitals in Afghanistan facing the most intense pressure from the Taliban⁽¹⁵⁴²⁾. During the first six months of 2017, UNOCHA classified Qala-i-Zal and Dashti Archi districts among areas in Afghanistan where the conflict was most severe in terms of the number of incidents, the amount of civilian casualties and the numbers

⁽¹⁵³⁴⁾ CPAU, Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz Province, 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵³⁵⁾ Ali, O. New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordinated, still well-placed to threaten the city, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵³⁶⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵³⁷⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵³⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁵³⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁵⁴⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁴¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁵⁴²⁾ Sweden, Lifos, Lägesanalys: Afghanistan, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

of IDPs originating from the area ⁽¹⁵⁴³⁾. UNOCHA prioritised the districts of Chahar Dara, Imam Sahib and Qala-i-Zal as areas of integrated protection programming meant for high combat intensity areas as well as populations under armed opposition group control ⁽¹⁵⁴⁴⁾.

UNAMA noted a total of 190 civilian casualties (39 deaths and 151 injured) during the first half of 2017 in Kunduz, a seven % decrease over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by aerial attacks and targeted/deliberate killings. Kunduz had the ninth highest number of civilian casualties of the Afghan provinces ⁽¹⁵⁴⁵⁾.

Aerial operations caused 45 civilian casualties (15 deaths and 30 injured) in Kunduz during the first half of 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁴⁶⁾. On the night of 2 to 3 November 2016, a series of airstrikes carried out against residences in Boz Qandahari village, Kunduz district, killed 20 children in addition to six women and six men ⁽¹⁵⁴⁷⁾.

The Taliban launched a coordinated attack against Kunduz City in the beginning of October 2016, taking over the city's central square and targeting symbolically important administrative buildings. The Afghan security forces managed to repel the attack before the Taliban took full control of the city and regained control of most of the city the following day ⁽¹⁵⁴⁸⁾. The Taliban still spent 11 days in the city from 3 October 2016, where they were reportedly forcing people from their homes in an attempt to create large numbers of internally displaced people. The insurgents also sheltered in the houses of civilians, putting them at risk ⁽¹⁵⁴⁹⁾.

Kunduz saw an intensification of the conflict again in May 2017 after the Taliban's spring offensive, launched on 28 April 2017. The Taliban assaulted Kunduz City again in May 2017 when Taliban fighters attempted to capture Imam Sahib district administrative centre, causing the displacement of 1,000 families from the district. A number of civilians were caught in the crossfire between government forces and Taliban, and were unable to leave the area during the fighting. There were 72 unconfirmed civilian casualties reported (16 killed and 56 injured) as a result of explosive weapons, such as mortars and air strikes ⁽¹⁵⁵⁰⁾. The Taliban captured Qala-i-Zal district on 6 May 2017 and held it for 10 days before the government forces recaptured the district centre ⁽¹⁵⁵¹⁾. Qala-i-Zal was again under Taliban control at the end of August 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁵²⁾.

On 25 May 2017, the Taliban fired multiple mortar rounds into Kunduz City to target international military forces residing in a guesthouse near the Provincial Governor's office in the vicinity of at least three schools and various shops and businesses. At least one mortar round landed close to a boys' school, killing a nine-year-old-boy and injuring 12 other civilians ⁽¹⁵⁵³⁾. In June 2017 there was intense fighting in the district of Imam Sahib when Afghan

⁽¹⁵⁴³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 52.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 26.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁸⁾ New York Times (The), Emboldened Taliban Overrun Parts of Kunduz and Taunt Afghan Forces, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)); Ali, O., The Taliban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, 12 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁴⁹⁾ IISS Armed Conflict Database, Afghanistan Human Security, October 2016, available by subscription ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁰⁾ UNHCR, Global Protection Cluster, The Protection situation in the North and North East Update, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Captures District Near Kunduz, 6 May 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Retake District Center Near Kunduz, Government Says, 16 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵²⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 67, 1-31 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 41.

security forces were recapturing areas previously taken over by the Taliban. According to the provincial police chief, there were foreign militants such as Pakistanis, Chechens, Tajiks and Uzbeks fighting in the Taliban ranks ⁽¹⁵⁵⁴⁾.

In early July 2017, the Taliban carried out several simultaneous attacks against the Afghan security forces in Kunduz. One of the attacks targeted several government security check points along the highway in Khanabad district. The attacks were less coordinated than in the previous years and they were repelled. On 1 July 2017, Taliban tried to overrun Dashti Archi district centre in a large-scale attack which was pushed back after several hours by Afghan Air Force support. Taliban fighters also blocked the Kunduz-Baghlan highway for four days after their attack in Aliabad district ⁽¹⁵⁵⁵⁾. The Taliban reportedly has checkpoints along the Kunduz-Takhar highway and has attempted to block the road ⁽¹⁵⁵⁶⁾.

According to Tolo News, Kunduz has seen an increase in targeted killings of military-related persons as well as civilians. The head of the provincial council, quoted by Tolo News in July 2017, said there had been 19 recent incidents in Kunduz City ⁽¹⁵⁵⁷⁾. The province lacks telecommunication services during the night because of Taliban activity ⁽¹⁵⁵⁸⁾. As of August 2017, the Taliban has reportedly remained active in Kunduz suburbs ⁽¹⁵⁵⁹⁾. Several high-ranking Taliban commanders have been killed in Kunduz during the year. Most notably, Mullah Abdul Salam, the previous shadow governor of Kunduz who led the two Taliban attacks against Kunduz city, was killed in an airstrike on 26 February 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁶⁰⁾. On 11 March 2017, the heads of the Taliban's military and finance commissions, Qari Dost Mohammad and Mullah Niaz Mohammad, were killed along with four other Taliban militants in Dashti Archi district ⁽¹⁵⁶¹⁾.

According to Pajhwok News Agency, Kunduz had the eighth highest number of casualties among Afghan provinces during August 2016 to July 2017: 1,034 civilians killed and injured in total ⁽¹⁵⁶²⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 141,580 individuals from Kunduz province who were displaced by conflict. This was by far the highest number of IDPs in Afghanistan: 141,049 were displaced from Kunduz, 154 from Khanabad, 140 from Qala-i-Zal, 137 from Chahar Dara, 51 from Dashti Archi, and 49 from Imam Sahib. Almost 120,000 people were displaced in October 2017 when Taliban almost took over Kunduz City. Most of them were displaced inside Kunduz City or in Taloqan, the capital of the neighboring province Takhar. Large amounts went to Kabul and Faizabad, Badakhshan as well ⁽¹⁵⁶³⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁵⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Retake Villages In Northern Province, 10 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁵⁾ Ali, O. New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordinated, still well-placed to threaten the city, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁶⁾ Ali, O. New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordinated, still well-placed to threaten the city, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁷⁾ Tolo News, Kunduz Sees Sharp Increase in 'Targeted Shootings', 6 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁸⁾ Tolo News, Mobile Phone Service Blackout Has Kunduz Residents Fuming, 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁹⁾ Tolo News, Taliban Still Active in Suburbs of Kunduz City, 6 August 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶⁰⁾ LWJ, Taliban back on the offensive in Kunduz, 9 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶¹⁾ IISS Armed Conflict Database, Afghanistan Military & Security, March 2017 available by subscription ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 24,500 people lost lives, suffered injuries in last 12 months, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 02 October 2017 ([url](#)).

Between 1 January 2017 and 30 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 31,360 individuals from Kunduz province displaced by conflict, which was the highest number in Afghanistan after Nangarhar:

- 15,604 from Kunduz;
- 4,872 from Qala-i-Zal;
- 3,652 from Imam Sahib;
- 3,328 from Khanabad;
- 1,569 from Dashti Archi;
- 1,530 from Chahar Dara, and 805 from Aliabad.

Of these, 23,627 were displaced to Kunduz City, 1,834 to Khanabad, more than 1,000 to Baharak and other localities in Takhar province, and 546 to Qala-i-Zal ⁽¹⁵⁶⁴⁾.

Some 3,000 people were displaced due to fighting in several locations in Kunduz in the beginning of July 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁶⁵⁾. More than 5,000 people were reported to be displaced from Chahar Dara district due to intensified military operations in the beginning of September 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁶⁶⁾.

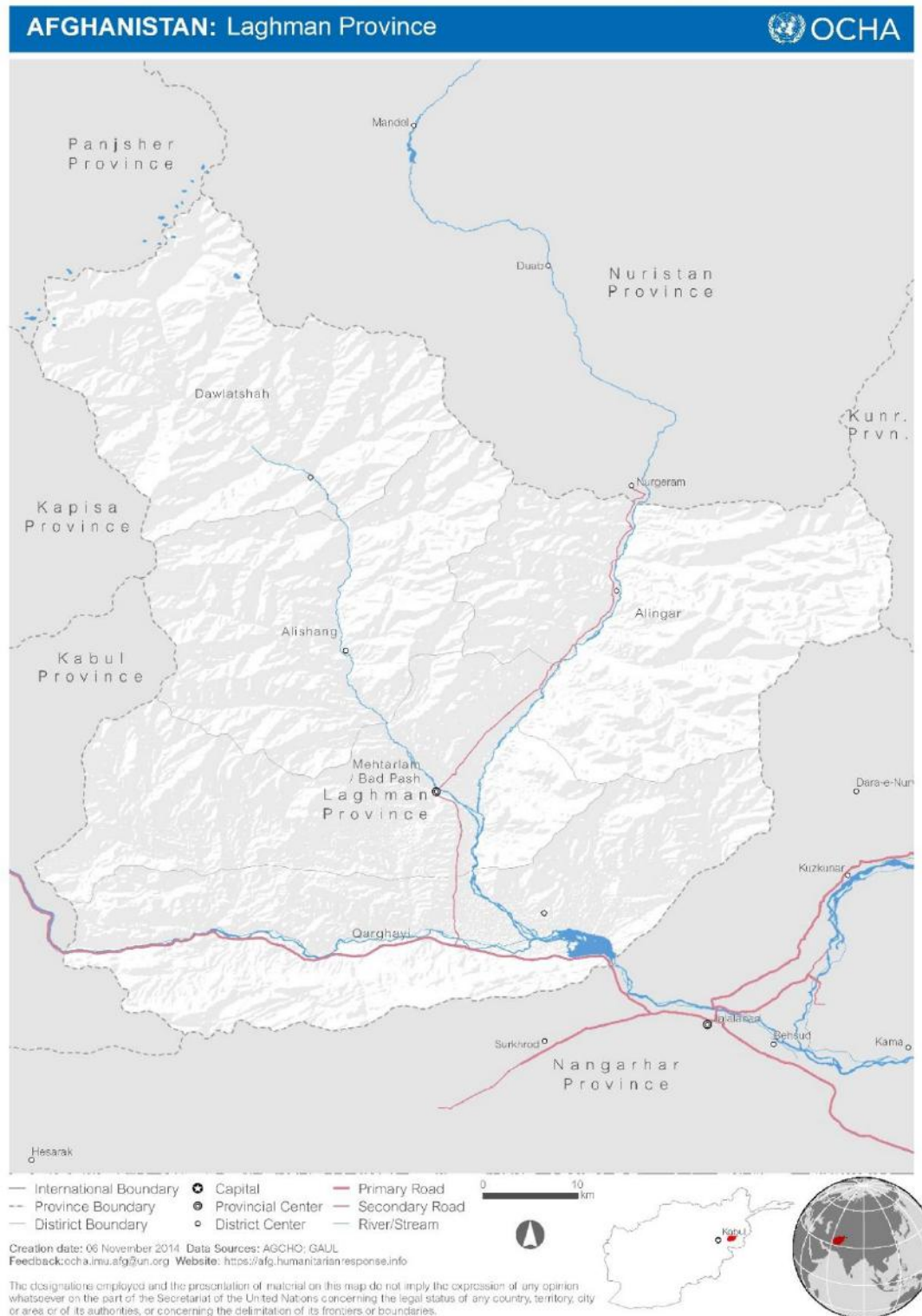
⁽¹⁵⁶⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 02 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶⁵⁾ UNDPI, Afghanistan: U.N. supporting population fleeing clashes near Kunduz city, 6 July 2017 ([url](#)), Ali, O., New Taliban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordinated, still well-placed to threaten the city, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, Week of 4 - 10 September 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, Week of 28 August - 3 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.21 Laghman

General description of the province



Laghman province is located in the eastern part of Afghanistan and shares borders with Nangarhar in the south and east, Kunar in the northeast, Nuristan in the north, Panjshir in the

northwest, and Kabul and Kapisa provinces in the west ⁽¹⁵⁶⁷⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 445,588 ⁽¹⁵⁶⁸⁾. The Office of the President of Afghanistan meanwhile states that Laghman has about 800,000 inhabitants ⁽¹⁵⁶⁹⁾.

According to UNOCHA, Laghman consists of five districts: Mehtar Lam (Mehtarlam/Mihtarlam, also referred to as Bad Pash/Bad Pukh), Alingar, Alishang (Alishing, Ali Shing), Dawlatshah (Dawlat Shah) and Qarghayi (Qargayi) ⁽¹⁵⁷⁰⁾. However, other sources indicate that Laghman has six districts, counting Mehtar Lam and Bad Pash as two districts ⁽¹⁵⁷¹⁾. Mehtar Lam is the provincial capital ⁽¹⁵⁷²⁾.

An international organisation notes that some 90 % of Laghman's population is Pashtun ⁽¹⁵⁷³⁾. Pajhwok Afghan News however states that Pashtuns account for 58 % of the population ⁽¹⁵⁷⁴⁾. There is a large ethnic Pashayi population in Dawlat Shah and Bad Pukh districts and there are smaller communities of Nuristanis in the northern part of Alingar district, as well as Tajik residents in Qargayi and Mehtarlam/Bad Pash districts ⁽¹⁵⁷⁵⁾. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Tajiks and Pashayis comprise 21 % each ⁽¹⁵⁷⁶⁾. As noted by ICG, Mehtarlam/Bad Pash, Alishang, Dawlat Shah and the Garouch area are dominated by Pashtuns ⁽¹⁵⁷⁷⁾.

A majority of the residents of Laghman work in agriculture. Other sectors include forestry and mineral resources ⁽¹⁵⁷⁸⁾. The province lies on the Kabul-Jalalabad-Torkham highway, which passes through Qargayi district ⁽¹⁵⁷⁹⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 98.9 % of Laghman's population live in rural areas and 59.8 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁵⁸⁰⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Laghman

According to ISW, Laghman is a province where the Taliban have traditionally maintained a high level of influence ⁽¹⁵⁸¹⁾. Similarly, Landinfo refers to Laghman (like its neighbouring provinces Kunar, Nuristan and Nangarhar) as a province where the Taliban and other insurgent groups have kept a strong foothold over many years. The source goes on to say that conflicts between the *mujahideen* groups such as Jamiaat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami resulted in many of their members joining the Taliban. Also, local disgruntlement over the presence of international troops and their allies has helped the Taliban to become established in the

⁽¹⁵⁶⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Laghman Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsene Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶⁹⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Laghman Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Laghman Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷¹⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Laghman Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷⁷⁾ ICG, The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, 27 June 2011 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁷⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁰⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 41-42.

⁽¹⁵⁸¹⁾ ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security, March 2015 ([url](#)), p. 17.

province ⁽¹⁵⁸²⁾. According to an international aid worker and media reports, quoted by Landinfo, most insurgent activity in Laghman is linked to the Taliban ⁽¹⁵⁸³⁾. ICG reported in 2011 that an estimated 23 small groups of Taliban fighters were operating in the province, with each group comprising ten to 30 armed men. In Laghman's Pashtun-majority districts, the Taliban 'exploit tensions, focusing their recruiting efforts on tribal and political factionalism, alienation as a result of international operations, and local government rivalries' ⁽¹⁵⁸⁴⁾.

Landinfo could not find any information on activities in Laghman that were linked to Hizb-e-Islami in 2016, although the group was previously reported to have a strong presence in the province. According to a local journalist interviewed by Landinfo, ISKP planned to gain a foothold in Laghman from where it aimed to infiltrate Surobi district of Kabul province as well as Kabul city. An international organisation noted in a response to Landinfo that there had been attempts by IS to recruit members in Laghman and that an IS flag was spotted outside Mehtarlam city in July 2016. However, the same source noted that IS was much weaker in 2016 than in 2015. In contrast to these accounts, the aid worker (who is described as being well-informed on Laghman) and a diplomatic source who is referred to as having a good knowledge of the IS group could not confirm that the group in fact had a presence in the province ⁽¹⁵⁸⁵⁾.

As in other provinces, the authorities have mainly concentrated their resources on safeguarding provincial capital (Mehtarlam city), district centres, the main road from Kabul to Jalalabad that passes through Qargayi district, and roads to and from Mehtarlam city including those from Mehtarlam to Alishang and Alingar districts ⁽¹⁵⁸⁶⁾. According to an international organisation responding to Landinfo, Qargayi was the only district that remained under government control in 2016, with all other districts in Laghman being 'contested', meaning that the security forces had a presence in the district centres but faced resistance in smaller or larger parts of the territory outside the centres. In 2016, insurgents carried out attacks on all district centres except the Qargayi district centre, including the provincial capital. According to an international source and an aid worker interviewed by Landinfo, maintaining road safety was a particular problem, as there were regular attacks on ANP and ALP checkpoints and patrols along roads from Mehtarlam city and those north of Alishang and Alingar districts. In addition to attacks against ANSF, insurgents have also set up illegal roadblocks on these roads ⁽¹⁵⁸⁷⁾. The above-mentioned aid worker noted that as far as Mehtarlam district was concerned, the government only controlled Mehtarlam city, and not necessarily the rest of the district. At the same time, insurgents were capable of conducting sporadic attacks on the city ⁽¹⁵⁸⁸⁾.

According to a LWJ map, Alingar and Alishang districts are described as being contested as of September 2017 and Dawlat Shah district is described as 'unconfirmable Taliban claim' ⁽¹⁵⁸⁹⁾. According to a map published by ISW, most of Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district and smaller parts of Alingar and Alishang districts are 'high confidence Taliban support zones' ⁽¹⁵⁹⁰⁾.

The Taliban, in a March 2017 article published on their website, claimed that they controlled 95 % of the territory of Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district, while the district center was controlled by the government. They further claimed a 70 % control of the district areas of Dawlat Shah,

⁽¹⁵⁸²⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 2-3

⁽¹⁵⁸³⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁴⁾ ICG, The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, 27 June 2011 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁵⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 3-4.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁶⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁷⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁸⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Laghman, 25 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁹⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁹⁰⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

Alishang and Alingar, while the remaining areas of these districts including their district centers were under government control. According to the Taliban, 80 % of Mehtarlam/Bad Pash and Qarghayi districts were under government control ⁽¹⁵⁹¹⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Laghman province counted 1,226 security incidents ⁽¹⁵⁹²⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	67
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1048
Explosions	50
Security enforcement	48
Non-conflict related incidents	12
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	1,226

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Laghman province ⁽¹⁵⁹³⁾:

Alingar	114	Mihtarlam	681
Alishing	340	Qarghayi	55
Dawlat Shah	36		

As reported by KP in March 2017, ‘anti-government armed militant groups have increased their insurgency in some parts of the province during the recent years’ ⁽¹⁵⁹⁴⁾. The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) notes that as of end of 2016, fighting between ANSF and AGEs was ongoing in Laghman ⁽¹⁵⁹⁵⁾. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) noted that in late 2016, there was an increased presence of opposition groups in the province ⁽¹⁵⁹⁶⁾. Tolo News reported that in early March 2017, AGEs ‘fought for two days and nights’ to take control of Mehtarlam city before being pushed back by security forces ⁽¹⁵⁹⁷⁾.

UNAMA documented a total of 210 civilian casualties (53 deaths and 157 injured) during the first half of 2017 in Laghman, a 58 % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground fighting between ANSF and AGEs, which caused 156 civilian casualties during the first six months of

⁽¹⁵⁹¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁹²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁵⁹³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁵⁹⁴⁾ KP, Prominent religious cleric killed in East of Afghanistan, 22 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁹⁵⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 88.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁶⁾ DRC, Monthly Migration Movements: Afghan Displacement Summary, January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁹⁷⁾ Tolo News, Taliban Attempting To 'Establish Military Bases' In Laghman, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

2017 (compared to 70 in the first half of 2016) ⁽¹⁵⁹⁸⁾, constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by IEDs ⁽¹⁵⁹⁹⁾. In Mehterlam district, the number of civilian casualties from ground engagements in the first half of 2017 (125 persons, including 28 deaths and 97 injured) was more than three times the number of civilian casualties documented during the first half of 2016 ⁽¹⁶⁰⁰⁾. According to the same source, Laghman also saw an increase in civilian casualties over the year 2016 ⁽¹⁶⁰¹⁾.

In November 2016, a mortar launched by AGEs targeting an ALP checkpoint hit a residential area in Mehterlam city during a wedding, killing a child and injuring five other civilian persons including three children ⁽¹⁶⁰²⁾. In December 2016, a spokesman for the Laghman provincial governor stated that a roadside bomb killed at least two civilians in Mehterlam, with no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident ⁽¹⁶⁰³⁾. UNAMA reported that in February 2017, AGEs in Alingar district 'shot and killed a civilian man and injured a civilian man and 13-year-old boy after opening fire on their vehicle in an attempt to kill two ANA officers, who survived' ⁽¹⁶⁰⁴⁾. Also in February 2017, a spokesman for the governor of Laghman province stated that eleven members of a family were killed and three others wounded as unknown armed people carried out a grenade attack on their home in Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district ⁽¹⁶⁰⁵⁾. In February 2017, two pupils were killed and seven others injured as a rocket hit a school in the Basram area of Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district ⁽¹⁶⁰⁶⁾. KP reported that in March 2017, a religious cleric was shot by gunmen and later succumbed to his injuries, with no group claiming responsibility for the incident ⁽¹⁶⁰⁷⁾.

As for other types of incidents resulting in civilian victims or casualties, UNAMA noted that in November 2016, AGEs in Alishang district abducted a man and two boys, assuming that their family members worked for the government. The three were later released after negotiations through elders ⁽¹⁶⁰⁸⁾. The same source notes that five children were killed in a detonation of unexploded ordnance in May 2017 ⁽¹⁶⁰⁹⁾. Furthermore, UNAMA stated that during the first half of 2017, two civilians were killed and another seven injured as ALP responded to attacks by AGEs ⁽¹⁶¹⁰⁾.

Fighting between AGEs and ANSF or international forces resulting in deaths or injuries on either side have been reported, amongst others, in Alishang and Alingar districts in November

⁽¹⁵⁹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 24.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 25.

⁽¹⁶⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 49.

⁽¹⁶⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 53.

⁽¹⁶⁰³⁾ RFE/RL, Roadside Bomb Kills At Least Two Civilians In Eastern Afghanistan, 25 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁰⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 42.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Grenade Attack On Afghan Home Kills 11 Members Family, 20 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁰⁶⁾ Tolo News, Two Students Killed As Rocket Hits School In Laghman, 26 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁰⁷⁾ KP, Prominent religious cleric killed in East of Afghanistan, 22 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁰⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 53.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

⁽¹⁶¹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 59.

2016 ⁽¹⁶¹¹⁾, Alishang district in late December 2016 ⁽¹⁶¹²⁾, Mehterlam in early March 2017 ⁽¹⁶¹³⁾, and in Alishang district in March 2017 ⁽¹⁶¹⁴⁾, April ⁽¹⁶¹⁵⁾, July ⁽¹⁶¹⁶⁾ and August 2017 ⁽¹⁶¹⁷⁾.

Between June to August 2017, AGEs in Laghman forced a number of health facilities in Laghman to close down temporarily 'in an attempt to coerce non-governmental organisations that are running the facilities to improve service delivery for their combatants' ⁽¹⁶¹⁸⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 3,337 individuals from Laghman province displaced by conflict. During this period, 330 persons were displaced from Alingar district, 610 from Alishang district, 70 from Dawlatshah district, and 2,327 from Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district ⁽¹⁶¹⁹⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016 1,222 individuals from Laghman province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA. During this period, 234 persons were displaced from Alingar district, 97 from Alishang district, 98 from Dawlatshah district, 774 from Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district, and 19 from Qarghayi district ⁽¹⁶²⁰⁾.

⁽¹⁶¹¹⁾ KP, 15 militants killed, 5 wounded in Laghman airstrikes: MoD, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹²⁾ Tolo News, 11 Insurgents Killed In Laghman and Zabul Operations, 29 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹³⁾ Tolo News, ANSF Deal Major Blow to Taliban in Laghman, 20 Fighters Killed, 2 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹⁴⁾ KP, Key Taliban group leader Abdul Wali killed in Laghman province, 13 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹⁵⁾ KP, Clashes among the Taliban and Afghan forces in Laghman province, 11 April 2017 ([url](#)); KP, 7 Taliban militants killed in Afghan Air Force strike in Laghman, 12 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹⁶⁾ KP, Taliban and civilians suffer casualties in Laghman clashes in East of Afghanistan, 11 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶¹⁷⁾ KP, Taliban leaders among 8 killed in US drone strike in Laghman province, 11 August 2017 ([url](#)).

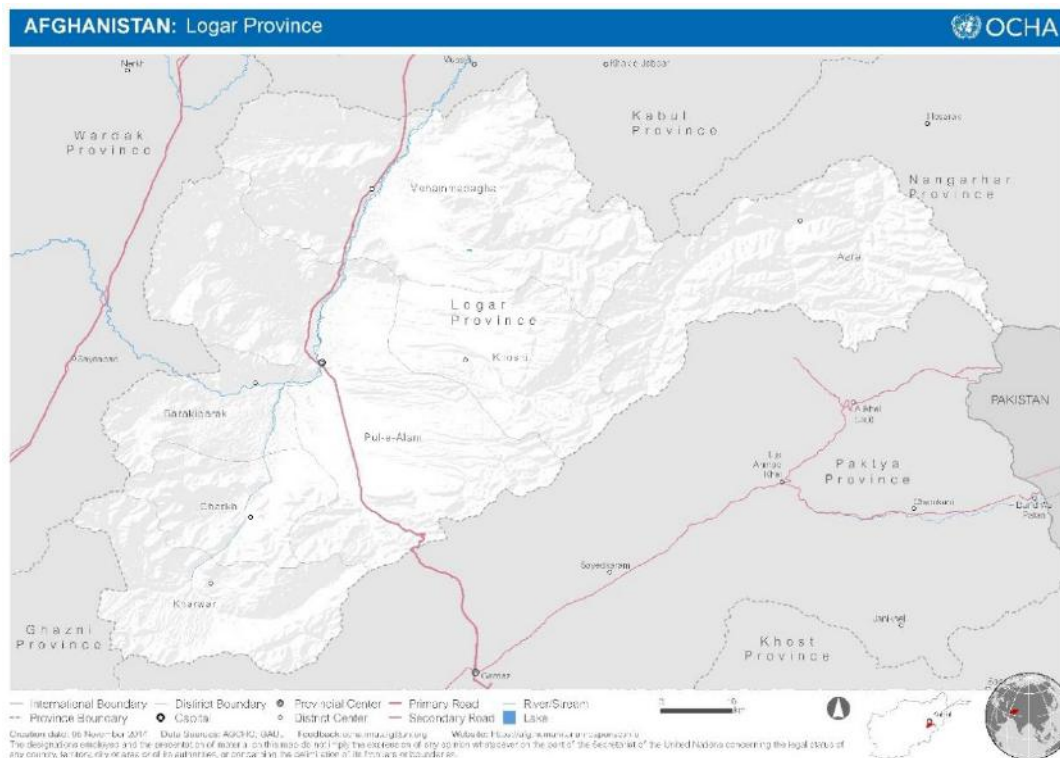
⁽¹⁶¹⁸⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽¹⁶¹⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶²⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

2.22 Logar

General description of the province



Logar province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is surrounded by Nangarhar, Paktya, Kabul, Wardak and Ghazni provinces ⁽¹⁶²¹⁾. The province is divided into seven administrative units: Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar, Khoshi, Mohammad Agha, and the provincial capital Poli Alam ⁽¹⁶²²⁾. Logar is estimated to have 405,109 inhabitants, of which 111,679 live in the provincial capital Poli Alam ⁽¹⁶²³⁾. According to an international organisation, the province is 70% Pashtun and 30% Tajik. Tajiks constitute 75% of the population in Charkh district, 50% in Khoshi district, 40% in Baraki Barak, and 20-25% in Mohammad Agha and Poli Alam districts. Kharwar and Azra districts are homogenous Pashtun districts ⁽¹⁶²⁴⁾. There is reportedly a small percentage of Hazaras in Khoshi and Poli Alam districts, and Kuchi nomads can be found in Poli Alam and Kharwar districts ⁽¹⁶²⁵⁾.

Agriculture and farming are a major source of income for 90 per cent of the population in the province ⁽¹⁶²⁶⁾. Cultivated land is concentrated in the fertile western half of the province, and the province is best known for producing maize, yogurt and wool. An advantage to Logar is its close access to Kabul markets ⁽¹⁶²⁷⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 97.5 % of Logar's population live

⁽¹⁶²¹⁾ UNOCHA, Logar Province: Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶²²⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Logar, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶²³⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)) p. 9.

⁽¹⁶²⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶²⁵⁾ NPS, Logar Provincial Overview, March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶²⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶²⁷⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Logar, n.d. ([url](#)).

in rural areas and 36.8 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work and 29.9 % in services ⁽¹⁶²⁸⁾.

The main road connecting Kabul with Gardez in Paktya runs through this province. The transport infrastructure in Logar is quite developed, with more than three quarters of roads open for traffic in all seasons. However, in a small part of the province (5 %) there are no roads at all ⁽¹⁶²⁹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Logar

Logar province's conflict situation is described as one of the most volatile and kinetic in the central region and constitutes an 'insurgents' highway' from Pakistan to Kabul, through a poorly guarded border in the vicinity of Azra district. Historically, the insurgency appeared in Logar in 2005, operating in Kharwar, Charkh and Baraki Barak districts. Later, the insurgency spread throughout the province though these three districts remain the most affected by Taliban, with ties to neighbouring movements in Ghazni, Paktya and Wardak ⁽¹⁶³⁰⁾.

According to a report by the AAN in 2014, the situation in Logar started deteriorating in 2011 when targeted killings and kidnappings of local influential elders, family members of government employees, and provincial peace council members became more common. The districts of Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar and Mohammad Agha were described as the areas worst hit by the insurgency in Logar. Mohammad Agha, only 23 kilometres outside Kabul city's limits on the Kabul-Gardez highway, is described as a key strategic area due to its location not only near the capital but also the provinces of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Khost, Wardak and Ghazni ⁽¹⁶³¹⁾.

According to a report by RFE/RL in August 2017, the Taliban is reported to have a heavy presence in Logar ⁽¹⁶³²⁾. According to LWJ assessment, Kharwar, Charkh and Azra districts are almost entirely under Taliban control ⁽¹⁶³³⁾. Most parts of the three districts already fell under the Taliban in late 2014 ⁽¹⁶³⁴⁾. As noted by Dr. Antonio Giustozzi in August 2017, the Taliban's Miran Shah Shura, based in North Waziristan region in Pakistan and composed exclusively of Haqqani network members, has authority in Logar province ⁽¹⁶³⁵⁾.

According to provincial representatives interviewed by Pajhwok News Agency in June 2017, the Taliban controlled more than half of the territory in Logar and had established checkpoints on the Kabul-Gardez highway searching people and vehicles. According to a provincial council member, the security situation had deteriorated in 2017 and foreign militants had been seen in the province besides local Taliban ⁽¹⁶³⁶⁾. Kharwar, a mountainous district, was among the first ones in Central Afghanistan where the Taliban groups started to reorganise in 2005. Already in 2008 the Taliban reportedly had full control of the district ⁽¹⁶³⁷⁾. According to officials in Azra district only four villages and the district centre were under the control of the

⁽¹⁶²⁸⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 43-44.

⁽¹⁶²⁹⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Logar, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶³¹⁾ Ali, O. The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³²⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Civilians Reportedly Killed After Attack On Taliban-Occupied House, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³³⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³⁴⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³⁵⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽¹⁶³⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 50pc of Logar being controlled by Taliban, 26 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³⁷⁾ Elias, M.O.T., The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul: Logar and Wardak, in: Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, 2009. pp. 45-46, 52.

government in July 2017. All of the district's four roads have been closed to traffic for the past 13 years. Besides insecurity, Azra is reported to suffer from the lack of healthcare services ⁽¹⁶³⁸⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Logar Province counted 215 security incidents ⁽¹⁶³⁹⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	19
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	131
Explosions	29
Security enforcement	31
Non-conflict related incidents	5
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	215

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Logar Province ⁽¹⁶⁴⁰⁾:

Azra	3	Khushi	4
Baraki Barak	54	Muhammad Agha	48
Charkh	38	Puli Alam	61
Kharwar	7		

UNAMA noted a total of 60 civilian casualties (27 deaths and 33 injured) during the first half of 2017 in Logar, a 54 % decrease over the same period in 2016. IED attacks and targeted/deliberate killings constituted the leading causes for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by ground engagements ⁽¹⁶⁴¹⁾.

On 15 December 2016, armed men shot dead a local journalist working for Mili Paygham Radio in Mohammad Agha district as he travelled home from his office. On two previous occasions, the victim reported receiving death threats by phone from AGE operating in the area who instructed him not to broadcast the voices of women or any advertisements related to ANSF. The Taliban publically denied involvement in the incident ⁽¹⁶⁴²⁾. AGE shot to death the deputy of the Logar provincial *Ulema shura* on 26 May 2017 as he walked to morning prayers in Poli Alam ⁽¹⁶⁴³⁾. Tolo News reported the assassination ⁽¹⁶⁴³⁾ of the head of Logar's anti-crime unit on 17

⁽¹⁶³⁸⁾ Tolo News, Logar Soldiers Criticize Lack Of Ammunition, 21 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁶⁴⁰⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁶⁴¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁶⁴²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 40.

⁽¹⁶⁴³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.46-47.

June 2017 ⁽¹⁶⁴⁴⁾. On 23 June 2017 in Mohammad Agha district, AGE shot into a mosque, killing a local influential elder and member of the district *shura* and another civilian man, and injuring two civilian men ⁽¹⁶⁴⁵⁾.

The Taliban stoned to death a couple they charged of adultery in Mohammad Agha district in April 2017 ⁽¹⁶⁴⁶⁾. On 19 May 2017, 11 members of the same family were killed and three injured in an IED explosion in Mohammad Agha when their vehicle rolled over a landmine ⁽¹⁶⁴⁷⁾. There have also been threats and one attack against schools in Mohammad Agha and Poli Alam districts ⁽¹⁶⁴⁸⁾.

The Taliban attacked the district centre of Charkh on 1 September 2016. The Taliban has also repeatedly attacked Baraki Barak district ⁽¹⁶⁴⁹⁾. There were heavy clashes in Baraki Barak over the control of the district again in the end of August 2017. The Taliban attacked the district centre on 26 August 2017 ⁽¹⁶⁵⁰⁾. According to local officials, at least 11 civilians were killed and 16 wounded on 30 August 2017 when a NATO helicopter attacked a house where Taliban insurgents had taken shelter against the wishes of the residents. The attack happened in Dashti Bari area near the provincial capital Poli Alam ⁽¹⁶⁵¹⁾.

The main road from Kabul to Gardez was reported in 2016 to be controlled by the Afghan security forces three days per week and the rest of the time by the Taliban ⁽¹⁶⁵²⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 1,469 individuals from Logar province displaced by conflict: 775 from Baraki Barak, 428 from Charkh, and 224 from Khoshi. 952 individuals from Logar were displaced to Poli Alam, 371 to Mohammad Agha, 104 to Kabul and 42 to Ghazni ⁽¹⁶⁵³⁾.

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 827 individuals from Logar province displaced by conflict: 504 from Baraki Barak, 252 from Charkh, 56 from Khoshi, and 15 from Kharwar. Almost all of them were displaced to the provincial capital Poli Alam ⁽¹⁶⁵⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁴⁾ Tolo News, Head of Logar's Anti-Crime Unit Gunned Down, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁴⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.46.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Stone Logar Couple to Death on Adultery Charge, 17 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁴⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.36.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁸⁾ Tolo News, Insecurity: Closure of 2 Logar schools affects 1,600 students, 24 August 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Girl's School Torched in Logar Province, 18 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁴⁹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Logar, 22 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, Week of 28 August - 3 September 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 67, 1-31 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Civilians Reportedly Killed After Attack On Taliban-Occupied House, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

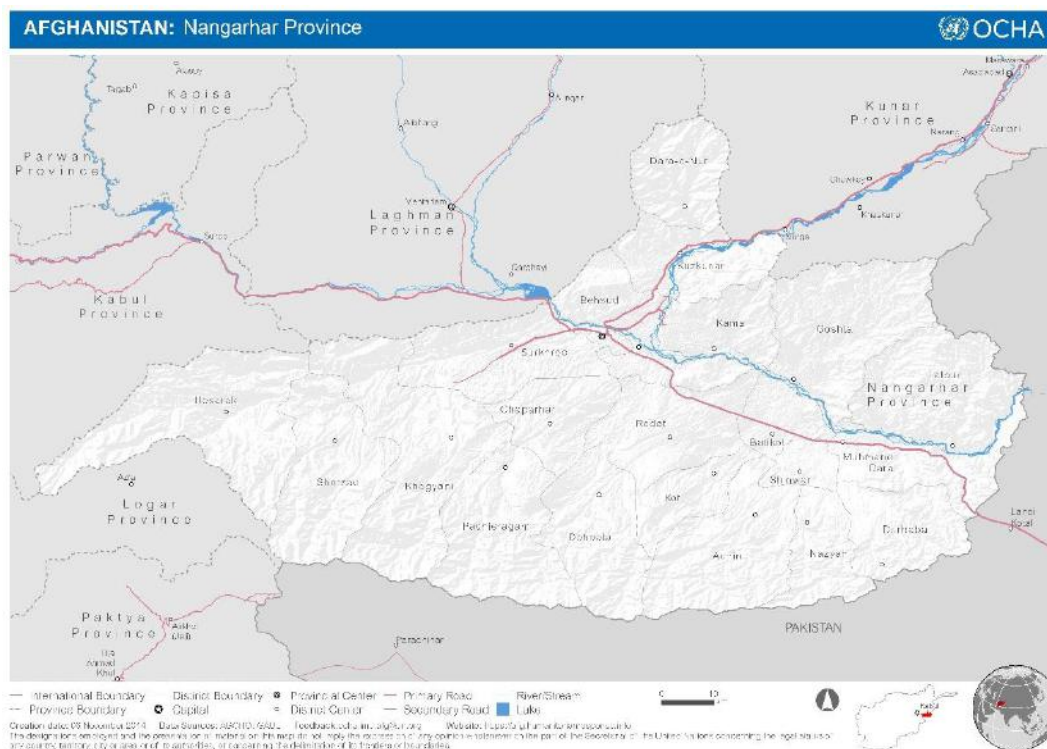
⁽¹⁶⁵²⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Logar, 22 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 02 October 2017 ([url](#)).

2.23 Nangarhar

General description of the province



Nangarhar province is located in eastern Afghanistan and has borders with Kunar, Laghman, Kabul, Logar and Paktya provinces and borders Pakistan in the east and south ⁽¹⁶⁵⁵⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 1,517,388 ⁽¹⁶⁵⁶⁾.

Nangarhar province comprises 22 administrative units: the provincial capital Jalalabad and the districts Ghani Khil (also referred to as Shinwar), Sherzad, Rodat, Kama, Surkhrod, Khogyani, Hesarak (Hesarak), Pachiragam (Pachir Wa Agam), Deh Bala (Deh Balah), Acheen (Achin), Nazyan, Mohmand Dara (Muhmand Dara), Batikot, Kot, Goshta, Behsood (Behsud), Kuz Kunar (Kuzkunar), Dara e Noor (Dara-e-Nur), Lalpora (Lalpur), Dur Baba (Durbaba), and Chaparhar ⁽¹⁶⁵⁷⁾. According to an international aid worker with long experience in Afghanistan, Deh Balah is also called Haska Mina ⁽¹⁶⁵⁸⁾. Pajhwok Afghan News lists Spingghar as an additional district ⁽¹⁶⁵⁹⁾, AREU notes that the government ‘divided Achin into two districts, Achin and Spinghar’ and that both districts ‘have their district centres in Kahi’ ⁽¹⁶⁶⁰⁾.

Over half of Nangarhar’s territory is mountainous, while the remaining parts are flat or semi-mountainous ⁽¹⁶⁶¹⁾. The population is mainly Pashtun, with small communities of Pashayee living in Dara-e-Nur and Khewa districts, and small numbers of Arabs and Sikhs residing in

⁽¹⁶⁵⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Nangarhar Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵⁷⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Nangarhar Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to UNOCHA, Nangarhar Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁸⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetsituasjonen i provinsen Nangarhar, 13 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nangarhar, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁶⁰⁾ AREU, The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s continued decline into insurgency, violence and widespread drug production, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 2, footnote 4.

⁽¹⁶⁶¹⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Nangarhar Province, Nangarhar Province, n. d. ([url](#)).

Jalalabad city. Among the Pashtuns, there are three dominant tribes: Shinwari, Mohmand and Khogyani ⁽¹⁶⁶²⁾. The languages spoken are Pashto and Dari ⁽¹⁶⁶³⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 85.1 % of Nangarhar's population live in rural areas and 39.2 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁶⁶⁴⁾.

Referring to reports by IOM and UNHCR, Fazal Muzhary of the AAN notes that over 600,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan during 2016 (in previous years the numbers were less than 100,000, except in 2012). Most of the recent returnees settled in various districts of Nangarhar province. According to IOM, one in five inhabitants of Nangarhar is a returnee. This surge in population numbers has 'put a strain on government services' in areas such as healthcare and education ⁽¹⁶⁶⁵⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Nangarhar

According to an email response from an international organisation, '[t]he political landscape in Nangarhar province is dominated by the influence of powerbrokers, particularly former jihadi commanders' ⁽¹⁶⁶⁶⁾. AREU noted in 2014 that formal and informal political parties in Nangarhar have roots going back to alliances forged during the Soviet occupation and the civil war ⁽¹⁶⁶⁷⁾. While more than forty political parties are officially registered in the province, only a few of them have political influence ⁽¹⁶⁶⁸⁾. According to the 2014 AREU report, the most powerful political factions included Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA), Hezb-e Islami Khaless and Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan ⁽¹⁶⁶⁹⁾. Indeed, Nangarhar (and the eastern region as a whole) is described as a traditional HIA stronghold ⁽¹⁶⁷⁰⁾, and following the September 2016 peace deal between the government and HIA, several high-ranking members of HIA arrived in Nangarhar from Pakistan in late 2016 ⁽¹⁶⁷¹⁾. As AREU notes in 2014, other political factions, such as Dawat-e Islami Afghanistan and Afghan Millat, enjoy 'modest' levels of support ⁽¹⁶⁷²⁾. Meanwhile, the international organisation states that '[a]s a result of the entrenched tribal structure, political parties play a secondary role in the political dynamics of Nangarhar province' ⁽¹⁶⁷³⁾.

According to a 2016 paper by Borhan Osman of the AAN, the ANSF only have a 'nominal presence in the district centres' of Nangarhar. In the southern and south-eastern districts of

⁽¹⁶⁶²⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶⁶³⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Nangarhar Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁶⁴⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 45-46.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁵⁾ Muzhary, F., Resettling Nearly Half a Million Afghans in Nangarhar: The consequences of the mass return of refugees, 12 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁶⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁷⁾ AREU, Politics and Governance in Afghanistan: the Case of Nangarhar Province, June 2014 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁹⁾ AREU, Politics and Governance in Afghanistan: the Case of Nangarhar Province, June 2014 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁰⁾ Ruttig, T., Hekmatyar taken off UN sanctions list: Paving the way for his return – and Hezb-e Islami's reunification?, 11 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷¹⁾ Ruttig, T., Hekmatyar taken off UN sanctions list: Paving the way for his return – and Hezb-e Islami's reunification?, 11 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, First group of senior HIA members arrives, 7 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷²⁾ AREU, Politics and Governance in Afghanistan: the Case of Nangarhar Province, June 2014 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽¹⁶⁷³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

the province, government control has been nearly absent. However, unlike in other parts of Afghanistan, this void was not filled by the Taliban due to the fragmented nature of the insurgency in these districts (see below) ⁽¹⁶⁷⁴⁾. According to Afghanistan scholar DR. Antonio Giustozzi, the Taliban's Peshawar Shura (which recognises the main Taliban shura, the Quetta Shura) claims authority over Nangarhar, although the Shura of the North (which does not recognise the Quetta Shura and its shadow governors, leaders and courts) is expanding its activities into Nangarhar ⁽¹⁶⁷⁵⁾.

As Borhan Osman of the AAN notes in September 2016, the southern and south-eastern districts saw an increasing fragmentation of the insurgency since 2007 and particularly since 2012, with Taliban shadow governors struggling to control their combatants and impose clear chains of command. Indeed, 13 domestic and foreign non-state armed groups have been active in the province during the last years, including the mainstream Taliban, HIA, Salafi groups, Al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), Lashkar-e Islam and Ansar ul-Islam. To a much larger extent than in other provinces, fighters engaged in criminal activities including 'unexplained killings' of ordinary residents, murders of local elders and kidnapping for ransom. Between 2011 and 2014, Nangarhar had the highest number of violent crimes in the country. Thus, unlike elsewhere, the Taliban have failed to impose a rule functioning as an alternative to the state authorities, allowing the ISKP group to gain a foothold in these districts where it found a number of small armed groups from they were able to recruit" ⁽¹⁶⁷⁶⁾.

According to a February 2017 BBC article, Nangarhar became the centre of ISKP activities both due to its proximity to Pakistan's tribal areas, where the group's top leaders hailed from, and the presence of followers of Salafi or Wahhabi interpretations of Islam similar to those of the IS group ⁽¹⁶⁷⁷⁾. According to Osman, ISKP's presence in Nangarhar peaked in summer 2015 when it became the most influential insurgent group in a number of districts of the province (Achin, Kot, Nazyan, Batikot, Deh Balah, Khogyani, Sherzad, Pachiragam and Chaparhar), although it never succeeded in capturing any district centres. Since then, Taliban counter-attacks and US air strikes have reduced the territory under ISKP control to four districts by late 2015, with areas previously under ISKP control usually falling into Taliban hands ⁽¹⁶⁷⁸⁾. Throughout 2016 and up to March 2017, ISKP appeared to have firm hold of Achin, Kot and Nazyan districts in south-east Nangarhar and Deh Bala district in the southwestern part of the province ⁽¹⁶⁷⁹⁾. ISKP captured the Tora Bora area of Pachiragam district in June 2017 ⁽¹⁶⁸⁰⁾. The area was retaken by ANSF later the same month ⁽¹⁶⁸¹⁾. In April 2017, US and Afghan forces launched an offensive called 'Operation Hamza', heavily attacking ISKP both in Nangarhar and Kunar. While the US military claimed in May 2017 that US and Afghan forces had killed 750 ISKP fighters, thereby reducing both the group's territory and strength by two-thirds ⁽¹⁶⁸²⁾, Osman noted in May 2017 that southern Nangarhar, especially Achin and Deh Bala districts, remain the areas in Afghanistan where ISKP is 'most entrenched'. The Mamand Valley of Achin district has become the group's command base, with the nearby Pekha Valley (east of the Achin district centre) the second most important area in strategic terms ⁽¹⁶⁸³⁾. According to a September 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General, ISKP 'succeeded in re-establishing operational capacity in areas of Nangarhar province that previously had been cleared by

⁽¹⁶⁷⁴⁾ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, 27 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷⁵⁾ Giustozzi, Antonio, Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 6-7.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁶⁾ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, 27 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷⁷⁾ BBC News, IS in Afghanistan: How successful has the group been?, 25 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷⁸⁾ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷⁹⁾ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Reports: IS Fighters Capture Tora Bora In Eastern Afghanistan, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Recapture Tora Bora Hideout From Islamic State, 21 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸²⁾ RFE/RL, U.S. Military Says 750 IS-Linked Fighters Killed In Afghanistan Since Early March, 19 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸³⁾ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017 ([url](#)).

Afghan security forces’⁽¹⁶⁸⁴⁾. A July 2017 Tolo News article claims that ISKP is active in six districts of Nangarhar⁽¹⁶⁸⁵⁾.

According to a September 2017 LWJ map based on an evaluation of Taliban claims of control, Lalpur, Batikot, Hesarak, Khogyani and Sherzad districts are described as being contested⁽¹⁶⁸⁶⁾. According to a map published by ISW, some parts of Sherzad and Khogyani districts are ‘Taliban control zones’ while much of Hesarak, Sherzad, Khogyani, Surkh Rod, Chaparkar, Pachiragam, Lal Pur and Goshta are described as ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’. Further ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’ are shown in Achin, Deh Bala districts and west of Jalalabad⁽¹⁶⁸⁷⁾. In a March 2017 article published on their Voice of Jihad website, the Taliban claim that 95 % of Hesarak and Sherzad districts were under their control, while district centers were under government control. Surkh Rod, Chaparhar, Pachiragam, Mohmand Dara and Ghani Khel districts are half under Taliban control and half under government control. The Taliban further claim that 75 % of Khogyani, Bati Kot and Lalpura districts are under their control, while the government controls 75 % of Rodat and Behsud districts. Taliban guerilla operations were carried out in Kama, Khewa, Dara Nur, Gwashta and Dur Baba. Deh Bala, Kot, Spin Ghar, Achin and Naziyan districts are 25 % under Taliban control, 30 % under government control, the rest of the districts are under the control of ‘miscellaneous bandits’⁽¹⁶⁸⁸⁾.

A Landinfo report of October 2016 gives the following overview of the general security situation in the province:

‘Insurgents carry out sporadic attacks in the provincial capital Jalalabad and along the main road from Kabul to the border crossing into Pakistan at Torkham. There is a relatively high presence of Afghan security forces in these areas, and the most common insurgent tactic is the use of IEDs (improvised explosive device), suicide attacks and smaller attacks. Fighting over extended periods of time is rare. In the southern districts bordering Pakistan, however, the authorities have only symbolic presence. Here there are reports of pressure and attacks on district centers and government institutions, extended battles between parties, and the use of IEDs by insurgent groups. Outside district centers, the situation is complex and in constant change. In the districts north of the main road between Kabul and Torkham, few security incidents are generally reported, including in district centers’⁽¹⁶⁸⁹⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Nangarhar province counted 2,393 security incidents⁽¹⁶⁹⁰⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	143
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1397

⁽¹⁶⁸⁴⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)), p.5.

⁽¹⁶⁸⁵⁾ Tolo News, Nangarhar Residents Claim Foreign Airstrike Targeted Civilians, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁶⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁷⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment: November 23, 2016-March 15, 2017, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁸⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Nangarhar, 13 October 2016 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁰⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Explosions	198
Security enforcement	454
Non-conflict related incidents	188
Other incidents	13
Total security incidents	2,393

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Nangarhar province ⁽¹⁶⁹¹⁾:

Achin	233	Khogyani	154
Bati Kot	219	Kot	60
Bihsud	134	Kuz Kunar	17
Chaparhar	154	Lal Pur	75
Dara-I-Nur	8	Muhmand Dara	105
Dih Bala	152	Nazyan	55
Dur Baba	26	Pachir Wa Agam	190
Goshta	17	Rodat	101
Hisarak	156	Sherzad	29
Jalalabad	135	Shinwar	160
Kama	30	Surkh Rod	183

In autumn 2016, sources described Nangarhar province as ‘volatile’ ⁽¹⁶⁹²⁾ or ‘insecure’ ⁽¹⁶⁹³⁾. UNAMA noted a total of 377 civilian casualties (132 deaths and 245 injured) during the first six months of 2017 in Nangarhar, a 7 % decrease over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by targeted / deliberate killings ⁽¹⁶⁹⁴⁾. During the first half of 2017, UNAMA documented 133 civilian casualties from ground engagements (31 deaths and 102 injured), an increase from 93 civilian casualties (24 deaths and 69 injured) during the first six months of 2016 ⁽¹⁶⁹⁵⁾. For example, two civilians and two police were killed as AGEs attacked a police checkpoint in Behsud district in late March 2017 ⁽¹⁶⁹⁶⁾.

According to UNAMA, the number of civilian casualties attributed to ISKP during the first half of 2017 (72 civilian casualties, including 37 deaths and 35 injured) was 41 % lower in comparison to the first half of 2016. These attacks were reported to have occurred either in Jalalabad city or in areas contested or controlled by ISKP. Furthermore, 26 of the 37 attacks attributed to ISKP in Nangarhar were directed against civilians or civilian objects, with ISKP targeting former Taliban members, tribal elders and persons suspected of providing

⁽¹⁶⁹¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁶⁹²⁾ Diplomat (The), 2016 Fighting Season in Afghanistan: Taliban Target Senior Ranks, 13 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁹³⁾ 1 TV News, Nangarhar governor, Saleem Kunduzi, resigns, 2 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 24.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁶⁾ 1 TV News, Civilians, police killed in Nangarhar attack, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

‘intelligence to the government’⁽¹⁶⁹⁷⁾. This included the beheading of two civilians in March 2017 in Achin district who were accused of providing information to the government that resulted in an air strike that killed members of ISKP. In other cases, civilians were killed or injured as ISKP attacked the ANSF. For example, in November 2016, IEDs targeting ANP officers in Jalalabad City killed five civilians and injured 32 others. One ANSF member was killed and three others were injured in the same incident⁽¹⁶⁹⁸⁾. Another IED explosion killed six civilians in Achin district and injured five others in June 2017⁽¹⁶⁹⁹⁾.

During the first half of 2017, UNAMA attributed eleven cases of abduction resulting in seven civilian casualties (six deaths and one injured) as well as the abduction of 70 civilians to Daesh/ISKP activities in Nangarhar⁽¹⁷⁰⁰⁾. For example, in January 2017 more than a dozen teaching staff at a religious school in Nangarhar were reportedly abducted by ISKP fighters⁽¹⁷⁰¹⁾. The Taliban launched an attack on the house of two off-duty ALP members in Bati Kot district in March 2017, abducting one of the officers along with his two sons. The officer was killed, while the sons were released⁽¹⁷⁰²⁾.

Further incidents attributed to AGE resulting in civilian deaths or injuries included a suicide attack on the Jalalabad home of an MP in August 2017⁽¹⁷⁰³⁾, the death of a tribal elder in an IED explosion in late July 2017⁽¹⁷⁰⁴⁾, an attack by unidentified gunmen inside a mosque in Chaparhar district in July 2017 leaving three people dead⁽¹⁷⁰⁵⁾, a mortar shell fired by AGEs in Ghani Khil district in July 2017 that left 14 people injured⁽¹⁷⁰⁶⁾, the killing of a judge in June 2017 in an IED explosion in Jalalabad city⁽¹⁷⁰⁷⁾, the killing of two religious scholars in April 2017 by unspecified perpetrators in Khogyani district⁽¹⁷⁰⁸⁾, a suicide bombing targeting the house of a government official in Surkh Rod district in March 2017 killing one relative⁽¹⁷⁰⁹⁾, and a suicide bombing at a gathering of tribal elders in October 2016 leaving six people dead and six others injured⁽¹⁷¹⁰⁾.

In May 2017, ISKP claimed a complex attack on the Radio Television Afghanistan compound in Jalalabad City which left five civilians dead and 14 others injured⁽¹⁷¹¹⁾. In March 2017, AGEs set fire to the vaccination room of an NGO that was about to start a polio vaccination campaign⁽¹⁷¹²⁾.

During the first half of 2017, airstrikes by pro-government military forces were responsible for 24 civilian casualties (13 deaths and 11 injured) in Nangarhar province⁽¹⁷¹³⁾. As in 2016, the province saw the highest number of civilian casualties resulting from aerial operations of the

⁽¹⁶⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 47-48.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 62.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 48-49.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 43.

⁽¹⁷⁰¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Religious Teachers Taken Hostage By IS Militants, 16 January 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Daesh Kidnap 14 Education Ministry Staff In Nangarhar, 15 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁷⁰³⁾ RFE/RL, Suicide Attack On Home Of Afghan Lawmaker Kills Two Guards, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰⁴⁾ Tolo News, Tribal Elder Killed In Roadside Blast In Nangarhar, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 of a family killed, 14 injured in Nangarhar attacks, 6 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 of a family killed, 14 injured in Nangarhar attacks, 6 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰⁷⁾ Tolo News, Judge Reportedly Killed In Jalalabad IED Blast, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁰⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 47.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁹⁾ Tolo News, At least One Dead In Nangarhar Suicide Attack, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷¹⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Six Killed In Suicide Attack In Eastern Afghanistan, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷¹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 48.

⁽¹⁷¹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽¹⁷¹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 52.

international military forces, mainly due to airstrikes targeting ISKP ⁽¹⁷¹⁴⁾. In August 2017, officials in Deh Balah district stated that up to 16 civilians had been killed in an airstrike by US forces. The Afghan Defence Ministry and the US military said that the strike exclusively killed AGEs ⁽¹⁷¹⁵⁾. In July 2017, residents of Deh Balah district reported that international airstrikes killed eight civilians and left another ten wounded ⁽¹⁷¹⁶⁾. In April 2017, three civilians were killed and another two four injured in such airstrikes ⁽¹⁷¹⁷⁾. In late September 2016, an airstrike hit the house of a tribal elder, killing 15 male civilians and injuring 13 others ⁽¹⁷¹⁸⁾.

In June 2017, pro-government forces killed a father and his two sons as they opened fire in response to an IED attack on a joint military convoy of international and Afghan forces ⁽¹⁷¹⁹⁾. Three civilians were killed and another 13 injured as the NDS conducted a search operation in Bati Kot district in May 2017 ⁽¹⁷²⁰⁾. Another four civilians were killed during a joint search operation in October 2016 in Kama district that was carried out by the NDS and international military forces ⁽¹⁷²¹⁾. One civilian was killed and three others were injured in Nangarhar during the first half of 2017 as ALP responded to attacks initiated by AGEs, in most cases against checkpoints ⁽¹⁷²²⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 31,830 individuals from Nangarhar province displaced by conflict. During this period, Chaparhar district produced the highest number of displaced persons (10,051), followed by Pachiragam (9,832), Lalpur (6,174), Dehbala (2,373) Khogyani (2,161) and Achin (887) districts ⁽¹⁷²³⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, 26,228 individuals from Nangarhar province displaced by conflict were documented by UNOCHA, most of them (24,788) from Pachiragam district ⁽¹⁷²⁴⁾. According to the December 2016 UNHCR Protection Community Assessment in Nangarhar, 'the Eastern Region, and particularly Nangarhar province and the districts around the provincial capital Jalalabad, remain one of the areas with the highest cumulative density of new, prolonged and protracted displacement, now compounded by thousands of newly arrived returning refugees and undocumented Afghans' ⁽¹⁷²⁵⁾. UNAMA notes that Pachiragam district was one of the areas in the country where 'significant displacement' was documented. The displacement resulted from fighting between ANSF and ISKP militants ⁽¹⁷²⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁷¹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 54.

⁽¹⁷¹⁵⁾ RFE/RL, U.S. Military Denies Air Strike In Nangarhar Killed Afghan Civilians, 12 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷¹⁶⁾ Tolo News, Nangarhar Residents Claim Foreign Airstrike Targeted Civilians, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 54.

⁽¹⁷¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 92.

⁽¹⁷¹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 57.

⁽¹⁷²⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 58.

⁽¹⁷²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 96.

⁽¹⁷²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 59.

⁽¹⁷²³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

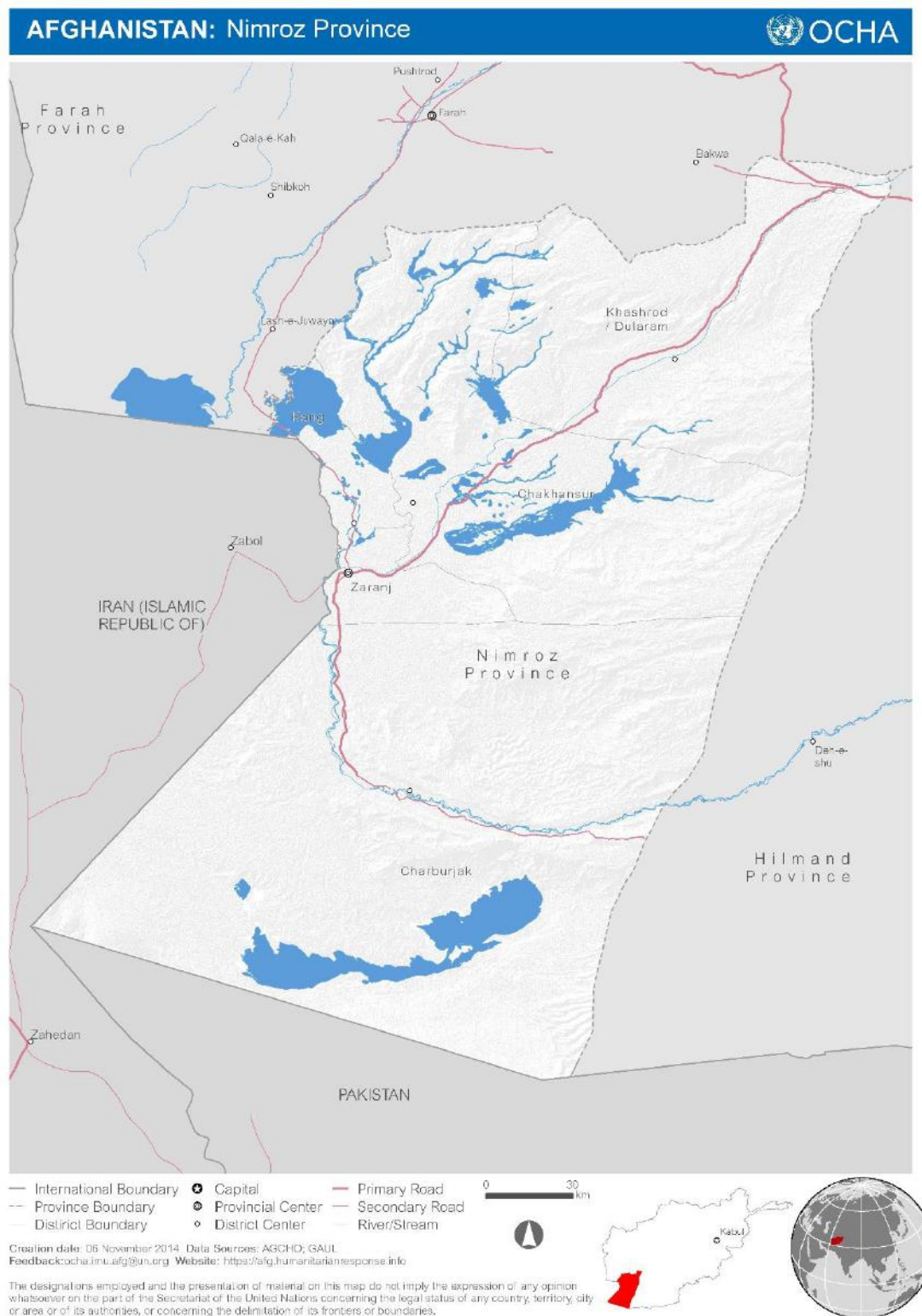
⁽¹⁷²⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷²⁵⁾ UNHCR, Protection Community Assessment in Nangarhar, December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽¹⁷²⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 44.

2.24 Nimroz

General description of the province



Nimroz Province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan and shares a border with Iran to the west and Pakistan to the south. The province of Helmand is located to its east and Farah to its north ⁽¹⁷²⁷⁾. Nimroz province consists of the following five districts: Chahar Burjak,

⁽¹⁷²⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Nimroz Province: Reference Map, 09 February 2014 ([url](#)).

Chakhansur, Kang, Khash Rod (including the area of Dilaram), and the provincial capital Zaranj⁽¹⁷²⁸⁾. The province is estimated to have 170,790 inhabitants, of which 60,463 live in the provincial capital, Zaranj⁽¹⁷²⁹⁾. Official sources estimate the population of Nimroz to be around 400,000 to 600,000⁽¹⁷³⁰⁾. Some estimates put the population of the provincial capital Zaranj at 160,000⁽¹⁷³¹⁾. Due to its insecurity, Khash Rod was not covered at all in a demographic survey done by CSO in 2016 in other districts of Nimroz⁽¹⁷³²⁾, and in Kang district, less than 20 % of the inhabitants have birth certificates⁽¹⁷³³⁾. Nimroz is Afghanistan's fifth largest province in terms of territory, covering approximately 42,000 square kilometres⁽¹⁷³⁴⁾. A large proportion of the province is sandy desert, known as Dashti Margo⁽¹⁷³⁵⁾.

According to information from 2015, Nimroz is predominantly inhabited by the Baluch, but the Pashtun population in the province has reportedly been increasing. Historically, the majority of the population used to be Baluch and Brahwui but considerable migration has resulted in the Pashtun community assuming a greater proportion, and according to some sources even the majority (60 %) in the province⁽¹⁷³⁶⁾. Other sources mention the Baluch as the dominant ethnicity, followed by the Pashtuns and the Tajiks⁽¹⁷³⁷⁾. Many Pashtuns living in Baluch dominated areas (Kang, Chakhansur and Chahar Burjak) have been assimilated into the Baluch community. Khash Rod is mentioned as a Pashtun dominated district⁽¹⁷³⁸⁾. Also Hazara, Arabs, Uzbeks, Kuchi nomads, and Gujars are mentioned to live in the province⁽¹⁷³⁹⁾.

Nimroz is located along the drug transit routes to Pakistan and Iran with its large unprotected borders⁽¹⁷⁴⁰⁾. Nimroz itself is one of the main opium producing provinces in Afghanistan⁽¹⁷⁴¹⁾. The economy is largely based on trade, both licit and illicit, and agriculture. A majority of trade occurs across the border with Iran, with one official border crossing located in Zaranj and an illegal border crossing in Kang District⁽¹⁷⁴²⁾. Nimroz is poor in terms of natural resources, and its agriculture and livestock have been severely damaged as a result of years of severe drought⁽¹⁷⁴³⁾. The road infrastructure in Nimroz is relatively good, and the major road runs from the capital Zaranj through Khash Rod/Dilaram connecting it to the Ring Road. Other main roads run along the Helmand River and to the Iranian border⁽¹⁷⁴⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁷²⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Nimroz Province: Reference Map, 09 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷²⁹⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)), p. 41.

⁽¹⁷³⁰⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Nimroz Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷³¹⁾ FP, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³²⁾ UNFPA/Afghanistan, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey 2016: Nimroz, 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³³⁾ UNFPA/Afghanistan, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey 2016: Nimroz, 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁷³⁴⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Nimroz, n.d. ([url](#)); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Nimroz Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³⁵⁾ ISW, Nimroz Province, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷³⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d. ([url](#)); ISW, Nimroz Province. Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷³⁹⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Nimroz Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); NPS, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁴⁰⁾ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁴¹⁾ UNODC/ Afghanistan, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5

⁽¹⁷⁴²⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷⁴³⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Nimroz, n.d. ([url](#)); Afghanistan, MRRD, Nimroz Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)); ISW, Nimroz Province, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁴⁴⁾ NPS, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d. ([url](#)).

According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 84.1 % of Nimroz’s population live in rural areas and 33.7% of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁷⁴⁵⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Nimroz

Nimroz is described by a 2017 article by Foreign Policy (FP) as a lawless province, Afghanistan’s drug-smuggling hub, and a financial artery for the Taliban ⁽¹⁷⁴⁶⁾. According to Landinfo, the conflict dynamics in Nimroz differ from other southern Afghan provinces, as the security incidents in Nimroz are not as much connected to the armed insurgency as they are connected to the existence of criminal networks and the smuggling industry ⁽¹⁷⁴⁷⁾. According to ISW, security forces have a minimal presence in Nimroz ⁽¹⁷⁴⁸⁾. According to FP, remote Nimroz is a low priority, so the state has little authority in Zaranj and virtually none outside it ⁽¹⁷⁴⁹⁾.

According to LWJ assessment in September 2017, except for the provincial capital Zaranj and other district centres, the Taliban is in control of Nimroz ⁽¹⁷⁵⁰⁾. According to Landinfo, Khash Rod is the most unstable district in Nimroz, which is mostly related to its location at the border of Helmand and Farah provinces ⁽¹⁷⁵¹⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Nimroz Province counted 113 security incidents ⁽¹⁷⁵²⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	3
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	59
Explosions	11
Security enforcement	17
Non-conflict related incidents	14
Other incidents	9
Total security incidents	113

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Nimroz Province ⁽¹⁷⁵³⁾:

Chahar Burjak	5	Khash Rod	71
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⁽¹⁷⁴⁵⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 47-48.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁶⁾ FP, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁴⁷⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)), p.11.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁸⁾ ISW, Nimroz Province, Regional Command South, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁴⁹⁾ FP, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁵⁰⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁵¹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)), p.26.

⁽¹⁷⁵²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁷⁵³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Chakhansur	4	Zaranj	29
Kang	4		

According to UNAMA, during the period from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2017 Nimroz had 43 civilian casualties with 19 deaths and 2 injuries. This was a decrease of 16 % compared to the same period in 2016. Ground engagements, IEDs and targeted/deliberate killings were the leading causes of casualties ⁽¹⁷⁵⁴⁾.

According to a UNOCHA assessment for the first quarter of 2017, Khash Rod was among the hot-spot areas of the conflict in the south of Afghanistan ⁽¹⁷⁵⁵⁾. Conflict severity was Nimroz's highest in Khash Rod also for the first half of 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁵⁶⁾. In September 2016, the Taliban attacked the district administrative centre of Khash Rod, located at a strategically important position along the Zaranj-Dilaram main road ⁽¹⁷⁵⁷⁾. Taliban tried to attack Khash Rod centre again in August 2017 but security forces managed to repel the attack ⁽¹⁷⁵⁸⁾.

As of July 2017, the Taliban were reportedly checking cars and passengers on the Zaranj-Dilaram road to identify people working for the government ⁽¹⁷⁵⁹⁾. The police chief of Dilaram, along with his bodyguard, was killed in a Taliban ambush on 27 August 2017 near the Dilaram centre ⁽¹⁷⁶⁰⁾. The chief of the remote district of Chakhansur was killed in Zaranj by unknown gunmen on 19 June 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁶¹⁾.

Displacement

No displacement was reported from Nimroz province between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017. However, 108 displaced people from Bala Boluk in Farah province, settled in Zaranj ⁽¹⁷⁶²⁾. Additionally, in September 2017, Nimroz received an estimated 1,500 returnees and deportees from Iran crossing the border to Afghanistan daily, which was an increase to the usual numbers ⁽¹⁷⁶³⁾.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - First Quarter Report (January - March 2017), updated 18 May, original publication date 9 May ([url](#)), p. 31.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz's Khashrod district on the verge of collapse, 7 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁵⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack on Khashrod district repulsed, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁵⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban teams check vehicles on Zaranj-Dilaram road, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilaram police chief, guard killed in Taliban ambush, 27 August 2017 ([url](#)).

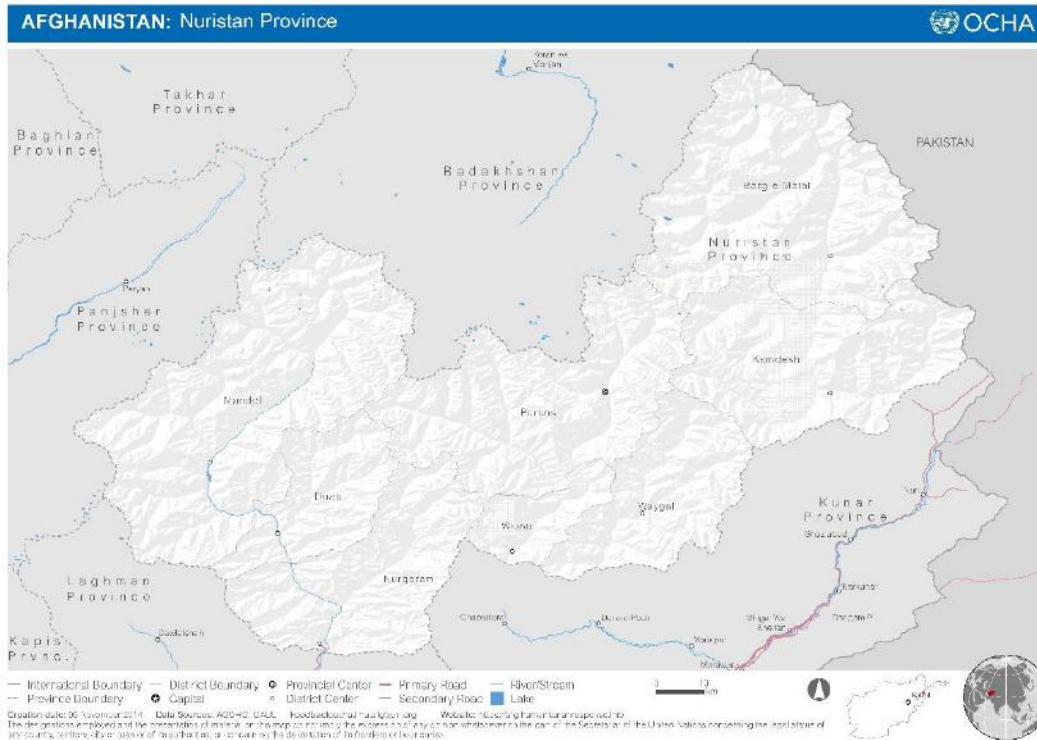
⁽¹⁷⁶¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Official Says Gunmen On Motorcycle Kill District Chief, 19 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 02 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 36.

2.25 Nuristan

General description of the province



Nuristan province is located in the eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Laghman, Panjshir, Badakhshan and Kunar provinces, and it borders Pakistan in the east⁽¹⁷⁶⁴⁾. According to a 2015 estimate by UNOCHA, the province has a population of 147,967⁽¹⁷⁶⁵⁾. Nuristan province comprises eight administrative units: the districts Wama, Waygul (Waygal), Bargtal (Barg-e Matal), Kamdesh, Noorgram (Nurgeram), Dawab (Duab), Mandol, and the provincial capital Parun (Poruns)⁽¹⁷⁶⁶⁾.

Nuristan is predominantly inhabited by Nuristanis⁽¹⁷⁶⁷⁾ who speak four linguistically diverse languages (Kati as a lingua franca, Ashkun, Waigali, and Prasun) and share a group identity based on the settlement area and a shared history⁽¹⁷⁶⁸⁾. The local languages and dialects are unrelated to Pashto and Dari⁽¹⁷⁶⁹⁾. In the south of the province, there are settlements of the Pashai people⁽¹⁷⁷⁰⁾. The region was historically known as 'Kafiristan', meaning 'land of infidels', before its residents were converted to Islam in the 19th century⁽¹⁷⁷¹⁾.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Nuristan: Reference Map, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)); according to Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nuristan, n.d. ([url](#)), the province has 400,000 inhabitants.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁶⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Nuristan Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); spelling in brackets according to UNOCHA, *Nuristan: Reference Map*, 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nuristan, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶⁸⁾ Rzehak, L., Ethnic groups and structures, In BFA Staatendokumentation (Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, COI Unit): AfPak Principals of the tribal and clan structure, 5 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17

⁽¹⁷⁶⁹⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁰⁾ Rzehak, L., Ethnic groups and structures, In BFA Staatendokumentation (Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, COI Unit): AfPak Principals of the tribal and clan structure, 5 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽¹⁷⁷¹⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

Nuristan is described as ‘one of the most impassable regions’ in Afghanistan, mostly consisting of mountainous areas ⁽¹⁷⁷²⁾. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, the Western districts Barg-e-Matal, Kamdesh, Duab, Mandol and Nurgeram have no road connection to the provincial capital Parun and residents have to travel through Kunar and Laghman provinces in order to reach Parun ⁽¹⁷⁷³⁾. According to the same source, officials claimed that a road has been recently extended to Mandol district ⁽¹⁷⁷⁴⁾. Nuristan has also been described as a ‘natural buffer, with its singular culture, rugged mountain ranges and lack of paved roads or electricity’ ⁽¹⁷⁷⁵⁾.

Economically, residents of Nuristan rely on crops (e.g. wheat, maize, beans) and on livestock (goats and cows) as their main source of income ⁽¹⁷⁷⁶⁾. The province’s economy is partly based on barter ⁽¹⁷⁷⁷⁾. According to the December 2016 Afghanistan Opium Survey by UNODC and the Afghan government, Nuristan has achieved the status as being poppy-free in 2007 and has maintained it since ⁽¹⁷⁷⁸⁾.

With regard to the education system, the newly-appointed education director for Nuristan claimed that out of 225 schools, only 40 have buildings, and as a result, thousands of students attend classes in tents ⁽¹⁷⁷⁹⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 100 % of Nuristan’s population live in rural areas and 70.7 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁷⁸⁰⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Nuristan

As a December 2016 Reuters article explains, the ‘real power in Nuristan is widely considered to be the ‘Qaomi Shura’, or local elders’ council.’ Central government is described as weak, only a few thousand lightly armed police and one army unit are stationed in the province ⁽¹⁷⁸¹⁾. According to a 2012 analysis by Anthony Cordesman from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a bi-partisan nonprofit policy research organisation in the US, the low level of violence in Nuristan province resulted from the fact that insurgents were able to freely consolidate control over the area after the withdrawal of ANSF/ISAF ⁽¹⁷⁸²⁾.

An international organisation states in September 2017 that all district headquarters are reported to be under government control; however, in Kamdesh, Barg-e Matal, and Waygal districts in particular, anti-government elements (AGEs) are present and active, and they are also present along all main supply routes leading into Nuristan. According to the same source, the Afghan Taliban are reported to have a strong presence in the province ⁽¹⁷⁸³⁾. The Taliban claim in a March 2017 article on their ‘Voice of Jihad’ website that Mandol district was under their control. The Taliban further claimed that the district centres of Kamdesh, Waygal and Duab were under government control, while 95 % of the district areas were under Taliban

⁽¹⁷⁷²⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Nuristan Province, 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 years on, no access road to 5 Nuristan districts, 20 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, After 16 years, Mandol district affairs still remotely run, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁵⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁶⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag - Nuristan Province, 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁷⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁸⁾ UNODC/ Afghanistan, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 180 Nuristan schools without buildings: official, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁸⁰⁾ Ministry of Economy/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 49-50.

⁽¹⁷⁸¹⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁸²⁾ Cordesman, A., Afghanistan from 2012-2014: Is A Successful Transition Possible?, 19 June 2012 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽¹⁷⁸³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

control. The districts Barg-e Matal, Wama and Nurgeram were 40 % under government control, while 60 % of these districts' areas were under Taliban control. The capital Parun was claimed to be 75 % controlled by the government and 25 % by the Taliban. ⁽¹⁷⁸⁴⁾.

According to a UN report dated August 2017, there are 'individuals associated with the Al-Qaida core' active in Nuristan ⁽¹⁷⁸⁵⁾, a December 2016 article by KP notes that the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba is believed to operate in the province ⁽¹⁷⁸⁶⁾, and a small presence of the ISKP is reported by the UN Secretary General in December 2016 ⁽¹⁷⁸⁷⁾. Other groups reported to be active in Nuristan include Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), remnants of Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Lashkar-e-Mujahideen, and militants from Salafi groups ⁽¹⁷⁸⁸⁾. Reuters reports in December 2016 that local elders are asked by the government to help prevent ISKP militants from expanding into new territory, and villages in Nuristan are provided with weapons, ammunition and other support. The same source adds that Nuristan 'has a history of repelling outsiders, including the Taliban and al Qaeda, by refusing them food and shelter and engaging in combat if necessary' ⁽¹⁷⁸⁹⁾. An international organisation states in September 2017 that the eastern border is porous and allows insurgents free movements and easy access to safe havens in Pakistan ⁽¹⁷⁹⁰⁾.

Reuters notes in December 2016 that most residents of Wama district are moderate Salafi followers ⁽¹⁷⁹¹⁾. According to reports by locals in August 2017, administrative affairs of Mandol district have been managed from neighbouring Nurgeram district for the past 16 years, one reason for this being insecurity ⁽¹⁷⁹²⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Nuristan Province counted 106 security incidents ⁽¹⁷⁹³⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	5
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	92
Explosions	5
Security enforcement	1

⁽¹⁷⁸⁴⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)). A map was published by the Long War Journal (LWJ) based on an evaluation of these Taliban claims: LWJ, Afghan Taliban lists 'Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen', 28 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁸⁵⁾ UN Security Council, Twentieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁶⁾ KP, 5 Lashkar-e-Taiba militants killed by own bomb in East of Afghanistan, 19 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁸⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, 13 December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5; see also on this topic: RFE/RL, Islamic State Proving Resilient In Afghanistan In Face Of Targeted Campaign, 4 August 2017 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., Notiz Afghanistan: Alltag in Kabul; Referat von Thomas Ruttig (Afghanistan Analysts Network) am 12 April 2017, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁹⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁹⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷⁹¹⁾ Reuters, In Afghan province, government woos allies against Islamic State, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, After 16 years, Mandol district affairs still remotely run, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁹³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Non-conflict related incidents	2
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	106

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Nuristan Province ⁽¹⁷⁹⁴⁾:

Bargi Matal	11	Parun	1
Du Ab	12	Wama	5
Kamdesh	37	Waygal	39
Nurgaram	1		

According to the representative of an international organisation, due to limited access to information and the lack of international community and IMF/ANSF presence throughout the province, an accurate assessment of the security situation is difficult; it is believed that incidents are significantly underreported. As a result of inaccessibility, mountainous terrain, and inadequate ANSF structure, the security situation remains volatile in Nuristan ⁽¹⁷⁹⁵⁾.

UNAMA noted 15 civilian casualties (3 deaths and 12 injured) during the first half of 2017 in Nuristan, a 25 % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by IEDs ⁽¹⁷⁹⁶⁾.

From late 2016 into 2017, several security-related incidents were reported in Duab district: according to the Ministry of Defence, 5 Taliban leaders were injured in Duab district in December 2016, when an IED went off prematurely ⁽¹⁷⁹⁷⁾. In January 2017, local officials reported that a 40-day siege of Duab district by the Taliban was lifted ⁽¹⁷⁹⁸⁾.

Other armed clashes were reported between April and August 2017: According to a border police commander, several militants were killed in clashes with Afghan security forces in Kamdesh district in April 2017 ⁽¹⁷⁹⁹⁾. Another incident in Waygal district was reported in April 2017, when ANP forces ambushed a local leader of the Taliban and killed him ⁽¹⁸⁰⁰⁾. KP reports a gun battle between Taliban and Islamic State militants in the vicinity of Waygal district on 27 June 2017, with a number of people dead or wounded ⁽¹⁸⁰¹⁾. UNOCHA reports that 1,000 people were displaced due to an attack on the Waygal district centre on 26 July 2017 ⁽¹⁸⁰²⁾. According to Xinhua News Agency, 45 militants were killed in this incident when security forces repelled the attack of hundreds of Taliban fighters ⁽¹⁸⁰³⁾. A coordinated attack by the Taliban on police posts in Nurgeram district on 23 August 2017 has been reported ⁽¹⁸⁰⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁴⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁷⁹⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), Annex III.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁷⁾ KP, 5 Taliban leaders critically injured in premature bomb explosion, 22 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban siege of Nuristan's Do Aab district broken, 4 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁹⁹⁾ Bakhtar News Agency, Eight Militants Killed in Nuristan, 9 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰⁰⁾ KP, Taliban leader killed in Afghan police ambush in Nuristan, 18 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰¹⁾ KP, Clashes reported among the Taliban and ISIS militants in Nuristan, 28 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report - Week of 23 July – 30 July 2017, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰³⁾ Xinhua News Agency, Afghan forces repel Taliban attack in eastern province, 45 attackers killed, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰⁴⁾ KP, Coordinated Taliban attacks repulsed in Nuristan, 30 militants killed, wounded, 24 August 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Nuristan clash leaves 9 rebels, 2 police dead, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)).

According to the governor, 2 policemen and 11 Taliban were killed in the clashes ⁽¹⁸⁰⁵⁾.

An incident of honour killing in Wama district on 12 February 2017 was reported by several sources. A mob of hundreds of armed men stormed a police station where a couple accused of adultery was being held. The family of the woman killed the woman who had been married against her will, the man was later killed by the woman's husband; one police officer was killed and several others wounded ⁽¹⁸⁰⁶⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 503 individuals from Nuristan province displaced by conflict. During this period, Waygal district produced the highest number of displaced persons (274), followed by Kamdesh district (118) ⁽¹⁸⁰⁷⁾. UNOCHA reports that most of the 1,000 people who were displaced due to an attack on Waygal on 26 July 2017 have reportedly returned to their homes with the security situation reportedly remaining tense ⁽¹⁸⁰⁸⁾. Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 36 individuals from Nuristan province displaced by conflict with all of these persons displaced from Waygal district ⁽¹⁸⁰⁹⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nuristan clash leaves 9 rebels, 2 police dead, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰⁶⁾ BAAG, Afghanistan in February 2017, March 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Young Afghan Lovers Lynched By Armed Mob In Latest Horrific 'Honor' Killing, 16 February 2017 ([url](#)).

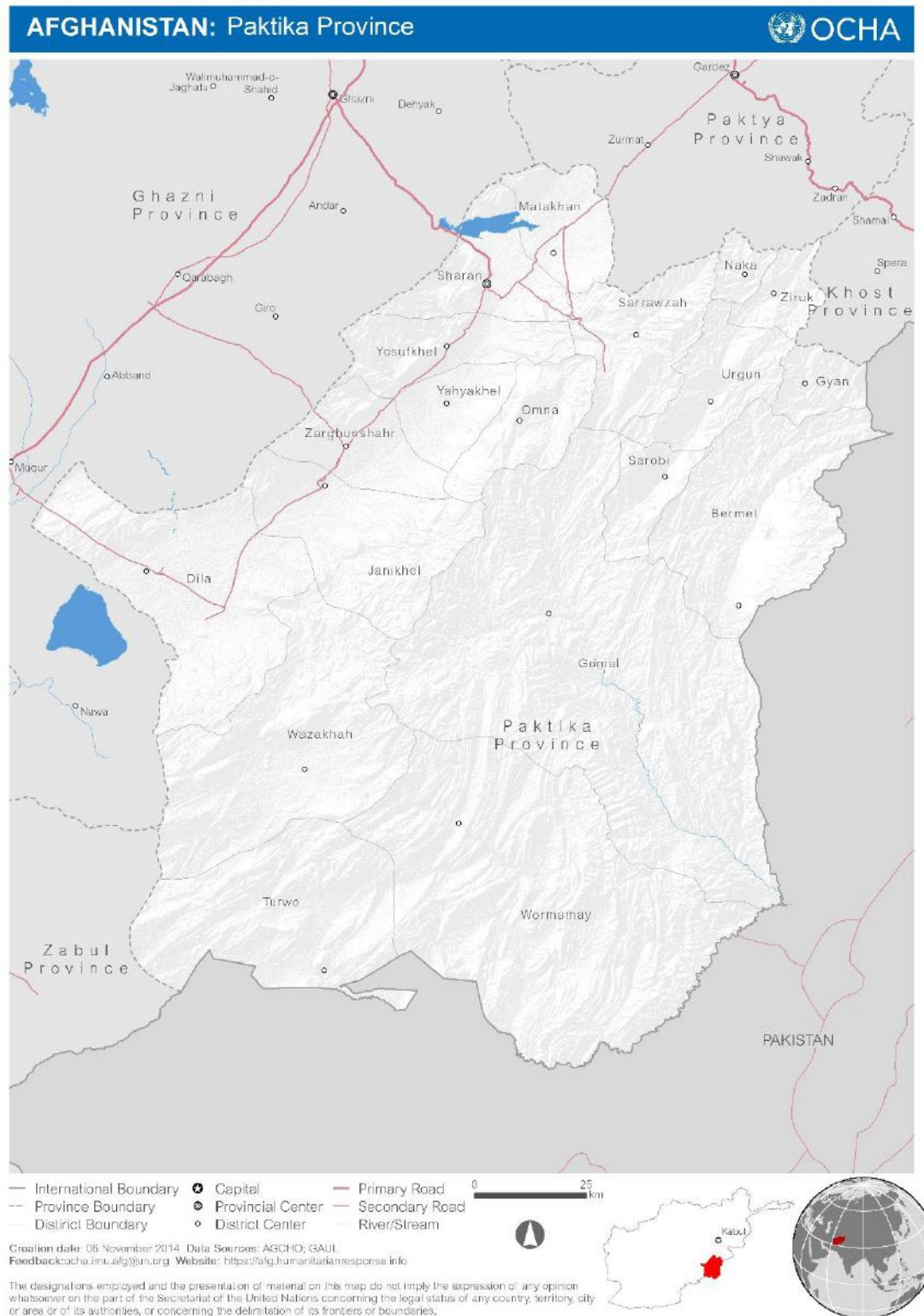
⁽¹⁸⁰⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report - Week of 23 July – 30 July 2017, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁰⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

2.26 Paktika

General description of the province



Paktika Province is located in the south-east of the country. The province borders with Paktya and Khost in the northeast, Ghazni in the Northwest, Zabul in the Southeast, and North and South Waziristan, in Pakistan, in the east and Zhob area of Pakistan's Baluchistan in the south.

It shares a 350 km border with Pakistan. The provincial capital is Sharan and the province has 19 official districts: Urgun, Sarobi, Gayan, Ziruk, Naka, Barmal, Gomal, Khairkot, Yusuf Khel, Sar Hawza, Omna, Mata Khan, Yahya Khel, Jani Khel, Dila, WazaKhwa, Tarwa and Wor Mamy⁽¹⁸¹⁰⁾. The estimated settled population of Paktika province is 449,116, of which 446,141 live in rural areas and 2,975 in urban areas⁽¹⁸¹¹⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 78.7 % of Faryab's population lives in rural areas and 10.3 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work⁽¹⁸¹²⁾. The large majority of the population belongs to the Pashtun ethnic group, followed by Tajiks, Arabs and Pashais⁽¹⁸¹³⁾.

Background of the conflict and actors

Paktika Province has a long and porous border of about 350 kilometers with South and North Waziristan and with Zhob area of Baluchistan, where insurgents, mainly Haqqani network, Pakistani Taliban and Afghan Taliban have their strongholds. AGEs have established parallel administrative systems in most of the districts. Their intimidation tactics have cowed off the population from visiting government offices at district administrative centres (DACs) and provincial offices in Sharana. Skirmishes between ANSF and insurgents from across the border are common in this part of the province. As of September 2017, sporadic cross border clashes also take place between Afghan and Pakistani forces. The Haqqani network terrorist group is still very active in the province⁽¹⁸¹⁴⁾. The withdrawal of international military forces from the province in 2014 particularly from the border districts including Barmal, Gomal, Gayan, Ziruk and Urgun has resulted in the increase of insurgent activities. Other local militia forces trained and equipped by the international military forces were very effective in counterinsurgency operations and security of the border, but after their dismantling in June 2013, attacks on ANSF installations have increased⁽¹⁸¹⁵⁾.

In March 2017, the Taliban claimed on its website that it has complete control over districts Naka, Chahrbaran, Omna, Dila and Gayan and more that 60 % control over districts Ziruk, Gomal, Sar Hawza, Khushamand, Waza Khwa and Barmal⁽¹⁸¹⁶⁾.

In the ISW's Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment map from March 2017 most of the northern districts of Paktika are marked as 'High Confidence Taliban Support Zone', with smaller areas under direct control of Taliban near the northern border with Paktya and Khost provinces, and near the eastern border with Ghazni province⁽¹⁸¹⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁸¹⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, July 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁸¹¹⁾ Afghanistan, Estimated population of Afghanistan – 2017-18, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽¹⁸¹²⁾ Ministry of Economy/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸¹³⁾ ISW, Regional Command East, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸¹⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, July 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁸¹⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, July 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁸¹⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸¹⁷⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment : November 23, 2016 – March 15 2017, March 2017 ([url](#)).

In 2016 the Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan (TTP) and al Qaeda also had a presence in the province and the ISKP used Paktika as recruitment base ⁽¹⁸¹⁸⁾. In January 2015, about 200 ISKP-linked foreign fighters and their families settled in the southeast, including Paktika province ⁽¹⁸¹⁹⁾.

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, 'many children were seen serving in security forces in different parts of the province but especially' the ALP. Unemployment and poverty are quoted as reasons a local resident gave for people to enroll their children in security forces. In September 2016, the governor of Paktika province vowed to remove underage recruits from armed forces and punish their recruiters ⁽¹⁸²⁰⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017, Paktika Province counted 377 security incidents ⁽¹⁸²¹⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	6
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	297
Explosions	45
Security enforcement	19
Non-conflict related incidents	8
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	377

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Paktika Province ⁽¹⁸²²⁾:

Barmal	48	Sharan	22
Dila	10	Turwo	12
Gayan	86	Urgun	37
Gomal	10	Waza Khwa	32
Jani Khel	12	Wor Mamay	16
Mata Khan	20	Yahya Khel	4
Omna	10	Yosuf Khel	9
Sar Hawza	18	Zarghun Shahr	5
Sarobi	9	Ziruk	17

⁽¹⁸¹⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸¹⁹⁾ MEI, Policy Focus 2016-11, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Examining its Threat to Stability, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽¹⁸²⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika to remove underage recruits from security forces, 19 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸²¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁸²²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

According to UNAMA, during the period from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2017 there have been 88 civilian casualties (43 deaths and 45 injured) in Paktika. Compared to the same period in 2016, this is a decrease by 9 %. IEDs were the leading cause of casualties ⁽¹⁸²³⁾. During the reference period of this report, there were several bomb and mine attacks throughout the province which resulted in civilian casualties, including children. Some police and security workers were also killed in these attacks. In February 2017, UNAMA strongly condemned an IED attack in Urgan district centre, which killed 8 children, among other adult civilians ⁽¹⁸²⁴⁾. Fatal explosions have been reported in **Sharan** city ⁽¹⁸²⁵⁾, **Merzaki** ⁽¹⁸²⁶⁾, **Dila** ⁽¹⁸²⁷⁾, **Gomal** ⁽¹⁸²⁸⁾, **Jani Khel** ⁽¹⁸²⁹⁾, **Yusuf Khel** ⁽¹⁸³⁰⁾ districts.

In April 2017, a border dispute broke out between Pakistani and Afghan security forces in **Barmal** district, continuing in the following months and leading to clashes. A security official in Barmal district confirmed that the Pakistani forces wanted to establish a check post in Angor Ada, a border crossing between the two countries, but they were prevented by the Afghan forces ⁽¹⁸³¹⁾. In May 2017, a three-hour long clash between Afghan and Pakistani border security personnel occurred in the Barmal district ⁽¹⁸³²⁾. In July 2017, Pakistani militia forces started fencing the border area in Zawaba Mountain in Barmal district. Local tribal leaders expressed the opinion to Pajhwok that the government is reluctant to respond the issue ⁽¹⁸³³⁾.

In November 2016, a number of residents of southeastern Paktika province stated that Taliban have started searching vehicles and passengers on highways. They said the armed insurgents looked for government officials traveling in vehicles on the Paktika-Ghazni and Paktika-Paktia highways. According to the local residents, the highways in Paktika had become highly insecure and Taliban militants conducted daily searches of vehicles on roads and pulled government officials from vehicles and killed them. An ANA soldier said to Pajhwok Afghan News that people could not easily travel to Paktika by road due to Taliban threat. There were no air flights to the Paktika from other provinces ⁽¹⁸³⁴⁾.

During the reference period of this report, there were armed clashes across the province between AGEs, especially the Taliban and Haqqani network, and security forces.

Early in September 2016 the **Omna** district collapsed to the Taliban after five days of continued fighting, an official said to Pajhwok Afghan News ⁽¹⁸³⁵⁾ and by August 2017, Omna was still held by Taliban ⁽¹⁸³⁶⁾. In October 2016, the Taliban's attack on **Wor Mamay** district was repulsed ⁽¹⁸³⁷⁾. In January 2017, dozens of Haqqani network gunmen attacked the Afghan

⁽¹⁸²³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁸²⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, UNAMA condemns killing of 12 civilians in PPIED blast, 17 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸²⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 17 hurt in Paktika twin blasts, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸²⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia explosion claims lives of 3 civilians, 21 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸²⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)) p. 57.

⁽¹⁸²⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 of a family killed, as many injured in Paktika blast, 3 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸²⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 people dead, over 20 hurt in Paktika blast, 22 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 rebels killed, 3 children injured in Paktika blasts, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces resist Pakistani post in Angor Ada, 11 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan, Pakistani forces trade fire in Paktika, 12 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistani militias fencing border inside Barmal district: residents, 6 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban search vehicles on roads: Paktika residents, 28 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Omna district collapses after 5 days of fighting, 4 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 70 Taliban, 2 police killed in ongoing Paktika clash, 2 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dozens of rebels suffer casualties as attack on Warmami district repulsed, 29 October 2016 ([url](#)).

military corps base in **Barmal** district ⁽¹⁸³⁸⁾. In June 2017, the Taliban militants stormed police posts in **Urgun** district ⁽¹⁸³⁹⁾.

The Taliban's activity in Paktika has increased in July and August 2017 when the group launched simultaneous attacks in several districts. Early in August 2017, the **Gomal** district's Afghan border police battalion was besieged by the Taliban and the insurgents managed to capture several security check points. Both militants and the police suffered considerable casualties, although there were no official exact figures available ⁽¹⁸⁴⁰⁾. ANA's task force arrived in Gomal to suppress the militants after several days of fighting ⁽¹⁸⁴¹⁾. During the summer of 2017, there were armed clashes between Taliban and security forces in **Barmal** ⁽¹⁸⁴²⁾, **Wor Mamay** and **Sar Hawza** districts ⁽¹⁸⁴³⁾. In August 2017, the security forces also launched an offensive in **Sarobi** district to purge the Taliban militants from the area ⁽¹⁸⁴⁴⁾. Some members of the Paktika Provincial Council expressed concern that the conflict had recently spread to more areas in the province due to lack of coordination between the police and the ANA. In response to these remarks, the Paktika police chief said to Pajhwok that although militants launched simultaneous attacks on Gomal, Wor Mamay, Sar Hawza, Gilan and Khoshamand districts, they faced strong resistance from the ANSF and were pushed back from these districts ⁽¹⁸⁴⁵⁾.

From November 2016 to July 2017, the US military forces conducted aerial drone strikes against the Taliban, Haqqani network, and other militants in some areas of Paktika, specifically in **Wor Mamay** and **Tarwa** ⁽¹⁸⁴⁶⁾, **Ziruk** ⁽¹⁸⁴⁷⁾, **Urgun** ⁽¹⁸⁴⁸⁾, **Barmal** ⁽¹⁸⁴⁹⁾ districts and areas near Afghanistan's border with Pakistan's South Waziristan ⁽¹⁸⁵⁰⁾. As the US Ministry of Defense confirmed in March 2017, one such drone strike killed a top al Qaeda leader responsible for several high profile terrorist attacks in Pakistan ⁽¹⁸⁵¹⁾. During the reference period of this report the Afghan authorities did not confirm civilian casualties of these air strikes in Paktika. On one occasion the Taliban alleged that a US air strike in Urgun district killed 13 civilians and injured several others at a funeral ceremony for a Taliban commander. The security forces denied any civilian casualties, saying all those killed were Taliban militants ⁽¹⁸⁵²⁾.

In July 2017, UNOCHA reported that increased fighting in past weeks continued to inhibit the humanitarian community's ability to gain access to people in need in several provinces of Afghanistan, including Paktya ⁽¹⁸⁵³⁾.

Displacement

According to UNOCHA, between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2017 there were a total of 1,967 individuals displaced from Paktika due to conflict. Among them, 461 were men, 635

⁽¹⁸³⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Haqqanis killed in Paktika overnight battle, 14 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸³⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 insurgents perish in Paktika firefight, 17 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 70 Taliban, 2 police killed in ongoing Paktika clash, 2 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 Taliban killed, scores injured in Paktika offensive, 11 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen rebels eliminated in Paktika offensive, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban besiege border police battalion in Paktika, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 rebels eliminated, scores injured in Paktika province, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security deteriorated in some Paktika districts: PC, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commanders among 50 rebels killed in Paktika: Mol, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commanders among 29 fighters killed in Paktika drone strike, 19 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Haqqani network commanders killed in Paktika raid, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁴⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Haqqanis among 15 Taliban killed in airstrikes, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵⁰⁾ Dawn, Drone kills four IS men before US senators visit South Waziristan, 4 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵¹⁾ RFE/RL, U.S. Says Al-Qaeda Leader Killed In Air Strike In Afghanistan, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commanders among 29 fighters killed in Paktika drone strike, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵³⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 66, 1-31 July 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

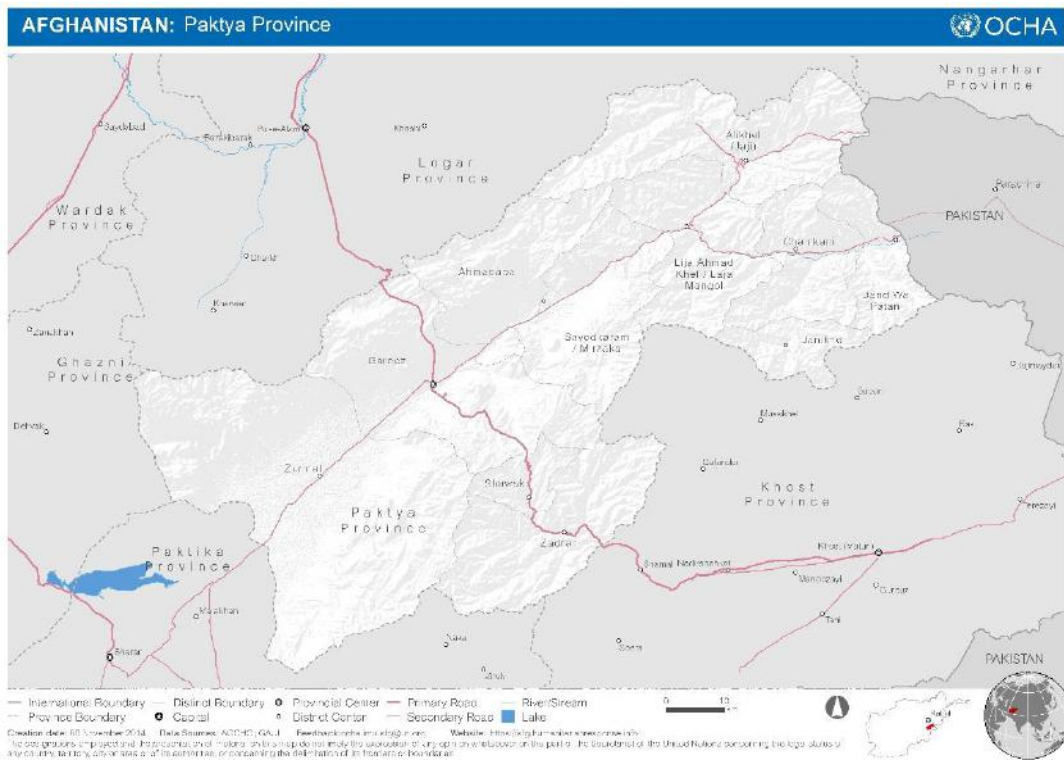
were women and 872 were children ⁽¹⁸⁵⁴⁾. Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, there were a total of 749 individuals displaced from Paktika. Among them, 107 were men, 109 were women and 533 were children ⁽¹⁸⁵⁵⁾.

In spring months of 2016, about 350 families from Dera Ismail Khan and South Waziristan areas across the Durand Line were displaced to the Sarobi district of Paktika. Some of the displaced individuals told Pajhwok Afghan News that Pakistani forces forced them to leave their homes without right to travel through Torkham, a legal border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some of them have also fled to Urgun district. In September 2016, many of these families were in acute need of shelter and other essentials, despite some assistance from Afghan government ⁽¹⁸⁵⁶⁾.

UNOCHA estimated that during August 2017, up to 3,500 people left Gomal district to go to other parts of Paktika ⁽¹⁸⁵⁷⁾, for example to Sarobi district ⁽¹⁸⁵⁸⁾.

2.27 Paktya

General description of the province



Paktya province is located in the south-east of the country. The province borders Nangarhar, Khost, Paktika, Ghazni and Logar provinces. It also shares 75 km border with Kurram tribal agency of Pakistan on east. The province has thirteen districts - Ahmad Abad, Sayed Karam, Laja Mangal, Mirzaka, Ahmad Khel, Zazi Aryoub, Chamkani, Dand-e-Patan, Jani Khel, Zurmat,

⁽¹⁸⁵⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, updated as of 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 14 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Waziristan refugees in Paktika need assistance, 14 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 66, 1-31 July 2017, September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁵⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 21 August – 27 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

Shwak, Gardaserai and Waza Zadran ⁽¹⁸⁵⁹⁾. The estimated settled population of Paktya province is 570,534, of which 545,567 live in rural areas and 25,967 in urban areas ⁽¹⁸⁶⁰⁾. The population of the provincial capital Gardez, is estimated to 24,803 ⁽¹⁸⁶¹⁾. According to data published by the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 95.6 % of Faryab's population lives in rural areas and 44.2 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁸⁶²⁾. Paktya is predominantly Pashtun, with a small Tajik population. Some Kuchi nomads are also present in the province ⁽¹⁸⁶³⁾.

Background of the conflict and actors

In 2015 the AAN published several articles acknowledging that the most problematic district of the province has been Zurmat for several years ⁽¹⁸⁶⁴⁾. In 2016, AAN wrote that over the last 15 years it has never come under complete government control. The densely populated district with its flat plains connects Paktia to three provinces (Paktika to the south, Ghazni to the west and Logar to the north) making it a crossroads for Taliban fighters who use it to freely move between these three provinces ⁽¹⁸⁶⁵⁾. In 2015, Fabrizio Foschini of AAN observed that violence gradually eased after the withdrawal of international forces; however, he gave the view that the relatively calm situation seems to stem from the relations between the Taliban and local residents. Civilian disputes are often settled by the Taliban and very few are brought to the state courts ⁽¹⁸⁶⁶⁾. AAN writes that most of the Taliban fighters who fight in Zurmat belong to both the Haqqani network and Abdul Latif Mansur's splinter faction of Harakat-e Nawin-e Inqilab-e Islami (New Islamic Revolution Moment) ⁽¹⁸⁶⁷⁾. In 2015, it was stated that 'Mansur's fighters are in the majority in the Zurmat district, while Haqqani fighters are smaller in number' ⁽¹⁸⁶⁸⁾. However, according to information from 2016, the Haqqani network, which is considered to be the most cohesive and best-funded insurgent group in the region, has had strongholds in Paktya for years ⁽¹⁸⁶⁹⁾. In July 2017, NDS confirmed that several Haqqani network associates were arrested in Gardez ⁽¹⁸⁷⁰⁾.

ISW considers most of the Paktya province's area is a 'Low Confidence Taliban Support Zone' ⁽¹⁸⁷¹⁾.

In September 2017, LWJ reported that Taliban claimed control over most of Ahmad Abad, Sayed Karam and Laja Mangal districts' areas, with the exception of the district centres ⁽¹⁸⁷²⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁵⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, July 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁰⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated population of Afghanistan – 2017-18, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽¹⁸⁶¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶²⁾ The World Bank/ Afghanistan, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶³⁾ ACF, Semi-Quantitative Evaluation of Access and Coverage, n.d. ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁴⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶⁵⁾ Muzhary, F., The ANSF's Zurmat Operation: Abuses against local civilians, 4 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶⁶⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶⁷⁾ Muzhary, F., The ANSF's Zurmat Operation: Abuses against local civilians, 4 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶⁸⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁶⁹⁾ Reuters, Taliban's Haqqani may be even more deadly foe than Mansour, 22 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁷⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7-member Haqqani network group held in Paktia, 12 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁷¹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment : November 23, 2016 – March 15 2017, March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁷²⁾ LWJ, Map assessment : Taliban controls or contests over 45 % of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

According to the AIHRC, militants have been using children as fighters in battles with security forces in the Paktya province ⁽¹⁸⁷³⁾.

UNAMA names Paktya among provinces with highest number of civilian casualties during the first half of 2017 caused by ERW ⁽¹⁸⁷⁴⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Paktya Province counted 345 security incidents ⁽¹⁸⁷⁵⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	8
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	223
Explosions	54
Security enforcement	40
Non-conflict related incidents	18
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	345

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Paktya Province ⁽¹⁸⁷⁶⁾:

Ahmadabad	15	Jani Khail	41
Chamkanay	6	Lija Ahmad Khel	17
Dand Wa Patan	17	Sayid Karam	25
Gardez	95	Shwak	2
Jaji	32	Zurmat	95

According to UNAMA, during the period from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2017 there were 160 civilian casualties (47 deaths and 113 injured) in Paktya. This is an increase by 167 %, compared to the same period in 2016. Targeted and deliberate killings were the leading cause of casualties ⁽¹⁸⁷⁷⁾.

Paktya's capital city, **Gardez**, experienced a number of high profile incidents in the spring and summer months of 2017. Early in March 2017, a little boy was killed and his sister was wounded by an unexploded ordnance in Gardez district ⁽¹⁸⁷⁸⁾. In May 2017, two policemen and one civilian were killed and another 30 civilians were injured during a complex attack on

⁽¹⁸⁷³⁾ Afghanistan Times, Insurgents use children in Paktia battles, 10 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁷⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 20.

⁽¹⁸⁷⁵⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁸⁷⁶⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁸⁷⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁸⁷⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 19.

a branch office of the Kabul Bank in Gardez City, according the Gardez police chief. All three assailants were killed by police, but no group claimed responsibility for the attack ⁽¹⁸⁷⁹⁾. In June 2017, several Taliban militants ambushed a security forces convoy in Shekhan area of the capital Gardez. One policeman was killed and another was wounded during the attack ⁽¹⁸⁸⁰⁾. The same month, unidentified gunmen shot dead a local appellant court's attorney and two other civilians during an attack on a mosque in Gardez ⁽¹⁸⁸¹⁾. In August 2017, one employee of NDS and another civilian were killed and several other people wounded in a magnetic bomb explosion in the provincial capital ⁽¹⁸⁸²⁾.

Jani Khel district continued to be strongly contested during the reference period. In September 2016, a commander of the 203 Corps of the Spin Ghar Police Zone informed that Afghan forces recaptured the Jani Khel district which was taken over by Taliban one month earlier ⁽¹⁸⁸³⁾. Firefights between Taliban militants and security forces resumed in the district in July 2017 and the Taliban claimed capturing the district, but the Afghan Ministry of Interior rejected the assertion. Each side claimed to have inflicted heavy casualties on the other ⁽¹⁸⁸⁴⁾. The AAN lists several reasons why the Jani Khel district is of interest to the Taliban :

'the first reason is that the second-largest road connecting the two provincial centres runs through the district. It is the junction of a number of smaller roads and insurgent routes, leading to other hotspots in the region, for example, to Waza Dzadran (Paktia), which is controlled by a local rival of the Haqqanis, and Sabari (Khost) districts. Even more importantly, Jani Khel connects – through mountain passes in the border district of Dand-e-Patan – the Haqqani network's logistic bases over the border in Parachinar (Pakistan's Kurram Agency) with the areas on the Afghan side of the border that are already widely under Taleban control ⁽¹⁸⁸⁵⁾. Early in August 2017 the Taliban claimed overrunning the district and inflicting heavy casualties on the security personnel. Police spokesman said the security forces have withdrawn from the district to prevent civilian casualties' ⁽¹⁸⁸⁶⁾.

NATO forces have carried out airstrikes in the district, targeted at Taliban militants ⁽¹⁸⁸⁷⁾.

Bomb attacks have occurred throughout the province during the reference period. In September 2016, three civilians were killed and four other people were wounded in a roadside explosion in **Mirzaka** district near police check-point ⁽¹⁸⁸⁸⁾. In November 2016, at least five policemen were killed when their tank hit a roadside bomb while they were patrolling the area in **Ahmad Khel** district ⁽¹⁸⁸⁹⁾. In February 2017, a district police chief was injured and his guard killed in a bomb blast that damaged the police official's vehicle in **Shwak** district ⁽¹⁸⁹⁰⁾. The same month at least two civilians were killed and a third wounded in a suicide attack in **Dand-e-Patan** district. Dand-e-Patan is a remote border district of Paktya where, according to Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces and the Taliban frequently engage in armed clashes ⁽¹⁸⁹¹⁾,

⁽¹⁸⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 killed, 31 injured in Paktia bank attack, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban militants, policeman killed in Paktia clash, 12 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia prosecutor among 3 dead in gunmen attack, 10 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Intelligence operative, civilian killed in Paktia blast, 2 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jani Khel district wrested back from Taliban: Police, 6 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mol spurns Taliban claim of seizing Paktia district, 25 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁵⁾ Ruttig, T., Muzhary, F., At the end of a long curve : The fall of Janikhel, 8 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jani Khel district changes hands -- yet again, 10 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁸⁸⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, NATO blitz hits Taliban meeting in Paktia, 15 killed, 9 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia explosion claims lives of 3 civilians, 21 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁸⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 policemen killed in Paktia explosion, 8 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, District police chief injured in Paktia blast, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁹¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians killed, 1 wounded in Paktia suicide attack, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

¹⁸⁹²). In April 2017, a married couple and their child were killed by a pressure-plate IED in Ahmad Abad district. The explosion also injured two women, one of whom had a subsequent miscarriage (¹⁸⁹³).

In November 2016, residents of the **Zazi Aryoub** district said rocket strikes from Pakistani forces fell into some areas of the district town. The provincial police chief confirmed that around 30 rockets were fired from Pakistan into different parts of the district - specifically Zadran, Sultan Jaba and Mandir areas. There were no reports of casualties (¹⁸⁹⁴).

Instances of occupation and/or looting of healthcare facilities by AGE have been reported. In late August 2016, in **Jani Khel** district, AGE occupied the health clinic in the district administration centre before ANSF recaptured the area and in turn occupied the health clinic until 4 October 2016. Between late August 2016 and early October 2016, parties to the conflict occupying the facility destroyed and looted large part of the facility's equipment (¹⁸⁹⁵). UNAMA also documented incidents in which AGE abducted ambulances and sometimes stole their medical equipment and supplies. In September 2016, AGE stopped and seized an ambulance travelling in **Zurmat** district and abducted its driver. At the time, the ambulance was transporting a patient to Gardez hospital. Abductors later released the driver and returned the ambulance to the clinic (¹⁸⁹⁶).

The US forces perform occasional airstrike operations in Zurmat district against Taliban insurgents. In November 2016 a drone air strike has targeted and killed a Taliban commander in Shah Karez locality (¹⁸⁹⁷). In July 2017 seven insurgents were killed as a result of US forces airstrike in Mamozai area of Zurmat district (¹⁸⁹⁸).

In July 2017, UNOCHA reported that increased fighting in past weeks continued to inhibit the humanitarian access to people in need in several provinces of Afghanistan, including Paktya (¹⁸⁹⁹).

Displacement

According to UNOCHA's summary of conflict induced displacements, between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, there were total of 2,758 individuals displaced from Paktya. Among them, 454 were men, 508 were women and 1,800 were children (¹⁹⁰⁰). Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, there were total of 9,118 individuals displaced from Paktya. Among them, 1,254 were men, 1,305 were women and 6,566 were children (¹⁹⁰¹).

Many civilians have fled from the strongly contested Jani Khel district. Jani Khel changed hands three times since it was attacked by militants in September 2016. Clashes have resumed in summer 2017 - between 31 July and 6 August clashes resulted in displacement of more than 6,600 people from their villages. Between 21 and 27 August 2017, about 2,800 more people

⁽¹⁸⁹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban, security forces suffer casualties in Paktia fire fight, 1 Jun 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Zazai Aryub residents worried at Pakistani rocket strikes, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict **Annual Report 2016**, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 28.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan - Protection of civilians in Armed Conflict **Annual Report 2016**, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 30.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, US drone strike kills Taliban commander in Paktia, 20 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 rebels eliminated in Paktia airstrike, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁸⁹⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 66, 1-31 July 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2016, updated as of 4 June 2017 ([url](#)).

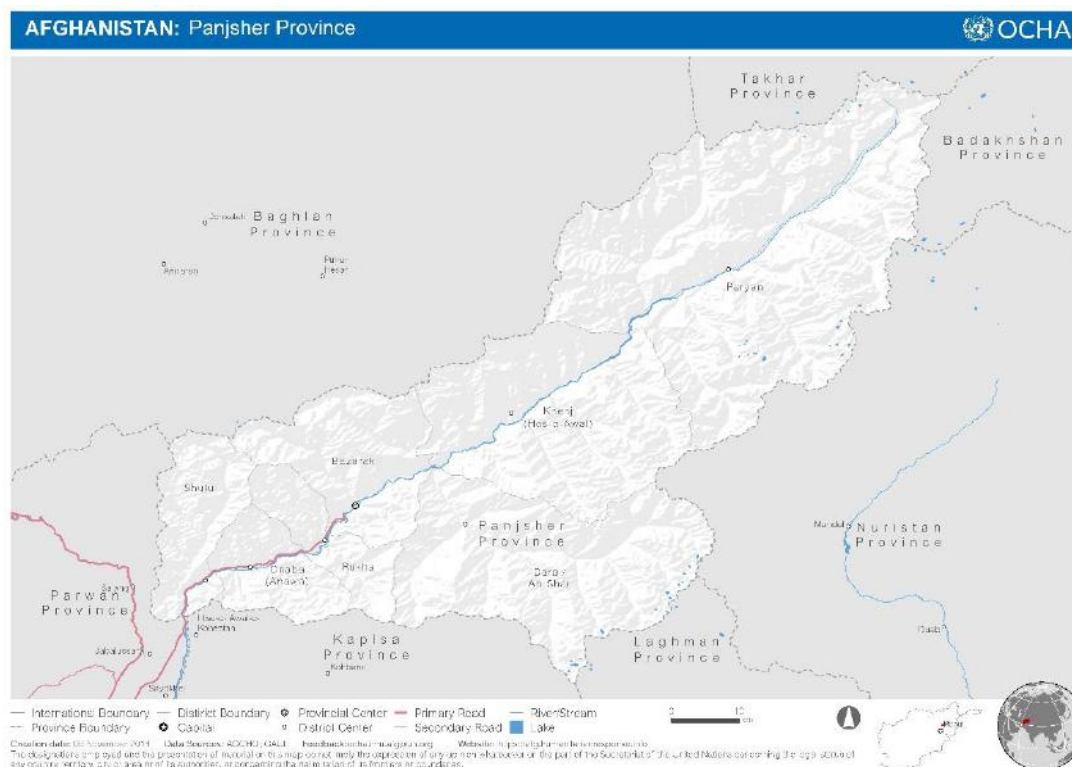
⁽¹⁹⁰¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 14 November 2017 ([url](#)).

left Jani Khel. Most of them fled to Chamkani and Dand-e-Patan districts of Paktya, and to Khost province ⁽¹⁹⁰²⁾.

From 1 January to 15 August 2017, about 1,700 newly displaced people arrived in Paktya ⁽¹⁹⁰³⁾.

2.28 Panjshir

General description of the province



Panjshir Province is located in the central zone of Afghanistan and surrounded by Nuristan in the east, Laghman in the Southeast, Kapisa in the south, Parwan in the west, Baghlan in the north-west, Takhar to the north and Badakhshan in the north-east. Nearly the entire province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain while only about 4.4 % of the area is made up of flat land ⁽¹⁹⁰⁴⁾.

Panjshir Province consists of the following districts: Bazarak, Dara/ Ab Shar, Khenj (Hes-e-Awal), Onaba (Anawa), Paryan, Rukha, Shutul ⁽¹⁹⁰⁵⁾. The capital is Bazarak. 98 % of its inhabitants are believed to be Tajiks while some Sunni Hazaras live in Dara and Paryan districts. A very small population of Kuchi is also reported ⁽¹⁹⁰⁶⁾. According to UNOCHA, the province had an estimated 153,487 inhabitants in 2015 ⁽¹⁹⁰⁷⁾. In its latest data the Afghan CSO

⁽¹⁹⁰²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 31 July – 6 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 21 August – 27 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Snapshot of Population Movements, 21 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰⁴⁾ MRRD, Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰⁵⁾ MRRD, Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰⁶⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons; MRRD, Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#))

⁽¹⁹⁰⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

estimates that 158,548 people are living in this province ⁽¹⁹⁰⁸⁾. According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 100 % of Panjshir's population live in rural areas and 39.1 % of its inhabitants is engaged in agricultural work ⁽¹⁹⁰⁹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Panjshir

Panjshir is a largely ethnically homogenous province, and its terrain and historical role against the Taliban has rendered insurgent infiltration difficult ⁽¹⁹¹⁰⁾. Because of their central role in the events after September 11th, 2001, Panjshiris, as the ethnic Tajiks of the valley are known, went on to dominate the initial post-Taliban order in both politics and security forces ⁽¹⁹¹¹⁾.

The political space in Panjshir is dominated by the Jamiat-e Islami party and former Shura-e Nazar networks. Shura-e Nazar was founded by the late Ahmad Shah Massoud. According to a source in Kabul, Hezb-e Islami previously had followers in the valley but under Massoud's leadership Hezb-e Islami followers were persecuted, leaving Jamiat uncontested dominance in the province ever since ⁽¹⁹¹²⁾. Massoud is buried in the province and his shrine regularly attracts high-placed people from Kabul ⁽¹⁹¹³⁾.

A deep and narrow gorge at the valley's mouth keeps the province very isolated and makes it very difficult to access ⁽¹⁹¹⁴⁾. Because of its geographical isolation and ethnic homogeneity, AGEs have not maintained a hold in this province. Nevertheless, authorities are concerned about insurgent intrusion through IDP movements, mainly coming from Nuristan ⁽¹⁹¹⁵⁾. According to a report issued by the Taliban in March 2017, the group claims to have fighters present in Dara Abdullah, Paryan and Rakha districts, but without holding any territory ⁽¹⁹¹⁶⁾. Concerning security forces, according to UNAMA and the US Department of Defense, no ALP programme was present in this province in 2016 ⁽¹⁹¹⁷⁾.

Recent security trends

The latest major security incidents in the province were attacks against the provincial governor's office in May 2013, against the district administrative centre of Dar, against the gate to the province in May 2014 and against the Administrative and chief of police building in May 2015 ⁽¹⁹¹⁸⁾. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, there were no reports of violence,

⁽¹⁹⁰⁸⁾ Central Statistics Organization, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁰⁹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 55-56.

⁽¹⁹¹⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁹¹¹⁾ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹¹²⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁹¹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, President and CEO arrive in Panjshir province, 1 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹¹⁴⁾ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹¹⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁹¹⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, , July 2016 ([url](#)) , p.91; US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 82.

⁽¹⁹¹⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

insecurity or attacks from the province of Panjshir for the months of September, October, November, December 2016 and January, February, March, April, May and August 2017 ⁽¹⁹¹⁹⁾. However, the Taliban stated on their official website that they launched missiles at the governor's office located in the capital wounding 3 policemen in May 2017 ⁽¹⁹²⁰⁾. From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Panjshir province, counted 2 security incidents ⁽¹⁹²¹⁾.

UNAMA reported no civilian casualties for this province, in the period January –June 2017 ⁽¹⁹²²⁾.

Displacement

No displacement has been registered from Panjshir in the period 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017 ⁽¹⁹²³⁾ but during the same period, 322 individuals who fled the provinces of Balkh, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Laghman and Nuristan found shelter in Panjshir ⁽¹⁹²⁴⁾. During the last week of July 2017, 91 individuals displaced to this province received cash from the Danish Refugee Council/Danish Demining Group (DRC-DDG) ⁽¹⁹²⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁹¹⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, In October, over 3,000 Afghans killed and wounded, 14 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualty toll hits nearly 1,400 in November, 18 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, January toll: 1,300 people killed and wounded in 137 attacks, 7 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, February: 1,400 killed & wounded in 139 attacks, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), Pajhwok Afghan News, March proves brutal than February, 984 killed, 6 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, April saw Afghan conflict killing nearly 1,500, 6 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3,000 people suffered casualties in May attacks, 5 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, In August, more than 3,000 suffered casualties, 6 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²⁰⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), 3 injured as governor office comes under attack, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²¹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁹²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

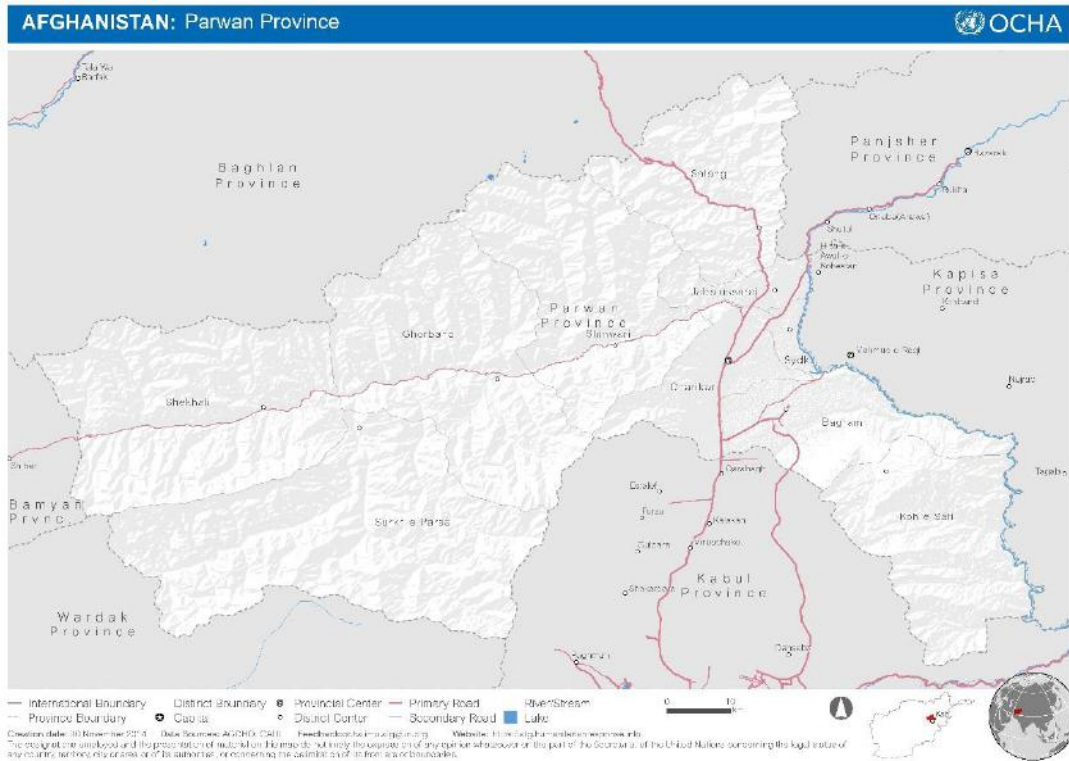
⁽¹⁹²³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²⁵⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, week of 23 July- 30 July 2017, 30 July 2017 ([url](#)).

2.29 Parwan

General description of the province



Parwan Province is located north of Kabul and surrounded by Bamyan, Baghlan, Panjsher, Kapisa, Kabul and Wardak provinces. More than two-thirds of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain while about one quarter of the area is flat land ⁽¹⁹²⁶⁾. Parwan Province is made up of the following districts: Bagram, Charikar, Ghorband (or Siagherd), Jabalussaraj, Koh-e Safi, Salang, Shekhali, Shinwari, Surkh-e Parsa and Saydkhel ⁽¹⁹²⁷⁾. According to the UNOCHA Parwan is estimated to have 664,502 inhabitants ⁽¹⁹²⁸⁾. In its latest data the Afghan Central Statistics Organization estimates that 687,243 people are living in this province ⁽¹⁹²⁹⁾. According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 91.2 % of Parwan's population live in rural areas and 39.1 % of its inhabitants is engaged in agricultural work ⁽¹⁹³⁰⁾.

70 % of Parwan's inhabitants are Tajik, 18 % Pashtun, 11 % Hazara and 1 % Turkmen. Ethnic Tajiks have a presence in every district in Parwan and live predominantly in Charikar, Salang, Jabalussaraj, Saydkhel, Bagram, Surkh-e Parsa and some parts of Shekhali districts ⁽¹⁹³¹⁾.

Shinwari district has a Pashtun majority and Ghorband a significant Pashtun population ⁽¹⁹³²⁾ as well as Koh-e Safi ⁽¹⁹³³⁾. Parwan Province also has a population of Kuchis or nomads whose

⁽¹⁹²⁶⁾ Afghanistan, MRD, Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Parwan province—reference map [map], 19 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹²⁹⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹³⁰⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 57-58.

⁽¹⁹³¹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁹³²⁾ Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, Afghanistan Analyst Network, 19 July 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹³³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., ([url](#)).

numbers vary in different seasons ⁽¹⁹³⁴⁾. Hazaras and the small Turk minority reside in Shekhali and Surkh-e Parsa districts ⁽¹⁹³⁵⁾. In Surkh-e Parsa district, Sunni Hazara are living and are, according to analyst Thomas Ruttig, traditionally at odds with the Shia Hazara in Bamyān and therefore supportive of Hezb-e Islami ⁽¹⁹³⁶⁾. Through the province runs Highway 1 connecting Kabul with Pul-e Khumri and other northern provincial capitals. From Charikar, the principal access road to Bamyān, the Ghandak Highway runs over the Shibar pass and through the Ghorband valley ⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Parwan

In Bagram there is an important military airfield which once was the largest American military base in the country where at its peak 40,000 military personnel and civilian contractors lived. The base also houses the Bagram detention centre ⁽¹⁹³⁸⁾, previously run by the US but handed over to the Afghan government by March 2013 ⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾. Bagram air base still is the biggest US military air base in Afghanistan ⁽¹⁹⁴⁰⁾.

Thomas Ruttig of AAN reported in 2011 that Pashtuns in Ghorband have traditionally been pro-Hezb-e Islami but the Taliban has been able to absorb some of its structures during their regime. Local Taliban networks have been reactivated and a provincial shadow administration has been set up ⁽¹⁹⁴¹⁾. In 2014, Landinfo noted that the insurgent groups active in the province included the Taliban, Hezb-e Islami, IMU and Al Qaeda ⁽¹⁹⁴²⁾. According to a representative of an international organization based in Afghanistan:

‘The Taliban in the province are constituted primarily by locals. In the mountainous Ghorband valley, Shinwari is a predominantly Pashtun district while Sia Gird [Ghorband] is a mixture of Pashtun and Tajiks. Koh-e-Safi district is located on the eastern part of the province with a Pashtun population (mainly Safi). The presence of insurgents can be attributed to numerous factors: one is the perception of marginalization by the communities from the provincial government dominated by Jamiat-affiliated Tajiks which has contributed to the alliance of former HIG [Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin] commanders with Taliban; another is unresolved grievances and political divisions of past decades nurtured by key powerbrokers to further their political goals. An additional element is the rural poverty of mountain valleys with deeply traditional and isolated communities’ ⁽¹⁹⁴³⁾.

In September 2015, IS infiltration and a few activities in parts of Parwan such as Shinwari, Ghorband and Koh-e Safi districts coming from the neighboring Baghlan was reported. But

⁽¹⁹³⁴⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹³⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons; Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, Afghanistan Analyst Network, 19 July 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹³⁶⁾ Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, Afghanistan Analyst Network, 19 July 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan Sikkerhetsoppdatering, 9 January 2014 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽¹⁹³⁸⁾ Time, Inside Afghanistan’s Bagram Airfield, 27 February 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾ Clark, K., The ‘Other Guantanamo’ 6: Afghans still struggling for sovereignty at Bagram, 25 July 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁴⁰⁾ Newsweek, U.S. military airbase attacked by suicide bombing in Afghanistan after soldiers insult Muslims with leaflets, 6 September 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Taliban Ambush Bagram Air Base Employees, Eight Killed, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁴¹⁾ Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, 19 July 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁴²⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan Sikkerhetsoppdatering, 9 January 2014 ([url](#)), p. 20.

⁽¹⁹⁴³⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

they reportedly have met resistance from some local AGEs ⁽¹⁹⁴⁴⁾. In April 2016 it was estimated that some 300 AGEs were active in the Ghorband valley ⁽¹⁹⁴⁵⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Parwan Province counted 130 security incidents ⁽¹⁹⁴⁶⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	10
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	54
Explosions	18
Security enforcement	15
Non-conflict related incidents	30
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	130

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Parwan Province ⁽¹⁹⁴⁷⁾:

Bagram	37	Sayd Khel	7
Chaharikar	26	Shekh Ali	1
Jabalussaraj	9	Shinwari	13
Kohi Safi	4	Sia Gird	30
Salang	2	Surkhi Parsa	1

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, there were no reports of violence, insecurity or attacks from the province of Parwan for the months of January, February and March 2017 ⁽¹⁹⁴⁸⁾. In July 2017 UNAMA reported 40 civilian casualties (13 deaths and 27 injured) for this province, caused primarily by targeted/deliberate killings, ground engagement and IED ⁽¹⁹⁴⁹⁾. The IWPR reported in January 2017 that numerous civilians in Parwan province have fallen victim to retaliatory attacks by insurgent forces. Some have been forced to flee their homes, while others have been murdered ⁽¹⁹⁵⁰⁾.

In Bagram district, the Bagram airbase and its international and local personnel were targeted by suicide attacks ⁽¹⁹⁵¹⁾ and shelling according to Pajhwok Afghan News and the web site of

⁽¹⁹⁴⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽¹⁹⁴⁵⁾ Tolo News, Suicide bomber kills 8 and wounds 34 in Parwan, 5 April 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁴⁶⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁹⁴⁷⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁹⁴⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, February: 1,400 killed & wounded in 139 attacks, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, March proves brutal than February, 984 killed, 6 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁴⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁹⁵⁰⁾ IWPR, Afghanistan: Civilians Caught up in Revenge Attacks, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵¹⁾ New York Times, Bomber kills 4 Americans at U.S. Base in Afghanistan, 12 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, US soldier succumbs to injuries suffered in Bagram attack, 8 December 2016 ([url](#)).

the Taliban in the last three months of 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁵²⁾. In one incident, convoys of foreign forces were targeted by a roadside blast ⁽¹⁹⁵³⁾ and in another instance by IED ⁽¹⁹⁵⁴⁾ as reported by Pajhwok Afghan News and the web site of the Taliban. Targeted killings were also reported in 2016 and 2017: women guards in charge of searching people entering the airfield were shot by motorcyclists as they were in the nearby bazar ⁽¹⁹⁵⁵⁾; security guards of a foreign company were attacked by insurgents ⁽¹⁹⁵⁶⁾ and a teacher was shot ⁽¹⁹⁵⁷⁾. In Sayedkhel district in August 2017, a private vehicle holding a police officer was ambushed and 3 people were wounded, including the police officer, and one killed ⁽¹⁹⁵⁸⁾.

In Charikar City, a remote-controlled IED killed the head of the Parwan provincial Ulema Shura and injured six civilians ⁽¹⁹⁵⁹⁾.

During the summer of 2017, Parwan-Bamyan highway was occasionally closed either because of clashes between insurgents and security forces in Siagherd district ⁽¹⁹⁶⁰⁾ or because it was blocked by insurgents (Jabalalsaraj, Shinwari districts) according to Pajhwok Afghan News and the web site of the Taliban ⁽¹⁹⁶¹⁾.

As of March 2017, according to ISW, the stretch of road running through Ghorband is divided into a 'Taliban control zone' and a 'low confidence ISIS support zone'. The stretch along the same road in Shinwari is considered a 'high confidence Taliban support zone'. A 'low confidence Taliban support zone' running through parts of Salang, Jabalussaraj, Charikar and Saydkhel connects this area with Baghlan, and Kapisa 'Taliban control- and support-zones' from neighbouring Tagab district in Kapisa are also stretching into Koh-e Safi district ⁽¹⁹⁶²⁾.

In March 2017, the Taliban issued a report on its presence in Afghanistan, claiming that its fighters controlled 95 % of the territory of Siagherd [Ghorband], apart from the district centre. The Taliban also claimed to hold 60 % of Shinwari and Koh-e Safi. According to the Taliban, the movement does not have any territory under its control in Surkh-e Parsa, Bagram, Sayed Khel, Jabal Siraj, Salang and Charikar, but its fighters carry out guerilla attacks in those districts. The Taliban also claimed to control 30 % of Sher Ali [Shekhali] ⁽¹⁹⁶³⁾. As of January 2017, according to a security official cited by IWPR, more than 20 people have been killed by the Taliban in Shinwari, Siagherd [Ghorband] and Koh-e Safi districts just because members of their family were in the Afghan police force and national army. According to the same report, local people whose relatives had joined the Taliban also found themselves targeted by the state security forces. In some cases, merely coming from an area outside government control

⁽¹⁹⁵²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 US soldiers hurt in Parwan suicide bombing, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)); Khaama Press, NATO: Taliban rocket destroyed, 2 minor injuries in IED attack, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)); Voice of Jihad, Missiles hit Bagram airbase in Parwan, 29 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign forces convoy attacked in Parwan, 14 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 US soldiers hurt in Parwan suicide bombing, 26 October 2016 ([url](#)); Voice of Jihad, 4 American invaders killed in Parwan, 10 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 female security guards killed in Bagram attack, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 security guards of foreign firm shot dead in Bagram, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan teacher killed on World Teachers' Day, 4 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 killed, 3 injured in Parwan gun attack, 22 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁵⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽¹⁹⁶⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan-Bamyan highway closed amid fierce clash, 27 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Road leads to Bamyan blocked off in Parwan, 23 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan-Bamyan highway reopened for traffic, 8 July 2017 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Parwan-Bamyan highway blocked in Siyah Gerd, 5 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶²⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶³⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

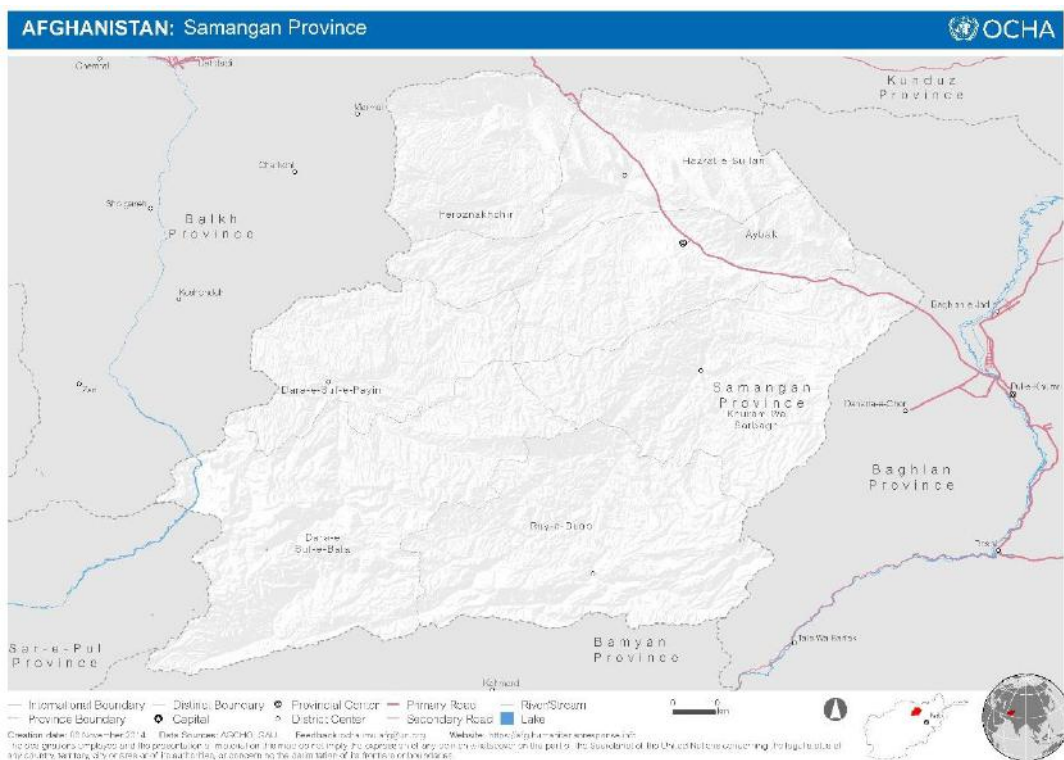
made people suspicious ⁽¹⁹⁶⁴⁾. However, both security forces and insurgents denied harassing civilians, insisting they never create problems for unarmed people ⁽¹⁹⁶⁵⁾.

Displacement

In December 2016, 42 individuals were displaced from Shinwari district and took shelter in Charikar district ⁽¹⁹⁶⁶⁾. In March 2017, 1,652 persons were displaced from Ghorband district to Kabul district and in August 2017, 17 persons left Shinwari for Kabul district ⁽¹⁹⁶⁷⁾.

2.30 Samangan

General description of the province



Samangan is located in northern Afghanistan and shares provincial borders with Balkh in the west, Sar-e Pul in the southwest, Kunduz in the northeast, Baghlan in the east and Bamyán in the south. The province consists of following districts: Aybak, Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala, Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin, Feroz Nakhchir, Hazrate Sultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh, Ruye Duab and the provincial capital is Aybak ⁽¹⁹⁶⁸⁾.

With an estimated population of 401,134, Samangan is one of the least populated provinces of Afghanistan. The population of provincial capital Aybak is estimated at 110,070 ⁽¹⁹⁶⁹⁾. The

⁽¹⁹⁶⁴⁾ IWPR, Afghanistan: Civilians Caught up in Revenge Attacks, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban, security forces accused of harassing civilians, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)); IWPR, Afghanistan: Civilians Caught up in Revenge Attacks, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced Displacements [map], 10 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁶⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil Division, Urban, Rural and Sex-2017-18, n.d. ([url](#)).

major ethnic groups living in Samangan province are Uzbeks and Tajiks followed by Pashtuns, Hazara, Arabs and Tatars ⁽¹⁹⁷⁰⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 92.4 % of Samangan's population live in rural areas and 40 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽¹⁹⁷¹⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Samangan

In May 2015, residents complained about a deteriorating security situation. A provincial council member stated to Pajhwok Afghan News that Samangan 'was said to be a peaceful province, but lately insurgents intensified their activities and some parts of the province became insecure' ⁽¹⁹⁷²⁾. Furthermore officials suggested in 2015 that AGEs active in neighbouring Baghlan used Samangan as a safe haven in case of ANSF operations against them ⁽¹⁹⁷³⁾.

Samangan was one of nine provinces where IS has appointed recruiters, according to United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in April 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁷⁴⁾. Pro-government armed groups are reported to be present in Aybak district ⁽¹⁹⁷⁵⁾ and are responsible for abuses in Samangan, according to UNAMA ⁽¹⁹⁷⁶⁾.

In 2017 Samangan province lost the poppy-free status it had held for nearly 10 years ⁽¹⁹⁷⁷⁾.

Taliban control and presence in the different districts of Balkh province remained unchanged according to a March 2017 assessment by the ISW. More than half of the north of Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin is considered a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' and a small pocket of the province is assessed as under Taliban control since April 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁷⁸⁾. The Taliban claimed to control 60% of Dara-I Suf district ⁽¹⁹⁷⁹⁾ in March 2017, excluding the district center ⁽¹⁹⁸⁰⁾. While the Taliban also claimed to control 60% of Hazrat-e Sultan district, ISW assessed a small part of the district as a 'low confidence Taliban support zone'. ISW considers parts of Aybak and Khuram Wa Sarbagh districts to be 'low confidence Taliban support zones'. In these and the remaining districts of Samangan province the Taliban presence or activity is reported to be limited, including as reported by the Taliban itself ⁽¹⁹⁸¹⁾.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁰⁾ NPS, Samangan Provincial Review, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁷¹⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁷²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan PC performance unsatisfactory: Residents, 25 May 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁷³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan-i-Markazi district cleared of rebels, 24 May 2015 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban take control of area after police retreat, 23 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁷⁴⁾ USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan assessing the Threat, April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 65.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan loses decade-old poppy-free status, 18 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Poppies destroyed on 300 acres of Samangan land, 31 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁷⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment, 12 April 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁷⁹⁾ The Taliban only mentions one 'Dara Suf' district, not differing between Dara-i-Suf-e Payin and Dara-i-Suf-e Bala districts. Dara-i Suf-e-Bala and Dara-i Suf-e-Payin initially were united in one district, Dara-I Suf. The two districts were separated after the fall of Taliban regime. ACF, Afghanistan: Nutrition Causal Analysis in Dari-Suf-Bala District, Samangan Province, January 2015 – February 2016, 29 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁸⁰⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁸¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)); LWJ, Control map by districts, n.d. (created 2 March 2017) ([url](#)).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Samangan Province counted 77 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽¹⁹⁸²⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	9
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	18
Explosions	12
Security enforcement	15
Non-conflict related incidents	22
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	77

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Samangan Province ⁽¹⁹⁸³⁾:

Aybak	35	Hazrati Sultan	6
Dara-I-Sufi Bala	3	Khuram Wa Sarbagh	2
Dara-I-Sufi Payin	23	Ruyi Du Ab	7
Feroz Nakhchir	1		

With 24 civilian casualties (8 deaths and 16 injured) Samangan province saw a 17 % decrease in civilian casualties in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016. ERW (Explosive Remnants of War) were the leading cause for civilian casualties, followed by IED explosions and ground engagements ⁽¹⁹⁸⁴⁾.

In December 2016, AGEs detonated a remote-controlled IED inside a pharmacy in Dara-I Suf-e-Payin district. Their intended target was a doctor who was examining patients. As a result, three civilians were killed and four others, including a girl, were injured ⁽¹⁹⁸⁵⁾. In January 2017, a man was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Dara-I Suf-e-Payin district ⁽¹⁹⁸⁶⁾. Also in 2017, a woman was severely beaten by AGEs in her home in Dara-I Suf-e-Payin district, according to UNAMA, after being accused of adultery and prostitution ⁽¹⁹⁸⁷⁾. UNAMA also documented the abduction of two boys in the same district, one by AGEs on accusation of immoral behavior, the other by pro-government armed group members, due to links between his father and

⁽¹⁹⁸²⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁹⁸³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽¹⁹⁸⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 11, 73.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 58.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Man gunned down, robber wounded in Samangan, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁸⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

AGEs. They were both released later ⁽¹⁹⁸⁸⁾. A clash was reported in in Dara-I Suf-e-Payin district in July 2017 as a result of the Taliban attacking ALP members ⁽¹⁹⁸⁹⁾.

Arrests of Taliban fighters were reported from Samangan province ⁽¹⁹⁹⁰⁾. Three ANP members were killed in an IED blast at an unspecified location in Samangan in September 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁹¹⁾. A kidnapped coalmine worker was killed after his family had paid a ransom. The man had been kidnapped in Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala district in November 2016 and his body was found in the neighbouring RuyeDuab district in January 2017 ⁽¹⁹⁹²⁾. A top commander of the Taliban was killed and three were wounded during clashes with Afghan security forces in the provincial capital Aybak in February 2017 ⁽¹⁹⁹³⁾. The sister of a NDS member was shot dead by a policeman when her house in Aybak was raided on suspicion of ongoing gambling activity there ⁽¹⁹⁹⁴⁾. Officials stated to have arrested a Taliban commander and a member of the Uzbek insurgent group Jundullah in Hazrat-e Sultan district in March 2017 ⁽¹⁹⁹⁵⁾. An official of the High Peace Council (HPC) and former jihadi commander was abducted and killed by Taliban militants in Khuram Wa Sarbagh district in July 2017, officials reported ⁽¹⁹⁹⁶⁾. Local officials confirmed that dozens of armed militants besieged RuyeDuab district center in May 2017. The clashes, resulting in three civilians reportedly being killed, were followed by an operation by special forces in the district ⁽¹⁹⁹⁷⁾.

In a 2016 survey of the Afghan people, the Asia Foundation stated that over the course of 2016 the road connection between Baghlan and Samangan became increasingly insecure ⁽¹⁹⁹⁸⁾.

Displacements

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017 UNOCHA recorded 3,113 IDPs (334 families) from Samangan province, most originating from Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin district. Other districts in Samangan generating IDPs, were RuyeDuab and Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala ⁽¹⁹⁹⁹⁾. Following an AGE attack in Dara-e Suf-e-Bala district, 1,050 people were reportedly displaced in April 2017 ⁽²⁰⁰⁰⁾. A large group of people left RuyeDuab district in May 2017 according to UNOCHA records ⁽²⁰⁰¹⁾, around the time when clashes, followed by a special operation, were reported in that district (see above).

⁽¹⁹⁸⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 43, 60.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP personnel among 3 dead in Samangan clash, 22 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Taliban arrested with weapons in Samangan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Senior Taliban leader arrested in North of Afghanistan, 6 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹¹⁾ Bakhtar News Agency, Three ANP Martyred in Mines Blast, 6 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Body of kidnapped coalmine worker found, 10 January 2017 ([url](#)); Bakhtar News Agency, Abductors After Receiving 1m Afghans Shot Dead Coalminer, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹³⁾ Bakhtar News Agency, Taliban Senior Commander Killed In Samangan, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police kill young girl in Samangan home raid, 11 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban commander, Jandullah member arrested, 15 March 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Jundullah's explosives expert and Taliban's key commander arrested in Samangan, 16 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan's peace committee public relations official killed, 9 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban besiege Samangan's Doab district amid clashes, 12 May 2017 ([url](#));

Afghanistan Times, Key Taliban commanders killed in Samangan, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Prominent Taliban leaders killed in Afghan forces targeted operation in Samangan, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Two Top Taliban Leaders In Samangan Killed In Operations, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁸⁾ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People. Afghanistan in 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 02 to 08 April 2017, April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰¹⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

Samangan province received 2,883 IDPs between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, according to UNOCHA records. Provincial capital Aybak received a large group originating from Kunduz district in Kunduz province in October 2016, a large group from Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin district in January 2017 and the largest group from RuyeDuab district in May 2017 ⁽²⁰⁰²⁾.

⁽²⁰⁰²⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.31 Sar-e Pul

General description of the province



Sar-e Pul borders Ghor and Bamyan provinces to the south, Faryab to the west, Jawzjan to the north and Balkh to the northeast. It is a mountainous province, consisting of the following districts: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sangcharak, Sar-e Pul, Sayad, Sozmaqala ⁽²⁰⁰³⁾.

Sar-e Pul province has an estimated population of 578,639, the provincial capital Sar-e Pul has an estimated population of 164,591 ⁽²⁰⁰⁴⁾. The province has an Uzbek majority population (31 %), and significant groups of Tajiks (25 %), Hazara (22 %) and Aimaq (11 %), as well as pockets of Arabs and Pashtuns, according to United Nation figures cited by the AAN ⁽²⁰⁰⁵⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 92.3 % of Sar-e Pul's population live in rural areas and 59.8 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽²⁰⁰⁶⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Sar-e Pul

In June 2015, AAN analyst Obaid Ali reported that the security situation in the province had been deteriorating over the previous two years ⁽²⁰⁰⁷⁾.

A joint study by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) and The Liaison Office (TLO) names Sar-e Pul as one of the Northern provinces where irregular forces, such as *arbaki* or private paramilitary units of commanders, and anti-government forces, which are mostly various local Taliban groups, outnumber the ANSF and National Uprising units ⁽²⁰⁰⁸⁾.

In an early 2017 analysis, AAN counts Sar-e Pul province among those vulnerable to Taliban expansion ⁽²⁰⁰⁹⁾. Sar-e Pul province has 'developed into a Taliban stronghold' since 2012, according to Obaid Ali, writing in March 2017, where they have gained significant ground and also set up an active administration and military structure. He points out that the Taliban were in control of more than half of the province by March 2017 ⁽²⁰¹⁰⁾.

Furthermore, at the beginning of 2017 it was reported that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) had a presence in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰¹¹⁾.

Besides the ANSF, the ALP was reported to be active in the western districts of Sar-e Pul, Kohestanat and Sayad, in 2014 ⁽²⁰¹²⁾. There have been reports of misconduct by ALP in recent years ⁽²⁰¹³⁾. In 2015, UNAMA listed Sar-e Pul among the provinces where the worst human

⁽²⁰⁰³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile Sar-i-Pul Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁴⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil Division, Urban, Rural and Sex-2017-18, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁵⁾ Ali O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁶⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#))

⁽²⁰⁰⁷⁾ Ali O., The 2015 Insurgency in the North: Case studies from Kunduz and Sar-e Pul provinces, 4 June 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁸⁾ Mielke, K. and Misak N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁹⁾ AAN, What to watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹⁰⁾ Ali O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, July 2015 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Son of slain IMU leader promotes IS in Afghanistan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹²⁾ US Department of Defense, Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP chided over families' displacement, 28 October 2013 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, AIHRC wants illegal armed groups disbanded, 2 September 2014 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2015, August 2015 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

rights violations were committed by ALP ⁽²⁰¹⁴⁾. Further, militias reportedly also committed human-rights abuses in Sar-e Pul Province in 2016 ⁽²⁰¹⁵⁾.

In March 2017, Obaid Ali stated that ‘Sar-e Pul is most dominated by three political parties: Junbesh-e Melli Islami Afghanistan, Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami Mardom-e Afghanistan and Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan’. He refers to a provincial council member who states that rivalry over government posts between Jamiat and Junbesh is a major negative factor affecting the security situation with personal interests by local strongmen intensifying local feuds between key players. Leader of the Junbesh party, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, has personally led a number of operations against the Taliban in the North since 2015, including in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾.

In 2017, there were reports about the presence of Islamic State (IS) in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾, in particular in Sayad district ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾. Sar-e Pul was one of nine provinces in 2016 where IS has appointed recruiters, according to USIP ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁾. Officials claimed that the Taliban cooperated with IS in an attack on Mirza Olang valley in Sayad district in August 2017 ⁽²⁰²⁰⁾, during which dozens of civilians were killed (see below). This was denied by the Taliban, who claimed sole responsibility for the attack ⁽²⁰²¹⁾, and observers and analysts expressed their doubts about the credibility of claims of a joint operation ⁽²⁰²²⁾. After examining the insurgents’ structure in Sayad district, Obaid Ali stated to have found no evidence of an IS presence there and was not convinced that the events in Mirza Olang were a joint Taliban-IS operation ⁽²⁰²³⁾. According to UNAMA, reported cooperation between Taliban and local self-identified IS ‘appears to be linked to the relationship between the local self-proclaimed Daesh commander and the local Taliban commander/shadow provincial governor, who are known to be related’. UNAMA states not to be aware of information supporting links between the local self-proclaimed IS commander and ISKP in Nangarhar or IS in Iraq and the Levant ⁽²⁰²⁴⁾.

Several incidents of switching allegiances between AGEs and security forces, uprising groups or pro-government armed groups and also between different AGE groups have been reported in Sar-e Pul province between September 2016 and May 2017 ⁽²⁰²⁵⁾. In November 2016, a

⁽²⁰¹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Mid-Year Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 88; Ali O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾ Ali O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾ Ariana News, Daesh Recruiting Fighters in Several Northern Provinces of Afghanistan, 23 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, ‘Daesh, Taliban coordinate attacks in Sar-i-Pul’, 26 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul security situation alarming: officials, 2 December 2016 ([url](#)); TV1, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan recruiting for IS in Sar-e-Pul: governor, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Son of slain IMU leader promotes IS in Afghanistan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul security situation alarming: officials, 2 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰¹⁹⁾ USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016 ([url](#)); USIP, The Rise and Stall of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁰⁾ New York Times (The), Joint Taliban-ISIS Attack Kills Dozen, Afghan Officials Say, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²¹⁾ RFE/RL, Local Afghan Officials Say Taliban, IS Teamed Up In Deadly Village Attack, 7 August 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Hundreds Of Hostages Freed After Rare Joint IS-Taliban Attack In Afghanistan, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²²⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Official: Taliban Seize Control of Key Northern Area, 5 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²³⁾ Ali O., The Assault in Sayad: Did Taleban and Daesh really collaborate?, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁴⁾ UNAMA, Special Report - Attacks in Mirza Olang, Sari Pul province: 3 – 5 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commander among 11 ANA troops surrender to Taliban, 4 September 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Uprising commander joins Taliban group with his 14 men in Sar-e-Pul, 5 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan news, 12 militiamen defect to Taliban in Sar-i-Pul, 11 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 local policemen join Taliban in Sar-i-Pul, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan news, Rebel group joins peace process in Sar-i-Pul, 6 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan news, 62 insurgents join peace drive in Sar-i-Pul, 17 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Eight insurgents renounce violence in Sar-e-Pul, 23 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan news, 16 Taliban return to insurgency in Sar-i-Pul, 4 February 2017 ([url](#)).

seven-member insurgent group killed five public uprising members, officials claimed. They had joined the peace process about two months earlier and had been serving as public uprising members since, but apparently had not cut their links to the Taliban ⁽²⁰²⁶⁾.

Sayad district saw the most significant changes in Taliban control or presence, according to the ISW. By March 2017, it assessed the whole district as a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ with two small pockets in that same district being under Taliban control ⁽²⁰²⁷⁾. The Taliban claimed to control 90 % of Sayad and Sozmaqala district in March 2017, excluding the district center ⁽²⁰²⁸⁾ and Obaid Ali described both districts, as ‘heavily contested, with government control limited to the district centre and nearby villages ⁽²⁰²⁹⁾. ISW assessed a large part in the north-west of Sozmaqala district as ‘a high confidence Taliban support zone’ in March 2017 ⁽²⁰³⁰⁾. A large area in the north of Sar-e Pul district, assessed by ISW as a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ in November 2016 ⁽²⁰³¹⁾, was expanded in ISW’s March 2017 assessment and a small pocket considered to be under Taliban control was added ⁽²⁰³²⁾. The Taliban has maintained a presence near Sar-e Pul city, according to Obaid Ali, with an area called Sheramah, just beyond the city’s borders entirely under Taliban control ⁽²⁰³³⁾. The Taliban claimed to control 50 % of Sar-e Pul city in March 2017 ⁽²⁰³⁴⁾. According to Obaid Ali, Kohestanat district had come entirely under Taliban control in July 2015 ⁽²⁰³⁵⁾. In June 2016, Mol admitted that Kohestanat was out of government’s control ⁽²⁰³⁶⁾, which was confirmed by the Taliban in March 2017 ⁽²⁰³⁷⁾. The district center was assessed as under Taliban control with a surrounding area in the east of the district considered a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ in March 2017 by ISW ⁽²⁰³⁸⁾. In February 2017 the governor of Sar-e Pul province said insurgents had been in control of Kohistanat district over the previous 18 months ⁽²⁰³⁹⁾. ISW considered an area in the north of Sancharak district a ‘high confidence Taliban support zone’ in March 2017 ⁽²⁰⁴⁰⁾. Obaid Ali described Sancharak as a ‘contested district’ with the government controlling around 50 % of the territory and the remaining parts under Taliban control ⁽²⁰⁴¹⁾, which was in line with information provided by the Taliban in March 2017 ⁽²⁰⁴²⁾.

⁽²⁰²⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Reconciled rebels kill 5 uprising members in Sar-i-Pul, 6 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁷⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁸⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁹⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁰⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³¹⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³²⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³³⁾ Ali O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁴⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁵⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁶⁾ Tolo News, Over 50 Districts Face Severe Security Threats, Mol admits, 28 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁷⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁸⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁹⁾ RFE/RL, Son of slain IMU leader promotes IS in Afghanistan, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴⁰⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 20 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴¹⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴²⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

ISW considered about half of Gosfandi district and only a small pocket in Balkhab district as ‘high confidence Taliban support zones’ in March 2017 ⁽²⁰⁴³⁾. Obaid Ali described government control in Gosfandi and Balkhab districts as ‘better, but still only limited’ in March 2017 ⁽²⁰⁴⁴⁾. The Taliban claimed to control 10 % of those two districts ⁽²⁰⁴⁵⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Sar-e Pul Province counted 185 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ⁽²⁰⁴⁶⁾:

Violence targeting individuals	20
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	118
Explosions	18
Security enforcement	15
Non-conflict related incidents	12
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	185

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Sar-e Pul Province ⁽²⁰⁴⁷⁾:

Balkhab	2	Sari Pul	78
Gosfandi	6	Sayyad	78
Kohistanat	1	Sozma Qala	5
Sangcharak	15		

As reported by the UN Secretary-General in June 2017, Sar-e Pul is one of the provinces on which the Taliban have focused their attacks ⁽²⁰⁴⁸⁾. A diplomatic source cited by Landinfo estimated that just under 9 % of all 1,362 civilian casualties UNAMA ⁽²⁰⁴⁹⁾ recorded in the northern region in 2016 were in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰⁵⁰⁾. Sar-e Pul province saw a 20 % decrease in civilian casualties in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016. UNAMA documented 40 civilian casualties (22 deaths and 18 injured) in Sar-e Pul province in the first half of 2017. Targeted or deliberate killings were the leading cause for civilian

⁽²⁰⁴³⁾ ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)); ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 22 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴⁴⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, 17 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴⁵⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴⁶⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽²⁰⁴⁷⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽²⁰⁴⁸⁾ United Nations Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁴⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁰⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Jawzjan, 5 April 2017 ([url](#)).

casualties in Sar-e Pul province in the first half of 2017, followed by ERW and ground engagements ⁽²⁰⁵¹⁾.

In 2016 several kidnappings were reported in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰⁵²⁾.

In January and April 2017 operations were reportedly carried out in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰⁵³⁾ and air strikes were reported in the province in July 2017 ⁽²⁰⁵⁴⁾.

The media reported two instances in January and February 2017 where security forces claimed to have discovered and defused explosive materials in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰⁵⁵⁾.

Killings of ethnic Hazara civilians by self-identified Daesh/ISKP fighters were reported in Sar-e Pul province in September 2016 and March 2017 ⁽²⁰⁵⁶⁾.

During an operation in October 2016, Afghan forces re-captured as many as nine villages in Sayad district out of thirteen villages the Taliban had seized three days earlier ⁽²⁰⁵⁷⁾. In November 2016, media reported that the Taliban had captured several villages in the western part of Sayad district, killing the ALP head of the district ⁽²⁰⁵⁸⁾. In that same month there were reports of the Taliban closing in on the district center of Sayad district during a fierce clash with security forces ⁽²⁰⁵⁹⁾. An ALP police commander was killed and three of his bodyguards were wounded in a roadside bomb explosion in October 2016 in Band-i-Mirzaw area in Sayad district ⁽²⁰⁶⁰⁾. In November 2016 official sources claimed an ALP member who had been held captive in Sayad district was beheaded by reconciled insurgents who rejoined the Taliban ⁽²⁰⁶¹⁾. Police claimed to have arrested two foreign fighters with links to the Taliban during a raid in Sayad district in January 2017 ⁽²⁰⁶²⁾. According to UNAMA self-identified Daesh/ISKP fighters shot dead a civilian and injured his sister in March 2017, after they had refused to pay them taxes ⁽²⁰⁶³⁾. A large operation codenamed 'Albarz' was launched in Sayad district in April 2017 and led to clashes with AGEs with casualties on both sides ⁽²⁰⁶⁴⁾. Three women and a child were killed when mortar shells hit their houses in Sayad district in April 2017. Both AGEs and security forces blamed each other for firing the shells and accused each other of targeting civilians ⁽²⁰⁶⁵⁾.

⁽²⁰⁵¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 11, p. 79.

⁽²⁰⁵²⁾ KP, Sar-e-Pul governor, intelligence chief escape suicide bomber attack, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵³⁾ Tolo News, 77 insurgents killed, wounded in operations in 16 provinces, 8 January 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 militants killed in round-the-clock raids: MoD, 7 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 45 Daesh rebels among 84 killed in security operations, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁴⁾ RFE/RL, At Least 13 Militants Killed In Afghan Air Strikes, Say Officials, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁵⁾ Bakhtar News Agency, 60 Kg Explosive Materials Discovered And Deactivated: NDS, 30 January 2017 ([url](#)); Bakhtar News Agency, Recent Conflicts Kill 10 Insurgents, ANSF Prevented 4 Blasts, 15 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Hazara elders allegedly beheaded in Sar-i-Pul, 16 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Many Sayad villages cleared of militants, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban seize many in Sar-i-Pul villages abandoned by police, 2 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban closing in Sar-i-Pul's Sayad district, 19 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁰⁾ Ariana News, Roadside bomb killed ALP commander, 3 guards in Sar-i-Pul, 28 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban behead ALP man in captivity in Sar-i-Pul, 8 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 foreigners with links to Taliban detained in Sar-i-Pul, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 insurgents killed, 22 injured in Sar-i-Pul operation, 8 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 21 Taliban killed & wounded in Sar-i-Pul operation, 10 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 57 militants killed, 3 drug smugglers captured: MoI, 11 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces in Sayad district, 15 April 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 insurgents killed, 8 injured in Sar-i-pul offensive, 15 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 women, child killed by Taliban-fired mortar shells, 17 April 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban kill child and 3 women over alleged cooperation with govt in Sar-e-Pul, 17 April 2017 ([url](#)).

Several sources were alarmed by the brutality of an attack on Mirza Olang village in Sayad district launched on 3 August 2017 ⁽²⁰⁶⁶⁾. After conducting a fact-finding mission to the area, UNAMA stated in August 2017 that AGEs, including Taliban and self-proclaimed Daesh fighters, killed at least 36 persons, including both civilians and persons *hors de combat*. A group of 18 persons, civilians and pro-government militia members, were killed deliberately, while they were trying to escape, according to UNAMA's preliminary findings ⁽²⁰⁶⁷⁾. Further investigation into allegations of a sectarian dimension to the killings is needed according to UNAMA, while the mission states that it has not received information that supports claims of a sectarian or ethnically motivated attack. Of the 36 persons killed, 9 were identified as members of security forces of pro-government militias. UNAMA states to have 'sufficient grounds to conclude that most of the (remaining) 27 (deceased persons) are civilian' ⁽²⁰⁶⁸⁾. Aiming at retaking Mirza Olang valley, the security forces launched a military air and ground operation ⁽²⁰⁶⁹⁾ and the government announced that it recaptured Mirza Olang on 14 August 2017 ⁽²⁰⁷⁰⁾.

Clashes between Taliban and Afghan forces were reported in the outskirts of Sar-e Pul city in November 2016 resulting in deaths among Taliban fighters and security personnel ⁽²⁰⁷¹⁾. In December 2016, officials accused the Taliban of killing a woman in Lati village (a village under Taliban control on the outskirts of Sar-e Pul city) after she had visited relatives in an area under government control. The Taliban, however, rejected the allegation and attributed the killing to personal enmity ⁽²⁰⁷²⁾. Five members of the same family, including two women and two children, were killed by AGEs in April 2017. One of the women had been released after earlier being illegally detained for 'immoral behavior' ⁽²⁰⁷³⁾. Clashes were reported in a locality north of Sar-e Pul city in January 2017, when security forces freed six border policemen a week after they had been abducted by the Taliban ⁽²⁰⁷⁴⁾. Two separate attempted suicide attacks against the governor were reportedly foiled ⁽²⁰⁷⁵⁾.

In December 2016, infighting was reported in Halaka village of Balkhab district, during which one AGE was killed and two others wounded ⁽²⁰⁷⁶⁾. Two members of a public uprising group were reportedly killed and a third wounded during a clash with AGEs in Sancharak district in September 2016 ⁽²⁰⁷⁷⁾. A clash was reported between Taliban fighters and security forces in

⁽²⁰⁶⁶⁾ Global Voices, Afghanistan's Government Stood By as Militants Unleashed Hell on a Hazara Village, 8 August 2017 ([url](#)); AIHRC, On the brutal killing of civilians in Mirza Olang village of Sar-i-Pul province, 11 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁷⁾ UNAMA, Special Report - Attacks in Mirza Olang, Sari Pul province: 3 – 5 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁸⁾ UNAMA, Special Report - Attacks in Mirza Olang, Sari Pul province: 3 – 5 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁹⁾ Ariana News, Operation Commences to Retake Mirza Olang from Taliban, 11 August 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Mirza Olang Recaptured By Security Forces, 14 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁰⁾ UNAMA, Special Report - Attacks in Mirza Olang, Sari Pul province: 3 – 5 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan news, 24 Taliban, 6 security personnel suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul clash, 15 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 21 Taliban militants killed in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 16 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban shadow governor among 11 rebels dead in Sar-i-Pul, 17 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 21 Taliban militants killed in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 16 November 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 militants, 2 security personnel killed in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 17 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban accused of killing woman in Sar-i-Pul, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Armed men linked to Taliban 'behead' woman in Sar-e-Pul, 27 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 border police released from Taliban in Sar-i-Pul, 2 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Would-be bomber shot dead: Sar-i-Pul governor, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Sar-e-Pul governor, intelligence chief escape suicide bomber attack, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Suicide bomber arrested before attacking Sar-e-Pul governor, 21 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 rebels dead, women among 9 hurt in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 6 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 4 killed in Sar-i-Pul violence, 20 September 2016 ([url](#)).

Sancharak district in January 2017 ⁽²⁰⁷⁸⁾. Three insurgents were reportedly killed and two others wounded when an IED exploded prematurely in Sozmaqala district in June 2017 ⁽²⁰⁷⁹⁾.

In a 2016 survey of the Afghan people, the Asia Foundation stated that over the course of 2016 the road linking Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul became increasingly insecure ⁽²⁰⁸⁰⁾. Two children were killed in September 2016 when a bomb exploded near a checkpoint on the Sar-e Pul-Jawzjan highway in Imam Jafar locality. They were grazing their cattle and stepped on the bomb ⁽²⁰⁸¹⁾. A local Taliban commander along with four of his sons were killed in January 2017 when an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) he was preparing on a road exploded prematurely in Sar-e Pul province ⁽²⁰⁸²⁾. Residents claimed in February 2017 that the road to Balkhab district had been closed over the previous 20 days and complained about uprising groups members extorting money from passengers on that road ⁽²⁰⁸³⁾.

Displacements

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017 UNOCHA recorded 13,423 IDPs from Sar-e Pul province, mainly from Sar-e Pul and Sayad districts. Over 25 % of those IDPs were displaced from Sayad district to Sar-e Pul in August 2017, during and after the attack on Mirza Olang valley ⁽²⁰⁸⁴⁾ (see above). Large groups of IDPS were also recorded from Sayad district to Sar-e Pul in November 2016, when heavy fighting was reported ⁽²⁰⁸⁵⁾, and in January 2017 ⁽²⁰⁸⁶⁾.

Sar-e Pul province received 12,151 IDPs between 1 September 2016 and 31 August 2017, according to UNOCHA records, mainly originating from Sayad and Sar-e Pul districts within the same province. More than 80 % of the displaced from Sar-e Pul were displaced within the province, notably in Sar-e Pul district ⁽²⁰⁸⁷⁾.

⁽²⁰⁷⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 militants killed, 8 injured in Sar-i-Pul clash, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 of a family injured in Farah artillery strike, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)); KP, Taliban suffer casualties in an explosion in Sar-e-Pul province, 8 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸⁰⁾ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People. Afghanistan in 2016, December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 4 killed in Sar-i-Pul violence, 20 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸²⁾ Xinhua News Agency, Premature blast kills Taliban commander, 4 sons in N. Afghanistan, 18 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 die as snow wreaks havoc in the north, 19 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report. Week of 7 – 13 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan news, Taliban closing in Sar-i-Pul's Sayad district, 19 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2016, 4 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNOCHA, Conflict displacements 2017, 17 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.32 Takhar

General description of the province



The province of Takhar (capital Taloqan) lies in the north-east of the country, between Badakhshan in the east and Kunduz and Baghlan in the west. To the north, it borders Tajikistan

and to the south, the province of Panjshir⁽²⁰⁸⁸⁾. Takhar is composed of 17 districts: Baharak, Bangi, Chahab, Chal, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala, Ishkashem, Farkhar, Hazarsumuch, Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Kalafgan, Namakab, Rostaq, Taloqan, Warsaj, Yangi Qala⁽²⁰⁸⁹⁾. It has a largely mountainous or semi-mountainous landscape⁽²⁰⁹⁰⁾.

The population is estimated to be around one million people⁽²⁰⁹¹⁾. The two main ethnic groups are Uzbeks (44 %) and Tajiks (42 %); Pashtun tribes (10 %) and Hazaras are also present⁽²⁰⁹²⁾. Some Pashtuns belong to Kuchi, nomadic tribes; therefore, population fluctuations occur seasonally⁽²⁰⁹³⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 86.9 % of Takhar's population live in rural areas and 35.8 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work⁽²⁰⁹⁴⁾. Salt and coal mines are important sources of revenue for the provincial government and play a key role in creating jobs⁽²⁰⁹⁵⁾.

As of May 2016 figures from the Afghanistan CSO, only 32.8% of children below five years old are registered at birth in the province⁽²⁰⁹⁶⁾. The overall provincial literacy rate is 28.1 % (37.8 % for men and 18.2 % for women)⁽²⁰⁹⁷⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Takhar

Takhar, as a province with an international border, is a route for the drug trade and various conflicts there are over the control of transit of narcotics⁽²⁰⁹⁸⁾.

AAN reports that Takhar has been facing ethnic tensions between Tajiks and Uzbeks. The Uzbek lobbying group, the Jihadi Council, which was established in Taliban times and made up of ex-Mujahideen leaders who fought them, mobilised protests and pressured the government to change the appointment of Tajiks in key posts in the province in 2013⁽²⁰⁹⁹⁾.

AGEs are present in some districts of Takhar as it is surrounded by other volatile provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan and Badakhshan⁽²¹⁰⁰⁾. Since 2007, the Taliban has expanded its territorial reach capturing many areas in the north, including in Takhar province. They started also local recruitment, first among Pashtuns, but afterwards also among other ethnicities⁽²¹⁰¹⁾. As early as in 2009, the provincial Taliban commander in the province was a Tajik from Farkhar district

⁽²⁰⁸⁸⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁸⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Takhar Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)); Afghanistan, MRRD, Takhar Provincial Profile, n.d ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹⁰⁾ Afghanistan, MRRD, Takhar Provincial Profile, n.d ([url](#)); Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽²⁰⁹¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹²⁾ Giustozzi, A. and Reuter, C., The Insurgents of the Afghan North, November 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹³⁾ UC Davis, Afghan Ag – Takhar, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹⁴⁾ Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy (Badakhshan and Takhar), October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽²⁰⁹⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar mining revenue slumps, 14 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹⁶⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽²⁰⁹⁷⁾ UNFPA, Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan Launches Highlights of the Results of Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey for Takhar Province, 10 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹⁸⁾ Khabarnama, The Clash of Khans 7 August 2016 ([url](#)); LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁹⁹⁾ Hewad G., Ethnic Revolt or Mujahedin Solidarity? A look at the power shuffle in Takhar (amended), 17 July 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁰⁰⁾ KP, Afghan forces retake control of Darqad district in Takhar, 10 January 2016 ([url](#)); Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁰¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., The Taliban Beyond the Pashtuns, CIGI, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

(²¹⁰²). Initially, a small group of Taliban entered the province from Kunduz and created a base in the forest on the borders of districts Darqad, Yangi Qala, Kwaja Bahawuddin. The group reportedly consisted of Tajiks and Pashtuns from Takhar and Helmand and some foreign fighters (²¹⁰³). Boosted by the fall of Kunduz in September 2015, the Taliban attacked several districts in the bordering Takhar Province such as Yangi, Eshkashem and Darqad (²¹⁰⁴). In 2016, fighting over control of Darqad and Khwajaghar districts occurred (²¹⁰⁵).

In Takhar, the Uzbek insurgent group Jundullah, which is close to the IMU, acts independently from Taliban (²¹⁰⁶). Obaid Ali reported that some parts of Takhar province were under Jundullah control in early 2016: the group has its present in Ishkamesh district, which is primarily inhabited by Uzbeks (²¹⁰⁷). In September 2015, this group joined ISK (²¹⁰⁸). The Uzbek fighters from Jundullah generally refuse to co-operate with Pashtun Taliban command and Pashtun Taliban from Darqad didn't accept Uzbek provincial leaders (²¹⁰⁹). The ethnic mistrust among the militant groups prevented their greater gains in Takhar (²¹¹⁰). IMU and Jundullah reportedly continue autonomously in Takhar, according to Obaid Ali in July 2017 (²¹¹¹).

An important role is played by various local tribal elders and local commanders. They have some strong links with political parties (Junbesh-e Melli, Jamiat-e Islami, Hezb-e Islami) and political leaders in Kabul (²¹¹²). It is believed that the unofficial security personnel of warlords outnumber the forces of ANA and ANP and some of them have also their private prisons. Some of them are paid and armed by the government to fight the Taliban in the framework of the National Uprising Support Strategy but they are very often engaged with illegal activities and local political conflicts, and committing serious human rights abuses (²¹¹³).

There are ANA divisions, ALP and police present in the province (²¹¹⁴). There are about 50 women in the Takhar ANP (²¹¹⁵). Many residents complained about ANP behavior (²¹¹⁶) and low morale of ALP (²¹¹⁷).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Takhar province counted 136 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents (²¹¹⁸):

(²¹⁰²) Giustozzi, A., The Taliban Beyond the Pashtuns, CIGI, 5 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 11.

(²¹⁰³) Giustozzi, A. and Reuter, C., The Insurgents of the Afghan North, November 2011 ([url](#)), p. 45.

(²¹⁰⁴) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban claim capturing 2 Takhar districts, 29 September 2015; Osman, B., The Fall of Kunduz: What does it tell us about strength of the post-Omar Taleban?, 30 September 2015 ([url](#)).

(²¹⁰⁵) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 ANA soldiers among 13 dead in Takhar gun battles, 21 February 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹⁰⁶) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹⁰⁷) Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taleban takeover, 30 January 2016 ([url](#)); Ali, O., The 2016 insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹⁰⁸) Ali, O., The 2016 insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹⁰⁹) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹⁰) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹¹) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹²) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹³) Khabarnama, The Clash of Khans 7 August 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹³) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)); Guardian (The); Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military ignores situation, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹⁴) Khabarnama, The Clash of Khans 7 August 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹⁵) Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar policewomen optimistic things to improve, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹⁶) Khabarnama, The Clash of Khans 7 August 2016 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹⁷) Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(²¹¹⁸) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Violence targeting individuals	8
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	79
Explosions	8
Security enforcement	18
Non-conflict related incidents	15
Other incidents	8
Total security incidents	136

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Takhar Province ⁽²¹¹⁹⁾:

Baharak	6	Kalafgan	1
Bangi	3	Khwaja Bahawuddin	24
Chah Ab	4	Khwaja Ghar	28
Darqad	16	Rustaq	5
Dashti Qala	4	Taluqan	15
Farkhar	5	Yangi Qala	8
Ishkamish	17		

In the first half of 2017, UNAMA documented 53 civilian victims (24 deaths and 29 injured). Most civilian casualties were caused by ground engagements or aerial attacks. Targeted and deliberate killings also took place in the province ⁽²¹²⁰⁾.

As of mid-2017, the Taliban reportedly partly control Darqad, Khwaja Bahawuddin, Khwaja Ghar, Yangi Qala, Dasht-e Qala, Ishkamesh and Bangi ⁽²¹²¹⁾. The Taliban tried to gain control on district centers of Darqad and Khwaja Bahawuddin but did not succeed ⁽²¹²²⁾.

The Afghan forces, with the support from international military forces, continued aerial operations against Taliban positions ⁽²¹²³⁾. In May 2017, days of heavy fighting blocked the highway from Kunduz to Takhar ⁽²¹²⁴⁾.

In January 2017, a Taliban commander in Ishkamesh was killed in the bomb blast ⁽²¹²⁵⁾. In January 2017, two Taliban leaders, a policeman, and a civilian were killed during a clash in the Rustaq district while insurgents tried to extort money from the people ⁽²¹²⁶⁾. Seven civilians and 20 Taliban were killed in Darqad airstrikes on 4 March 2017 ⁽²¹²⁷⁾. There was a clash in the

⁽²¹¹⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽²¹²⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)); Guardian (The); Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military ignores situation, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²¹⁾ Khabarnama, The Clash of Khans 7 August 2016 ([url](#)); Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²²⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²³⁾ KP, Taliban's shadow district chief among 11 killed in Takhar airstrikes, 3 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²⁴⁾ Tolo News, Kunduz-Takhar Highway Cleared Of Taliban, 12 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Key Taliban figure dead in Takhar blast, 3 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian among 4 killed in Takhar, 14 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Taliban suffer casualties in Takhar Clash, 4 March 2017 ([url](#)).

Khawaja Bahauddin district in May 2017. Four civilians were killed when a rocket struck a house ⁽²¹²⁸⁾.

The security is also hampered by illegal armed groups, not connected to AGEs. In August 2017, illegal armed men, connected to a local commander, opened fire on worshippers at a mosque and killed six and wounded 36 others in the Chah Ab district ⁽²¹²⁹⁾.

Displacement

During the first nine months of 2017, nearly 6,000 persons were internally displaced from various districts of Takhar Province, mainly from Khwaja Bahauddin, Yang-e Qala and Ishkmesh. Most people stayed in the Dasht-e Qala, Taloqan, Rostaq and Baharak districts ⁽²¹³⁰⁾. In May 2017, for instance, over a hundred families fled from Khwaja Bahawuddin and Darqad to safer areas within the province ⁽²¹³¹⁾.

According to AAN, in 2016, 51,000 internally displaced persons moved to Takhar (mostly to the capital Taloqan) from Kunduz ⁽²¹³²⁾.

The provincial governor appealed to the inhabitants to help the refugees and local residents reportedly responded by raising funds for humanitarian supplies, distributed bread, and sheltered some displaced people in their own homes ⁽²¹³³⁾. 125 tents were also provided to support 750 people by humanitarian NGOs. Each supported family also received tarpaulins, blankets and personal hygiene kits ⁽²¹³⁴⁾.

⁽²¹²⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, civilians and Taliban suffer casualties in Takhar, 2 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹²⁹⁾ Tolo News, Takhar Residents Complain Of Illegal Armed Group's Tyranny, 13 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹³⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 2 October 2017) ([url](#)).

⁽²¹³¹⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹³²⁾ Bjelica, J., Over Half a Million Afghans Flee Conflict in 2016, 28 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹³³⁾ Reuters, Host families struggle to help thousands who have fled Afghanistan's Kunduz, 10 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹³⁴⁾ AKDN, Focus Humanitarian Assistance delivers tents, blankets and relief items to the Governor of Takhar Province to help internally displaced people arriving from Kunduz, 07 October 2016 ([url](#)); Reuters, Host families struggle to help thousands who have fled Afghanistan's Kunduz, 10 October 2016 ([url](#)).

Noorzai tribe is mainly in Shahid Hassas and Dehrawud. The Ghilzai tribes are mostly in Dehrawud and Tirin Kot ⁽²¹⁴⁰⁾.

Uruzgan was described in 2009 as ‘a remote, mountainous and poor province with traditionally low levels of education, a limited government presence, and high levels of conservatism and violence’ ⁽²¹⁴¹⁾. Uruzgan was Afghanistan’s fourth largest major opium cultivating province after Helmand, Badghis and Kandahar in 2016 ⁽²¹⁴²⁾. According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 96.4% of Uruzgan’s population live in rural areas and 84.4% of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽²¹⁴³⁾.

Background of the conflict and actors

Uruzgan has a strategically important location connecting the southern Taliban heartlands of Helmand and Kandahar to the central highlands of Afghanistan ⁽²¹⁴⁴⁾. Uruzgan has also symbolic significance as a province where many of the Taliban’s original leaders, such as Mullah Omar, grew up or spent considerable time ⁽²¹⁴⁵⁾. Mullah Omar grew up in the district of Dehrawud which remains a Taliban stronghold as of AAN reporting in June 2017 ⁽²¹⁴⁶⁾.

Uruzgan province saw a rapid deterioration of security during 2016 as a result of increased Taliban pressure to take over districts, including the provincial capital ⁽²¹⁴⁷⁾. According to Sweden’s Lifos report on the situation in Afghanistan published in June 2017, Tirin Kot is one of the provincial capitals in Afghanistan facing the most intense pressure from the Taliban ⁽²¹⁴⁸⁾. The Taliban has kept Tirin Kot under siege into 2017 after briefly managing to capture the city on 8 September 2016. That attack was eventually repelled by air support. During the attack police forces abandoned around a hundred checkpoints and escaped to the airfield ⁽²¹⁴⁹⁾. In 2016 and 2017, there has been heavy fighting along the highway linking Tirin Kot to Kandahar. It is described as a ‘vulnerable route that in parts is no more than a dirt road that heavy vehicles struggle to pass’ ⁽²¹⁵⁰⁾. The Uruzgan-Kandahar highway has been closed for traffic on several occasions, as reported in January 2017 by Tolo News ⁽²¹⁵¹⁾. The northern parts of the road in particular have faced strong pressure from the Taliban, and the Taliban

⁽²¹⁴⁰⁾ van Bijlert, M., *Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan*, in: Giustozzi, A., *Decoding the New Taliban*, Oxford University Press, 2009 p. 163.

⁽²¹⁴¹⁾ van Bijlert, M., *Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan*, in: Giustozzi, A., *Decoding the New Taliban*, Oxford University Press 2009, pp. 155-156.

⁽²¹⁴²⁾ UNOCHA, *Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017)*, 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽²¹⁴³⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, *Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016* ([url](#)), pp. 65-66.

⁽²¹⁴⁴⁾ Norway, Landinfo, *Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen*, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 21; Derksen, D., *Transition in Uruzgan (2): Power at the centre*, 12 June 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁴⁵⁾ van Bijlert, M., *Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan*, in: Giustozzi, A., *Decoding the New Taliban*, Oxford University Press, 2009 pp. 155-156, 158-159.

⁽²¹⁴⁶⁾ Gopal, A., and Strick van Linschoten, A., *Ideology in the Afghan Taliban*, June 2017 ([url](#)) p. 31.

⁽²¹⁴⁷⁾ Norway, Landinfo, *Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen*, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁴⁸⁾ Sweden, Lifos, *Lägesanalys: Afghanistan*, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²¹⁴⁹⁾ Norway, Landinfo, *Temanotat Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sørlige regionen*, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, *Taliban advance on Afghan city exposes weak defenses, deep divisions*, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁵⁰⁾ RFE/RL, *Taliban Threats Force Health Facilities in Southern Afghan Province to Close*, 26 September 2017, ([url](#)); RFE/RL, *Taliban Targets Medical Clinics In New Afghan Insurgency Strategy*, 27 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁵¹⁾ Tolo News, *Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway Motorists Forced To Use Alternate Routes*, 11 February 2017 ([url](#)).

has set up checkpoints along the road ⁽²¹⁵²⁾. In November 2016, it was reported that all other roads leading from districts to the provincial capital were under Taliban control ⁽²¹⁵³⁾.

According to a report by UNOCHA for the first half of 2017, Uruzgan has been almost entirely deprived of healthcare as a result of the conflict. Uruzgan's pregnancy-related mortality rates and infant malnutrition rates are among the highest in Afghanistan ⁽²¹⁵⁴⁾. According to a 2017 RFE/RL report, most of the health facilities in Uruzgan have been closed due to threats from the Taliban. Out of the total of 59 in the province, only eight health centres remained open in September 2017 ⁽²¹⁵⁵⁾. According to a report in September 2017, at least 80 schools were shut down in the province due to the conflict, affecting thousands of students ⁽²¹⁵⁶⁾.

According to a LWJ assessment, all Uruzgan's districts are contested between the government forces and the Taliban ⁽²¹⁵⁷⁾.

In Shahid Hassas, in 2015 the government reportedly only held the district governor's office ⁽²¹⁵⁸⁾. LWJ reports that as of September 2017, in Shahid Hassas, the government only controls the district centre ⁽²¹⁵⁹⁾.

Chora first fell to the Taliban already in 2006 ⁽²¹⁶⁰⁾. Chora district was reported in the beginning of 2014 to have no functioning formal judicial system at all and to suffer from the 'absence of government in any functioning form' ⁽²¹⁶¹⁾. In Chora, government forces abandoned several checkpoints and fled to the district center in October 2016 ⁽²¹⁶²⁾. Dehrawud district has also been fiercely contested ⁽²¹⁶³⁾.

The Taliban is thought to control most, if not all, of the Khas Uruzgan district since May 2015 ⁽²¹⁶⁴⁾. In Khas Uruzgan, the district centre was close to falling into the hands of the Taliban around 23 August 2015, and government forces had to airlift local Afghan Local Police forces out ⁽²¹⁶⁵⁾. According to a report in 2015, the coexistence of Hazaras and Pashtuns in the district of Khas Uruzgan has been uneasy ⁽²¹⁶⁶⁾.

In addition to the harm caused to the civilians by the Taliban, security forces under the command of the ALP commander and local strongman Hakim Shojayi responsible for the killing of dozens of civilians in Uruzgan province in the past. Human Rights Watch interviewed ethnic Pashtun community leaders from Uruzgan in 2014-2015 who alleged that ethnic Hazara

⁽²¹⁵²⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Uruzgan, 8 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²¹⁵³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017, November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽²¹⁵⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 5-6.

⁽²¹⁵⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Taliban Threats Force Health Facilities in Southern Afghan Province to Close, 26 September 2017, ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Taliban Targets Medical Clinics In New Afghan Insurgency Strategy, 27 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁵⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Conflict in Uruzgan Leaves 80 Schools Closed, 8 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁵⁷⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁵⁸⁾ PTRO, Access to Justice in Zabul and Uruzgan, PTRO Research and Evaluation Paper, February 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 5, 10.

⁽²¹⁵⁹⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁶⁰⁾ van Bijlert, M., Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan, in: Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009 p.173.

⁽²¹⁶¹⁾ PTRO, Access to Justice in Zabul and Uruzgan, PTRO Research and Evaluation Paper, February 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 5, 10.

⁽²¹⁶²⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁶³⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁶⁴⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁶⁵⁾ Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, AAN, 3 September 2015 ([url](#)); van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁶⁶⁾ van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015 ([url](#)).

commander Hakim Shojayi had killed dozens of civilians. Shojayi had not been in the province since early 2013, and reportedly was at his home area in Ghazni's Malistan ⁽²¹⁶⁷⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Uruzgan Province counted 460 security incidents ⁽²¹⁶⁸⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	5
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	395
Explosions	42
Security enforcement	14
Non-conflict related incidents	3
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	460

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Uruzgan Province ⁽²¹⁶⁹⁾:

Chora	55	Shahidi Hassas	65
Dihrawud	55	Tirin Kot	234
Khas Uruzgan	51		

Uruzgan was described by UNOCHA in the first quarter of 2017 to be a 'high-combat area' and 'key military battleground' with a high intensity of security incidents ⁽²¹⁷⁰⁾. Excluding the district of Shahid Hassas, UNOCHA classified all Uruzgan's districts among the areas in Afghanistan where the conflict was most severe in terms of the number of incidents, the amount of civilian casualties and the numbers of IDPs originating from the area in the first six months of 2017 ⁽²¹⁷¹⁾. UNOCHA prioritised all Uruzgan's districts as areas of integrated protection programming meant for high combat intensity areas as well as populations under armed opposition group control in the first quarter of 2017 ⁽²¹⁷²⁾. According to a UNOCHA assessment for the first quarter of 2017, except for the provincial capital Tirin Kot, all districts of Uruzgan were among the hot-spot areas of the conflict in the south of Afghanistan ⁽²¹⁷³⁾.

UNAMA reports that during the period from 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2017, Uruzgan had the fifth highest number of civilian casualties in the country after Kabul, Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar. Uruzgan recorded 312 civilian casualties with 39 deaths and 273 injuries. This was

⁽²¹⁶⁷⁾ HRW, Today We Shall All Die: Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)); van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁶⁸⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽²¹⁶⁹⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽²¹⁷⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁷¹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽²¹⁷²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

⁽²¹⁷³⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - First Quarter Report (January - March 2017), updated 18 May, original publication date 9 May ([url](#)), p. 31.

a decrease of 16 per cent compared to the same period in 2016. Ground engagements, IEDs and aerial attacks were the leading causes of casualties. ⁽²¹⁷⁴⁾ According to UNAMA, the decrease in civilian casualties was the result of a lack of a major offensive in Uruzgan in the first six months of 2017 ⁽²¹⁷⁵⁾. Uruzgan was among the eight provinces that had the highest number of incidents of detonation of explosive remnants of war causing civilian casualties in the first half of 2017 as well as among the ten provinces with the highest number of incidents of use of indirect and/or explosive weapons causing civilian casualties during ground fighting ⁽²¹⁷⁶⁾. In the first six months of 2017, Uruzgan experienced the highest number of aerial operations by the Afghan Air Force that caused civilian casualties, recording four incidents that resulted in 31 civilian casualties (seven deaths and 24 injured) ⁽²¹⁷⁷⁾.

In 2016, approximately one in four civilian casualties in the southern region occurred in Uruzgan ⁽²¹⁷⁸⁾. In the course of the year 2016, Uruzgan had a total of 520 civilian casualties (159 deaths and 366 injuries) which was three times higher than the figures in 2015 (141 civilian casualties with 35 dead and 106 injured). Furthermore, 48 per cent of the civilian casualties of Uruzgan in 2016 occurred in the district of Dehrawud. ⁽²¹⁷⁹⁾ The Taliban launched a large-scale attack against Tirin Kot on 6 September 2016 when hundreds of Taliban fighters blocked the main road leading to the city and started advancing towards the centre in the following days. Finally the Afghan security forces managed to quell the attack after receiving air support and enforcements, but the attack was still the closest that the Taliban has come trying to take over a provincial capital after the two attacks on Kunduz City. By the end of September 2016, the situation in the city stabilised but the Taliban has kept surrounding the city and taken over some neighbourhoods ⁽²¹⁸⁰⁾. The highway linking Tirin Kot to Kandahar has been vulnerable to Taliban attacks and closed to traffic during the worst fighting in September 2016 - February 2017 ⁽²¹⁸¹⁾. During the fighting, all the main routes leading to Tirin Kot from the districts were blocked ⁽²¹⁸²⁾.

In 2016 especially the districts of Chora, Dehrawud and Tirin Kot were the targets of attacks ⁽²¹⁸³⁾. Taliban has kept the provincial capital Tirin Kot under pressure and surrounded, according to an international source interviewed by Landinfo in 2017 ⁽²¹⁸⁴⁾. The Taliban attacked the district centre of Chora on 22 October 2016 ⁽²¹⁸⁵⁾. Chora has also seen intense fighting and airstrikes in the summer and autumn 2017 as government forces and Taliban have continued to contest the control of the district ⁽²¹⁸⁶⁾. There were large-scale military operations also in Tirin Kot, Dehrawud and Khas Uruzgan districts in the summer 2017 ⁽²¹⁸⁷⁾.

⁽²¹⁷⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽²¹⁷⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, ([url](#)), pp. 23-24.

⁽²¹⁷⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 20.

⁽²¹⁷⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, ([url](#)), p. 53.

⁽²¹⁷⁸⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Uruzgan, 8 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁷⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁸⁰⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Uruzgan, 8 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽²¹⁸¹⁾ Reuters, Taliban advance on Afghan city exposes weak defenses, deep divisions, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway Motorists Forced To Use Alternate Routes, 11 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁸²⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan - Mid-Year Review (January - June 2017), 1 September 2017 ([url](#)), p. 41.

⁽²¹⁸³⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Uruzgan, 8 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²¹⁸⁴⁾ Norway, Landinfo, Respons Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i provinsen Uruzgan, 8 May 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽²¹⁸⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban storm Chora district centre in Uruzgan, 22 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁸⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Spare our lives, Uruzganis tell govt forces, Taliban, 8 September 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security force, Taliban clash near Chora district centre, 1 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁸⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 82 militants killed in Uruzgan airstrikes, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)).

According to Pajhwok News Agency, Uruzgan had the fifth highest number of civilian casualties during August 2016 to July 2017: a total of 1,596 dead and injured ⁽²¹⁸⁸⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 61,673 individuals from Uruzgan province who were displaced by conflict. This was the highest number of IDPs in Afghanistan after Kunduz: 58,152 were displaced from Tirin Kot, 3,059 from Chora, and 462 from Khas Uruzgan. Most people were displaced inside Tirin Kot and Chora districts or went to Kandahar City. Most of them were displaced in September 2016 when the Taliban attacked the provincial capital, Tirin Kot ⁽²¹⁸⁹⁾.

For the period of 1 January 2017 to 31 August 2017, UNOCHA reported that 21,898 people were displaced from Uruzgan: 10,754 from Tirin Kot, 7,063 from Chora, and 4,081 from Khas Uruzgan. Furthermore, 16,096 of them were displaced to Tirin Kot, 3,045 to Jaghori, 833 to Malistan and 707 to Ghazni City in Ghazni Province, and 1,217 to Kandahar City ⁽²¹⁹⁰⁾. Scores of people have fled from the village of Siro, in Khas Uruzgan, to Jaghori district in Ghazni after insurgents took control of the area in 2016 ⁽²¹⁹¹⁾.

⁽²¹⁸⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 24,500 people lost lives, suffered injuries in last 12 months, 6 August 2017 ([url](#)).

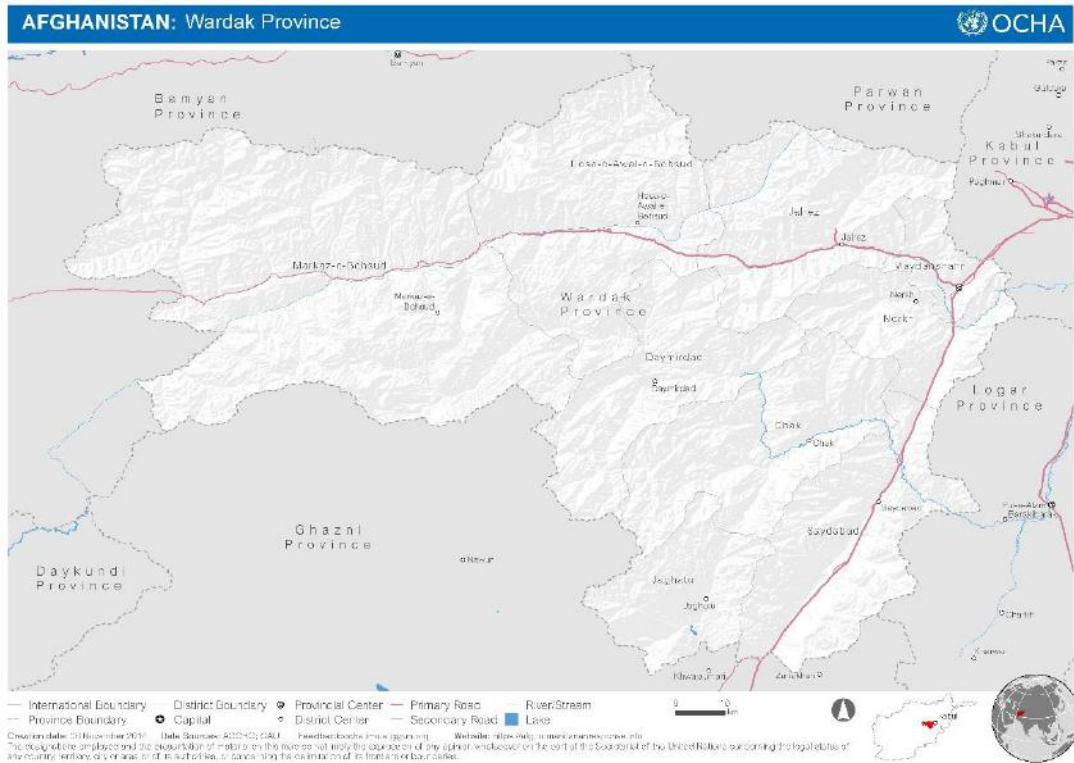
⁽²¹⁸⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 02 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements in 2017, updated as of 2 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹¹⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 64, 1-31 May 2017, June 2017, ([url](#)).

2.34 Wardak

General description of the province



Wardak Province, also known as Maydan Wardak, shares borders with Parwan and Bamiyan in the north, Kabul and Logar in the east, and Ghazni in the south and west. More than four-fifths of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain while a little more than one-tenth of the area is made up of flat land. The province of Wardak is divided into nine districts: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesa-e Awal-e Behsud, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Markaz-e Behsud, Maydan Shahr, Nirkh, Sayadabad ⁽²¹⁹²⁾. The capital is the town of Maydan Shahr, which is located almost 35 kilometres west of Kabul City ⁽²¹⁹³⁾. The main Kabul-Kandahar highway intersects the province through the districts of Maydan Shahr, Nirkh and Sayadabad. A provincial road runs west from Maydan Shahr to Bamiyan through Jalrez and the districts of Hesa-e Awal-e Behsud and Markaz-e Behsud ⁽²¹⁹⁴⁾. The areas around the Kabul-Kandahar highway are more densely populated ⁽²¹⁹⁵⁾.

The province is estimated to house 606,077 residents ⁽²¹⁹⁶⁾. The major ethnic group living in Wardak Province are the Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks and Hazaras. The local Pashtun population belongs to a variety of Ghilzai tribes, primarily the Wardak, Kharoti and Hotak

⁽²¹⁹²⁾ UNOCHA, Wardak Province District Atlas, 14 April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Back Ground Profile of Maidan Wardak, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Wardak Province District Atlas, 14 April 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹⁵⁾ Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, local militias and statebuilding in Afghanistan, January 2014 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽²¹⁹⁶⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Estimated population 2016/2017, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

tribes ⁽²¹⁹⁷⁾. During spring, Kuchi migrations regularly cause violent clashes in the predominantly Hazara Behsud districts ⁽²¹⁹⁸⁾.

Despite its political and strategic importance due to its proximity to Kabul and status as gateway to the south, the province has few resources and attracts comparatively little financial and political support. It has an unexplored mining sector which holds modest economic potential. The bulk of the agricultural production in the province comes from the predominantly Hazara district Markaz-e Behsud ⁽²¹⁹⁹⁾.

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 99.5 % of Wardak's population lives in rural areas and 76.2 % of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽²²⁰⁰⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Wardak

In 2014, according to AREU, armed groups in the province consisted of local and regional Taliban groups, Hezb-e Islami and international groups of fighters. The main jihadi party in the 1980s and 1990s was Hezb-e Islami and most Taliban fighters in Wardak are former Hezb-e Islami members ⁽²²⁰¹⁾. In September 2016, the Afghan government and Hezb-e Islami signed a peace agreement ⁽²²⁰²⁾.

In June 2015, the US Department of Defense reported that Al Qaeda fighters, pushed out of their safe havens in Waziristan by a Pakistani military operation, surfaced in Wardak, among other places, in the spring of 2015 ⁽²²⁰³⁾. These reinforcements led to renewed fighting between Taliban and Hezb-e Islami fighters in Nirkh district that summer ⁽²²⁰⁴⁾. According to the July 2016 UNAMA midyear report, groups claiming allegiance to ISIL/Daesh are reportedly operational in Wardak ⁽²²⁰⁵⁾.

As mentioned by a BBC report on October 2014 about Sayadabad's Tangi valley, this area was firmly under Taliban control. It collected taxes, ran schools and maintained a rudimentary court system ⁽²²⁰⁶⁾. Chak, also known as Chak-e Wardak, was considered in 2015 the insurgent headquarters for the previous 13 years. The Taliban had set up several checkpoints in the district and ran a parallel judicial system until it was ousted by ANSF operations in January 2015 ⁽²²⁰⁷⁾.

According to AREU, since 2008 the Taliban has significantly destabilised the province, resulting in several areas becoming inaccessible to government officials. As of autumn 2015, it was difficult for provincial government officials to travel from Maydan Shahr, the provincial

⁽²¹⁹⁷⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽²¹⁹⁸⁾ Norway, Landinfo, The conflict between Hazaras and Kuchis in the Beshud Districts of Wardak Province, 6 June 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽²¹⁹⁹⁾ Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, local militias and statebuilding in Afghanistan, January 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 17-18.

⁽²²⁰⁰⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 25-26.

⁽²²⁰¹⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 37-38.

⁽²²⁰²⁾ Guardian (The), Butcher of Kabul pardoned in Afghan peace deal, 22 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁰³⁾ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2015 ([url](#)), p. 25.

⁽²²⁰⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of dead, wounded in Hizb-e-Islami, Taliban clash, 17 June 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁰⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p.73.

⁽²²⁰⁶⁾ BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Life Inside a Taliban Stronghold, 20 October 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁰⁷⁾ Tolo News, ANSF gain control of district Chak after 13 years, 28 January 2015 ([url](#)).

capital, to any of the district centres ⁽²²⁰⁸⁾. According to UNHCR, in September 2015, Wardak was in a state of permanent instability. The security situation in the summer of 2015 was tense with several security incidents, including IED attacks and explosions, targeting military forces and government institutions. Civilian property was destroyed, which was, according to UNHCR, a violation of the principle of distinction in International Humanitarian Law. Killing of civilians in confrontations between AGEs and ANSF was reported in several districts, such as Chak, Sayadabad and Nirkh, in the September 2015 UNHCR report ⁽²²⁰⁹⁾.

The Hazara areas were *de facto* under the control of the political party Hezb-e Wahdat. However, AREU stated in February 2016 that some Hazara areas in the province, without specifying which ones, were affected by Taliban presence ⁽²²¹⁰⁾.

The USDOS also stated that the Taliban remained active throughout 2015 in what it called their 'traditional stronghold', Wardak ⁽²²¹¹⁾. After Jalrez saw heavy fighting in EASO's previous reporting period ⁽²²¹²⁾, the government created a pro-government militia outside the ALP, under the 'National Uprising Support Strategy' in 2015 ⁽²²¹³⁾. In its report on security and stability on Afghanistan, released in December 2016, the US Department of Defense stated that violence in Wardak province had increased compared to the previous year. Although, according to the same report, 'Taliban gains were minimal and fleeting' ⁽²²¹⁴⁾. In July 2016, the Taliban launched a major offensive in Jalrez. Reinforcements were sent from Ghazni and Zabul, and hundreds of armed militants attacked security posts in the Khwaja Sahib area of Jalrez district. Intense battles went on for two days. Eventually the security forces succeeded in making the attackers retreat and flee ⁽²²¹⁵⁾.

UNAMA recorded abductions of children in Wardak province in 2016 ⁽²²¹⁶⁾. A member of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan stated the organisation had to close schools in two districts of Wardak province due to threats from local Taliban commanders, without providing further details on the exact location of these schools ⁽²²¹⁷⁾.

Kidnappings occurred on the road network in the province. UNAMA documented 12 abductions in Wardak province in the first half of 2016, while only three had occurred during the same period in 2015. Reportedly, the Taliban were responsible for these abductions, with the release of abductees frequently contingent on the payment of a ransom. Six of the incidents occurred on the major highway connecting Kabul and Kandahar. Targets of abduction included mine-clearers, construction workers and supply convoys. In August 2016, AGEs abducted 32 members of demining teams in Sayadabad district, confiscating five vehicles and their equipment. After being questioned by the AGEs, all were later released unharmed. The vehicles and equipment were also later released through mediation by the local community ⁽²²¹⁸⁾.

A member of Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), contacted by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in 2016, stated that Hazara working in Kabul often travel to Bamyan by air

⁽²²⁰⁸⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽²²⁰⁹⁾ UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²²¹⁰⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 38.

⁽²²¹¹⁾ USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽²²¹²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Security Situation, November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 58.

⁽²²¹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 65.

⁽²²¹⁴⁾ USDOS, Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽²²¹⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Massive Taliban attack repulsed in Wardak: official, 2 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²²¹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p.20.

⁽²²¹⁷⁾ Reuters, Shifting Afghan frontlines make aid work harder, more dangerous, 9 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017, ([url](#)), p.32.

‘as the road through Wardak is perceived as too dangerous’ ⁽²²¹⁹⁾. According to UNAMA, Wardak province does not follow the general decrease in the number of abductions targeting Hazara civilians. In total, seven incidents involving the abduction of 234 Hazara civilians in Maidan Wardak province were recorded in 2016, compared to two incidents in 2015. They were linked to ongoing land disputes in the area between Hazara residents and Kuchi tribal members. Members of the Hazara ethnic group carried out avenging counter-abductions of Tajik or Pashtun civilians to secure the release of abducted Hazara civilians ⁽²²²⁰⁾.

In March 2017, the Taliban claimed to control 95 % of the territory in Jaghatu and Jalga [Day Mirdad] districts, and 70 % of the territory in Sayedabad, Chak, Nirkh, Jalrez and Maydan Shahr ⁽²²²¹⁾.

Recent security trends

According to the July 2017 UNAMA midyear report, which covers 1 January to 30 June 2017, 20 civilians were killed and 23 injured in Wardak due mainly to ground engagements, but also from aerial attacks and IEDs. This marks a 22 percent decrease compared to 2016 ⁽²²²²⁾.

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Wardak Province counted 307 security incidents ⁽²²²³⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	23
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	223
Explosions	33
Security enforcement	19
Non-conflict related incidents	5
Other incidents	4
Total security incidents	307

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Wardak Province ⁽²²²⁴⁾:

Chaki Wardak	30	Maydan Shahr	24
Day Mirdad	39	Nirkh	24
Jaghatu	26	Saydabad	49
Jalrez	115		

⁽²²¹⁹⁾ Canada, IRB, AFG105491.E Afghanistan: Situation of Hazara people living in Kabul City, including treatment by society, security situation, and access to employment; security situation for Hazara traveling to areas surrounding Kabul City to access employment (2014-April 2016), 20 April 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²²²⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017, ([url](#)), p.75.

⁽²²²¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Voice of Jihad), Percent of Country under the control of Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate, 26 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽²²²³⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

⁽²²²⁴⁾ For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see [introduction](#).

Security forces carried out operations in several districts of the province. According to KP, in September 2016, at least ten Taliban fighters were reportedly killed in a military operation in Nirkh district. The next month, the Ministry of Defense announced that nine militants had been killed during an ANA operation in Nirkh district ⁽²²²⁵⁾. According to Tolo News, in December 2016, at least four Taliban insurgents were killed in a clash with security forces in Nirkh district. Seven other Taliban insurgents and one member of the police force were wounded. No civilian casualties were reported ⁽²²²⁶⁾. Again according to the Afghan media, ANP seized a car bomb during a special operation in Jaghatu district in November 2016, and the next month, a Taliban commander who was leading a group of 30 militants was killed during an operation led by the security forces in Jalrez district ⁽²²²⁷⁾.

UNAMA also documented the imposition of punishments by parallel justice structures on civilians accused of having family or working relations with the ANSF or the Government in Wardak province. In December 2016, Taliban publicly hanged a university student in Chak district after finding him guilty of killing two Taliban commanders. The Taliban claimed to have carried out an investigation, arrested and questioned the student before killing him ⁽²²²⁸⁾.

Displacement

According to UNOCHA, between January and September 2017, 728 persons were displaced due to conflict, from their origin areas to the Maydan Shahr district in the province of Wardak, and 210 were displaced from Wardak to Ghazni. Among people displaced to Ghazni, there were 189 from the district of Saydabad and 21 from the district of Jaghatu ⁽²²²⁹⁾.

⁽²²²⁵⁾ KP, 6 soldiers martyred, 66 insurgents killed in the past 24 hours: MoD, 28 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²²²⁶⁾ Tolo News, Four Taliban members killed in Wardak clash, 28 December 2016 ([url](#)).

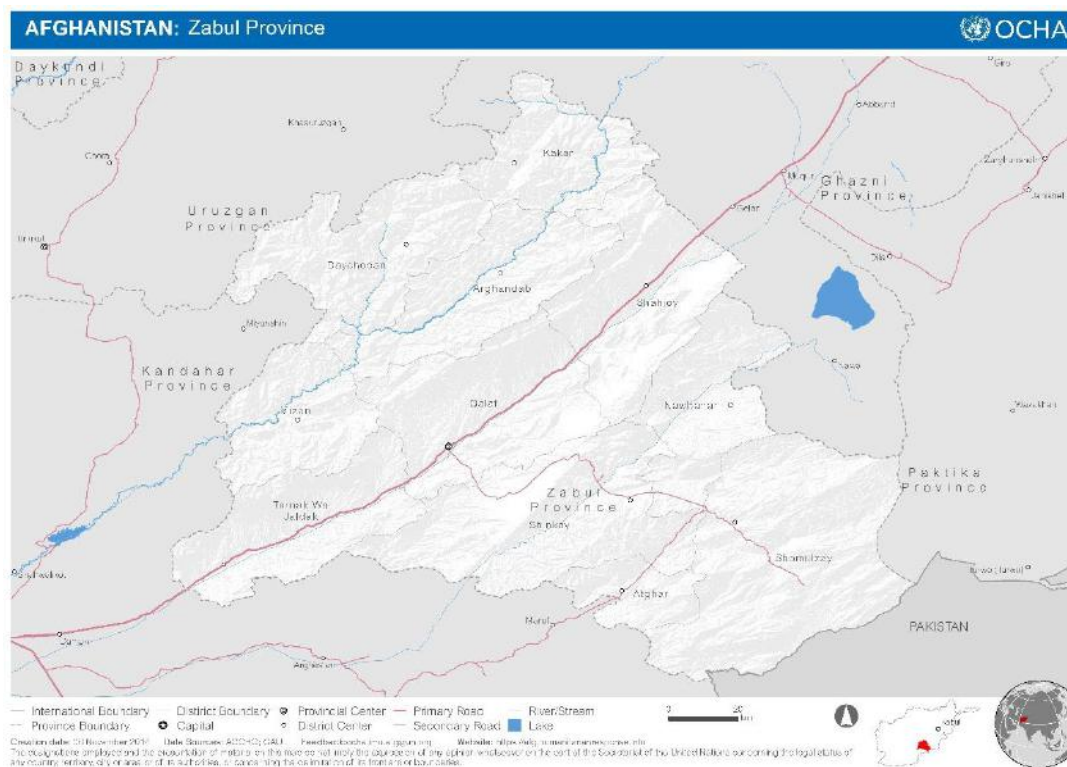
⁽²²²⁷⁾ KP, Afghan police seize car bomb prepared for an attack by militants, 16 November 2016 ([url](#)); KP, Key Taliban commander leading a group of 30 militants killed in Wardak, 24 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²²²⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017, ([url](#)), p.76.

⁽²²²⁹⁾ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2017 and 16 September 2017, 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

2.35 Zabul

General description of the province



Zabul province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan and is surrounded by the provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan, Ghazni, and Paktika. The province also shares a border with Pakistan’s Balochistan province ⁽²²³⁰⁾. Zabul province consists of the following 11 administrative units: the districts of Arghandab, Atghar, Day Chopan, Kakar (also known as Khak Afghan), Mizan, Naw Bahar, Shahjoy, Shinkay, Shomalzay, Tarnak wa Jaldak (also known as Shahr Safa), and the provincial capital Qalat ⁽²²³¹⁾. The Kabul-Kandahar highway runs in this province through the districts of Tarnak wa Jaldak, Qalat, and Shahjoy ⁽²²³²⁾. According to a report from 2010, three quarters of the population of Zabul were estimated to live in the areas north of the main highway ⁽²²³³⁾. Zabul’s estimated population is 314,325, of which 61,609 live in Shahjoy, 41,528 in Day Chopan, and 37,640 in the provincial capital, Qalat ⁽²²³⁴⁾. According to the provincial authorities, however, Zabul has an estimated population of 890,000, the vast majority of whom live in rural areas ⁽²²³⁵⁾.

Zabul’s society is described as one of the most deeply conservative in the south of Afghanistan ⁽²²³⁶⁾. Zabul is mainly populated by Pashtuns, followed by the Baluch ⁽²²³⁷⁾. The most dominant

⁽²²³⁰⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Zabul Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²³¹⁾ UNOCHA, Zabul Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Zabul Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Administrative Units of Zabul Province, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽²²³²⁾ UNOCHA, Zabul Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²²³³⁾ World Affairs, The Back of Beyond: A Report from Zabul Province, March/April 2010 ([url](#)).

⁽²²³⁴⁾ Afghanistan, CSO, Estimated Settled Population by Civil division, urban, rural and sex 2017-18, 2017 ([url](#)) p. 32.

⁽²²³⁵⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽²²³⁶⁾ Zabulwal, A.A., Taliban in Zabul: A Witness’ Account, in: Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 179; USAID, Fact Sheet – Zabul Province, June 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽²²³⁷⁾ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Zabul Provincial Profile, 1 February 2017 ([url](#)).

Pashtun tribes in the province are Ghilzai subtribes of Tokhi and Hotak ⁽²²³⁸⁾. There is also a small Tajik minority in the province ⁽²²³⁹⁾. Zabul is located on an important traditional route for Kuchi nomads, whose numbers vary according to the seasons. The Kuchi population in Zabul province is estimated to be 45,000 in the summer and approximately 50,000 in the winter ⁽²²⁴⁰⁾. In 2009, the Tokhi tribe was reported to mainly inhabit the districts of Arghandab, Naw Bahar and Shomalzay, the Hotak tribe was largely in the districts of Shinkay and Atghar. The Alakozai tribe were reported to be dominant in Tarnak wa Jaldak and Kakar, and the Suleymankhel in Day Chopan ⁽²²⁴¹⁾.

Zabul was described in 2010 as a largely forgotten province ⁽²²⁴²⁾. It was mentioned in 2009 as one of Afghanistan's poorest provinces that had been ignored by all the past central governments with very few schools and very small number of educated people ⁽²²⁴³⁾. Zabul's economy is entirely based on subsistence farming, with a relatively small amount of products reaching local markets. The province produces crops such as wheat, maize, potatoes, figs, various nuts and almonds, and fruit including grapes and pomegranates. ⁽²²⁴⁴⁾

According to data published by the Ministry of Economy and the World Bank for the years 2013 and 2014, 96% of Zabul's population live in rural areas and 82.5% of its inhabitants engage in agricultural work ⁽²²⁴⁵⁾.

Background on the conflict and actors in Zabul

Zabul is described as a 'restive' province ⁽²²⁴⁶⁾. It is located at a strategically important position along the Kabul-Kandahar highway ⁽²²⁴⁷⁾. The mountainous districts of Day Chopan, Kakar/Khaki Afghan, Arghandab and Naw Bahar were in 2009 described as 'safe havens' for the insurgency. Khaki Afghan in particular was known for its high number of very hardline insurgents, including foreign fighters linked to al Qaeda. In 2009, the district had been completely under Taliban control for years with no government presence ⁽²²⁴⁸⁾. Naw Bahar was in 2010 described as 'one of the most remote, poorest, driest, and least governed districts in Afghanistan' ⁽²²⁴⁹⁾. There have been reports of the presence of several terrorist organisations in Zabul. In the beginning of 2017, a local senior police officer interviewed by RFE/RL estimated that based on intelligence and reports from locals, he estimated the number of foreign fighters in the province to be in the hundreds. The fighters of Lashkari Jhangvi Al Alami, an offshoot of the Pakistani terrorist organization Lashkari Jhangvi, reportedly use the remote mountainous districts of Day Chopan, Arghandab and Kakar/Khaki Afghan as a hiding

⁽²²³⁸⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽²²³⁹⁾ Zabulwal, A.A., Taliban in Zabul: A Witness' Account, in: Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 179.

⁽²²⁴⁰⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽²²⁴¹⁾ Zabulwal, A.A., Taliban in Zabul: A Witness' Account, in: Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 185.

⁽²²⁴²⁾ van Bijlert, M., Voices from Zabul, AAN, 27 February 2010 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁴³⁾ Zabulwal, A.A., Taliban in Zabul: A Witness' Account, in: Giustozzi, A., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. pp. 180-181.

⁽²²⁴⁴⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

⁽²²⁴⁵⁾ Afghanistan/World Bank, Afghanistan Provincial Briefs, December 2016 ([url](#)) pp. 69-70.

⁽²²⁴⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 school buildings being constructed in Zabul, 25 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁴⁷⁾ UNOCHA, Zabul Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁴⁸⁾ Zabulwal, A. A., Taliban in Zabul: A Witness' Account, in: Giustozzi ed., Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2009. pp. 179-180.

⁽²²⁴⁹⁾ World Affairs, The Back of Beyond: A Report from Zabul Province, March/April 2010 ([url](#)).

place ⁽²²⁵⁰⁾. Al Qaeda is reported to have run a training camp in Mizan district in 2016 ⁽²²⁵¹⁾. There have also been media reports of ISIS fighters operating in Kakar/Khak Afghan district ⁽²²⁵²⁾.

According to a LWJ assessment, Kakar and Arghandab districts are firmly under Taliban control. Day Chopan, Atghar and Tarnak wa Jaldak are also under Taliban control, except for the district centres. Naw Bahar is claimed to be controlled by the Taliban, but information on the district is scarce ⁽²²⁵³⁾. According to an AAN analysis from September 2015, Kakar/Khak Afghan and Naw Bahar had been under Taliban control for years. In Day Chopan, the government moved the district administrative centre from its original place to Bailogh, a location that was still under government control ⁽²²⁵⁴⁾. Shinkay district is known for its links to the Taliban's original leader Mullah Omar as his family's place of origin ⁽²²⁵⁵⁾. In the semiofficial district of Sioray, officially part of Shinkay, the government was reported to only hold the district governor's office by the end of 2014 ⁽²²⁵⁶⁾. Shomalzay district shares an unsecure border with Pakistan ⁽²²⁵⁷⁾. It was reported in 2009 to be one of the main entry points of insurgents coming from Pakistan ⁽²²⁵⁸⁾. Shahjoy is described as a strategically important and fertile district along the Kabul-Kandahar highway. The Taliban use the district as their main transit and supply route between Pakistan and Uruzgan and Ghazni provinces. In September 2016, it was reported that the Taliban controlled most of the district's rural areas while government control was limited to the district centre and the highway ⁽²²⁵⁹⁾.

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, reporting in 2017, more than 50 % of the schools in Zabul have been shut down due to security problems while others lack buildings, professional teachers and other facilities ⁽²²⁶⁰⁾. Conservative traditions are common in the province and include child marriages and restrictions on women's movement and education ⁽²²⁶¹⁾.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2016 to 31 May 2017, Zabul Province counted 255 security incidents ⁽²²⁶²⁾. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents:

Violence targeting individuals	5
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	174

⁽²²⁵⁰⁾ RFE/RL, Pakistani Extremists Carve A Sanctuary In Southern Afghanistan, Gandhara, 23 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁵¹⁾ LWJ, Afghan Intelligence Service Destroys al Qaeda Base in Zabul, 19 September 2016 ([url](#)).

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Explosions	47
Security enforcement	20
Non-conflict related incidents	6
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	255

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Zabul Province ⁽²²⁶³⁾:

Arghandab	25	Qalat	65
Atghar	6	Shahjoy	35
Daychopan	10	Shamulzayi	15
Khake Afghan	5	Shinkay	31
Mizan	17	Tarnak Wa Jaldak	37
Naw Bahar	9		

UNOCHA prioritised the districts of Arghandab, Shahjoy and Shomalzay for the first half of 2017 as areas of integrated protection programming meant for high combat intensity areas as well as populations under armed opposition group control in its September 2017 assessment ⁽²²⁶⁴⁾. According to UNOCHA, many of Zabul's districts were inaccessible to the government, UN agencies and national and international organisations ⁽²²⁶⁵⁾. UNOCHA regarded Shahjoy district as one of the areas in Afghanistan where the conflict was most severe in terms of the number of incidents, the amount of civilian casualties, and the numbers of IDPs originating from the area ⁽²²⁶⁶⁾.

In Zabul, UNAMA documented a total of 135 civilian casualties (50 deaths and 85 injured) during the first half of 2017, a two % increase over the same period in 2016. Ground engagements constituted the leading cause for civilian deaths and injuries, followed by IED attacks and explosive remnants of war ⁽²²⁶⁷⁾. Zabul was among the eight provinces that had the highest number of incidents of detonation of explosive remnants of war causing civilian casualties in the first half of 2017. It is also among the ten provinces with the highest number of incidents of use of indirect and/or explosive weapons causing civilian casualties during ground fighting ⁽²²⁶⁸⁾.

In 2017, UNAMA documented civilian casualties and abuse of civilians as a result of the ALP activities in Siorai ⁽²²⁶⁹⁾.

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Taliban attacked multiple police checkpoints in Qalat and Shahjoy districts in late May 2017, killing at least 25 policemen ⁽²²⁷⁰⁾. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 villages in Shahjoy district were cleared of the Taliban in an operation codenamed 'Khaled' in July 2017 and since then have been under the control of the security forces ⁽²²⁷¹⁾. A reporter for the state-run Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) was shot to death near Qalat in October 2016 ⁽²²⁷²⁾.

Displacement

Between 1 September 2016 and 31 December 2016, UNOCHA documented 1,286 individuals from Zabul province who were displaced by conflict: 857 from Naw Bahar, 231 from Day Chopan, 189 from Shomalzay, and 9 from Shahjoy. The IDPs were either displaced within their districts or went to the provincial capital Qalat ⁽²²⁷³⁾.

Between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017, UNOCHA documented 7,274 individuals from Zabul province displaced by conflict: 5,489 from Shahjoy, 1,309 within Shomalzay, and 476 people from Day Chopan. 3,619 people were displaced to Shahjoy, 1,870 to Qalat, 1,309 to Shomalzay, and 476 to Arghandab ⁽²²⁷⁴⁾.

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Annex II Terms of Reference

The goal of this report is to provide security-related information relevant for international protection status determination (refugee status and subsidiary protection).

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 September 2015 until 31 August 2016.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

General description of the security situation

Introduction

Short history of the conflict(s)

Parties to the conflict

State's armed forces (army, police, intelligence...)

Components

Tasks/roles

Numbers in total

Casualties

Defecting (as indication of strength/weakness)

Armed groups (pro-government, opposition...)

Components

Level of organisation (cf. mentioning Report Afghan Analyst Network)

Numbers in total

Casualties

Defecting (as indication of strength/weakness)

International military forces (transition)

Armed confrontations (trends)

As intro to regional chapter

E.g., fighting tactics, attacks, military operations, guerilla

Use of weapons

Both qualitative and quantitative

Geographical overview of the security situation

- transition to next chapter; demonstrate clear geographical differences between level of violence
- use of maps
- urban/rural

Impact of violence on state ability to secure Law & Order

- Government institutions
- Court system
- Rural/urban divide

Refugees and returnees

Detailed regional description of the security situation

Description that goes into regional details, e.g. per province, district, cities...

Level of detail depending on province but some consistency needed.

By province, possibly with separate focus on some contested areas:

Try to define zones within province when describing levels of violence

Some provinces are safer, so need less detail. Other provinces need more detail.

Short description of the province

Terrain (short); main roads

Urban areas

Population (including numbers); ethnicity (indicative, no real figures, qualitative)

Map (UNOCHA) with districts, roads and neighbouring provinces

Quantitative data

Number of incidents

Number of victims (death and injured)

Civilians

Military staff/fighters

Humanitarian organisations

Number of population displacements

Direct impacts of violence

Overview of **major/significant incidents** in the province (chronology, not exhaustive and for very violent provinces it needs to be specified that no chronology is possible due to too many incidents)

Frequency of the incidents

Anti-government **elements active** in the region

Weapons and tactics used

Depending on occurrence of information, refer to chronology

Insofar as possible: info on type of weapons / tactics: targeted vs indiscriminate

Only effective use of violence, not potential, e.g. cache of weapons found

Examples may relate to:

Bombings

- Artillery and mortars
- Air raids
- Massive bombings

Explosives

- Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)
 - roadside bombs (VOIED, RCIED)
 - car and suicide bombs (VBIED, BBIED)
- Landmines

Shootings

- Direct confrontations/ground battles
- Snipers
- Death squads and executions

Guerilla attacks/asymmetric warfare/multiple and complex attacks

Surprise attacks/sweeps/raids

Siege

Terre brûlée

Intimidation and threats

Checkpoints/freedom of movement

Kidnappings

Limitations to participation in public life

Forced recruitment

Illegal taxation

Sexual violence as a war strategy

Lootings

Criminal activities related to the conflict (e.g. in case of breakdown of law and order)

Targets

If info available differentiates between, e.g.:

Civilian targets and population

Military targets

Government infrastructure

Humanitarian organisations

Affected areas

If info available differentiates between, e.g.:

Urban areas and dwellings

Crowded/public places

Markets, shops

Schools

Places of worship and recreation

Hospitals

Cultural property

Roads and transport systems

Roads

Airfields

Stations

Secondary impact of the violence (directly linked to violence; excluding e.g. natural disasters, corruption, cultural issues, etc.)



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