



EASO Country of Origin Information Report

Afghanistan Recruitment by armed groups





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September 2016

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A quality review was carried out by Kate Clark from the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), an independent non-profit policy research organisation. It aims to bring together the knowledge, experience and drive of a large number of experts to better inform policy and to increase the understanding of Afghan realities ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/>

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012)⁽²⁾. The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced. As much as 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.

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The target users are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decisionmaking authorities.

The drafting of this report was finalised in August 2016. 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.

⁽²⁾ 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 (https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/)
AGEs	Anti-Government Elements
ALP	Afghan Local Police; a security initiative to include armed militias in the police force, under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior, funded by the US.
Amir-ul-Momineen	Leader of the Faithfull; the Islamic ruler who can claim legitimacy from the community of Muslims; title given to the Taliban Leader.
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces (including Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police and National Directorate of Security)
Bacha Baazi	Dancing boys: Young boys who dance and are often sexually abused. This practice is often associated with powerful men.
CCPS	Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/)
CPUs	Child Protection Units in ANP and ALP recruitment centres
Daesh	Arabic acronym (al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham) used for Islamic State
Deobandism	The Deobandi school of Islam originated in 1866 in the town of Deoband in northern India at the Dar-ul-Uloom madrassa. It is a revivalist movement based on strict adherence to Sunna and Sharia. The core beliefs of the Deobandi school include: a Muslim's loyalty to Islam first and then to the nation; adherence to the primacy of the Ummah, or global Muslim community over all other communities; and a belief in the sacred obligation to wage jihad to protect Muslims.
Haqqani Network	An armed insurgent movement under the leadership of Sirajuddin Haqqani, based in south-east Afghanistan and North Waziristan (Pakistan)
Hezb-e Islami	Afghan opposition movement of which the main faction is led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan	The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was the state in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 under the Taliban regime. The Taliban still uses this name (http://www.shahamat-english.com/).
ISK	Islamic State in Khorasan

Jihadi	The insurgency against the communist regime and Soviet occupation was called a jihad and fighters from this period (1979-89) are still referred to as jihadi.
Lashkar	A Lashkar is a Pashtun tribal militia, a form of tribal mobilisation for war, where every household has to contribute a male of fighting age.
LWJ	The Long War Journal (http://www.longwarjournal.org/)
Madrassa	Islamic religious school.
Mahaz	Local front (group/unit) of fighters
Mullah	Islamic cleric (teachers and preachers) who studied in a madrassa. In Afghanistan they are very prevalent outside the cities and usually the single religious authority in a village. They can often read Arabic and the Koran.
Rahbari Shura	The Taliban's Leadership Council, also referred to as the Quetta Shura, because the council met often in Quetta (Pakistan) and its members were based there.
Sharia	Islamic law, used and interpreted by the schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Shafii and Ja'fari)
Shura	Community council
SOAS	Institution for the Study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, University of London (https://www.soas.ac.uk/)
Taliban	Armed Islamic insurgent movement in Afghanistan under the leadership of Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansur and the Rahbari Shura. The movement originated in the Afghan refugee communities in Pakistan and in Kandahar in the Mujahideen era (1980s and 90s), took control of Kabul in 1996 and, by 2001, controlled most of the country. See also: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
Tazkira	National ID card
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Wahabism	Ultra-conservative Sunni Islamic movement, based on the Salafi theology and characterised by the strict observance of the Koran. Its origins and heartland are in Saudi Arabia.
Warlord	A charismatic military leader with autonomy and capability of monopolising large-scale violence in a territory.

Introduction

This report was co-drafted by a Country of Origin Information (COI) specialist from Cedoca, the Belgian COI unit, as referred to in the [Acknowledgements](#) section, and EASO.

The report aims to provide relevant information for international protection status determination (PSD, including refugee status and subsidiary protection). Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Methodology

This report is an update of EASO's first Country of Origin Information report "Afghanistan, Taliban strategies, recruitment" (2012) ⁽³⁾.

The report presents information until 19 August 2016. The information is a result of desk research of public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources. In addition, the Cedoca researcher, a specialist on Afghanistan, conducted extensive interviews with the following experts on the topic:

- **Antonio Giustozzi**, independent researcher, visiting professor at King's College London and author of several articles, papers and books on Afghanistan. Telephone interview, 14 April 2016;
- **Aziz Hakimi**, Research Associate at the University of Sussex and Chr. Michelsen Institute. Hakimi's doctoral research at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London explored the security and political dynamics of US counterinsurgency and the Afghan Local Police (ALP) programme in three provincial settings in Afghanistan (Wardak, Baghlan and Kunduz). Telephone interview, 21 April 2016;
- **Borhan Osman**, analyst Afghanistan Analysts Network. Telephone interview, 4 April 2016;
- **Patricia Gossman**, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch (HRW). Skype interview, 19 February 2016;
- **Deedee Derksen**, Visiting Scholar at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University in the City of New York, previously journalist based in Kabul, and Ph.D. student at the War Studies Department of King's College London, examining the impact of DDR efforts on commander networks in Afghanistan;
- A **Western security official** based in Kabul who requested to remain anonymous, e-mail, 10 March 2016;
- **Lucile Martin**, previously researcher at The Liaison Office, currently with Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation, and pursuing a Ph.D at Ghent University.

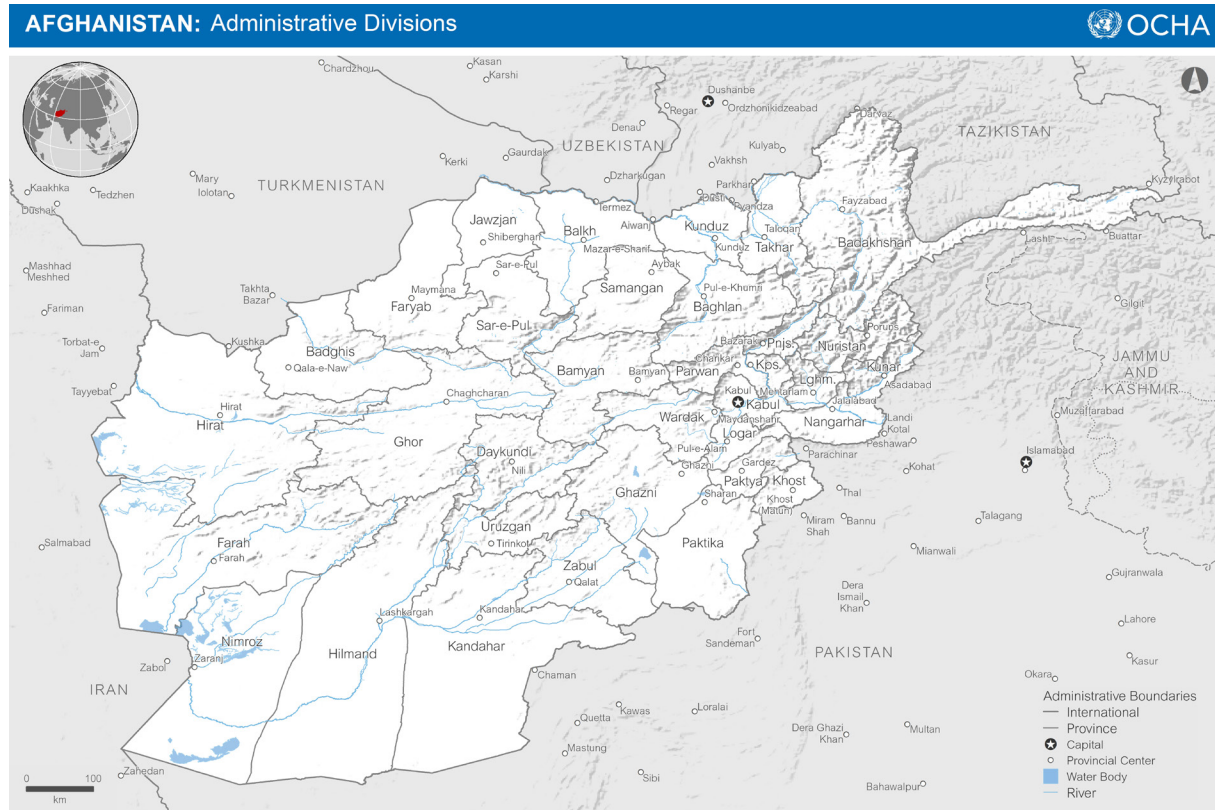
To verify whether the writers respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the departments listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. In addition, a review of the report was carried out by Kate Clark from the Afghanistan Analyst Network. After this, a complementary interview was done with Borhan Osman. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

As indicated in the [disclaimer](#), this report is not exhaustive. Reviewer Kate Clark gave an additional warning that it is very difficult to get information on the topic of insurgent recruitment. Problematic areas are: the difficulty and danger of travelling to insurgent and contested areas and the pressure on independent journalists, researchers and NGOs in contested areas. Furthermore, there are no disinterested parties among government officials or the Taliban so any information they give cannot be assumed to be accurate, but should be checked further for veracity.

⁽³⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 20.

Map of Afghanistan

Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UN OCHA



Creation date: 05 November 2014 Data Sources: AGCHO; GAUL Feedback: ocha.imu.afg@un.org Website: <https://afg.humanitarianresponse.info> <http://www.unocha.org/afghanistan>
The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

1. Taliban organisation and modus operandi

For a general description of the Taliban's organisation and modus operandi during the insurgency after 2001, see EASO's first Country of Origin Information report 'Afghanistan, Taliban strategies, recruitment' (2012, hereafter referred to as the '2012 EASO report')⁽⁴⁾. The current report covers information available on new developments and changes since 2012.

1.1. Leadership

In July 2015, it was officially announced that Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar had died in 2013. Mullah Akhtar Mansur became the insurgents' new leader but his nomination was contested by some other Taliban figures. Opposition to Mansur centred around Mullah Muhammad Rasul who now leads a breakaway faction. This resulted in internal strife and a few armed clashes⁽⁵⁾. In May 2016, Mullah Mansur was killed by a US drone strike in Baluchistan. The Taliban elected Maulawi Haibatullah Akhundzada as his successor and appointed Mullah Sirajuddin Haqqani and Maulawi Muhammad Yaqoub (son of Mullah Omar) as his deputies⁽⁶⁾.

In the 2012 EASO report the clerical nature of the Taliban movement was highlighted⁽⁷⁾. Michael Semple, author of a study on the Taliban movement for USIP, also elaborated on this⁽⁸⁾:

'Overall, the Taliban movement has been remarkably resistant to any notion of broadening its social base beyond the clergy. It continues to function as a sort of Afghan Islamist vanguardist movement—a closed group that claims a divine mission to transform Afghan society without the need for a popular mandate.

The clerical nature of the Taliban movement has endured despite more than a decade of mobilizing Afghans around a nationalistic opposition to the presence of foreign troops rather than the agenda of shariat implementation, which the Taliban pursued while in power.'

In September 2015, the BBC published a chart on the Taliban leadership, including the positions of the Amir (Mullah Mansur), his two deputies, and a leadership council (Rahbari Shura). Under this council several commissions are installed (military, finance, political, health, education, information and culture, martyrs and others). The military commission is reportedly the most important one and has a sub-division in Peshawar that is responsible for military matters in the east of Afghanistan⁽⁹⁾.

This leadership structure can also be seen in the Taliban's own communication: the *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful); his deputies and the leading council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan; and several commissions. Furthermore, they refer to several military commissions⁽¹⁰⁾. As explained in the 2012 EASO report, military commissions responsible for a province or a region are part of the Taliban's command structure⁽¹¹⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 20.

⁽⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Breakaway Faction Challenges New Taliban Leadership, 9 November 2015; Bezhan, F., The Taliban's Rare Winter Offensive In Afghanistan, RFE/RL, 8 January 2016; Telegraph (The), Afghan Taliban splinter faction picks rival leader in challenge to new chief, 5 November 2015; Frankfurter Rundschau, Bruderkrige bei den Taliban, 3 December 2015; Guardian (The), Dozens killed in clashes between rival Taliban factions in Afghanistan, 10 March 2016; NY Times, Taliban Chief Rebuked by Religious Leaders in Sign of Turmoil, 24 December 2015; Tolo News, No Evidence To Prove Mullah Mansour Is Dead: Ghani, 7 December 2015; Ruttig, T., The New Taleban Deputy Leaders: Is there an obvious successor to Akhtar Mansur?, 10 February 2016.

⁽⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Statement by the Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate regarding the martyrdom of Amir ul Mumineen Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour and the election of the new leader, 25 May 2016; NPR, Taliban Name New Leader, Confirm Death Of Mullah Mansour, 25 May 2016.

⁽⁷⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, pp. 22-23.

⁽⁸⁾ Semple, M., Rhetoric, ideology, and organizational structure of the Taliban movement, December 2014, p. 34.

⁽⁹⁾ BBC, Afghan Taliban: Mullah Mansour's battle to be leader, 23 September 2015; Semple, M., Rhetoric, ideology, and organizational structure of the Taliban movement, US Institute of Peace, December 2014, p. 18.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Introduction of the newly appointed leader of Islamic Emirate, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad (Mansur), may Allah safeguard hi), n.d.; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Declaration of the Leading Council of the Islamic Emirate regarding the appointment of new Amir (leader) of the Islamic Emirate, n.d.; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Brother, elder son of late Amir ul Mumineen officially commence their duties, April 2016; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, New head and deputy appointed for Political Office, n.d.

⁽¹¹⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, pp. 18-20.

1.2. Command structure and recruitment mechanisms

Under the military commissions (see section [Leadership](#)), the military organisation of the Taliban is composed of local commanders on the ground ⁽¹²⁾. For information on how the Taliban gradually infiltrated Afghanistan and established shadow governance and military structures, reference is made to the 2012 EASO report ⁽¹³⁾. In line with the main findings of that report, Taliban expert Antonio Giustozzi explains that in 2016, the Taliban in general still recruit via local specialised cells in Afghanistan (answering to the Recruitment Commission of each shura or office), apart from their significant recruitment pools in Pakistan (see section on [Pakistan as a base](#)) ⁽¹⁴⁾. Patricia Gossman, senior researcher on Afghanistan at Human Rights Watch (HRW), agrees that the Taliban recruits through the local front commander, via local tribal leaders' decisions, or in local madrassas or mosques, as outlined in the 2012 EASO report ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Borhan Osman, an Afghan expert in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) who has been studying the Taliban very closely, highlights an important difference between the time of writing of the 2012 EASO report and the current situation of the Taliban (2016). He states that 2012 was a significant year for the insurgency as the Taliban came under heavy pressure due to the continued presence of many foreign forces with air support, the surge in ALP militias and local uprising organised against them (e.g. in Panjwayi and Andar). As a result, the Taliban struggled with a shortage of fighters in 2012. In 2016, however, few foreign troops are involved in the fighting and there is little air support. The Taliban is moving into more conventional warfare and is widely perceived as the winning side now. Generally, the Taliban is under less pressure than in 2012 ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Aziz Hakimi, an Afghan researcher at SOAS, University of London, and an expert on armed groups, says there is no simple way to explain alliances and recruitment within the current situation in Afghanistan. The motivation to join any armed faction is always defined by the local situation; security, economic and political considerations; group dynamics; and individual decisions ⁽¹⁷⁾.

1.2.1. Local Taliban fronts

The Taliban's traditional form of organisation has been the local front (*mahaz*), composed of different local commanders with groups of 10 to 30 fighters who were mobilised locally for operations and belonged to a multi-layered hierarchy, including a district- and provincial-level command with the Taliban's military council as its head. Not all fighters belonging to a front were mobilised at the same time but operated on a rotation system so local fighters could return home quickly ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Regarding this mobilisation, Giustozzi explains that the basic unit of the social structure in Afghanistan consists of the family, with a head of family who makes decisions for the family, and the tribal or community unit, with elders or leaders who make decisions for the tribe. Some Pashtun communities or tribes can mobilise what they call a *lashkar*, or tribal militia. The decision to mobilise is made by the elders and there is the rule that each family must contribute one fighter. Families can be exempted from this obligation by paying a tax that is used to equip the *lashkar*. This is a very common practice often relied on by wealthier families in the tribe. The poorest families usually deliver fighters. Such systems vary throughout Afghanistan and are in some way also present in Tajik communities, especially in the so-called egalitarian Tajik communities that have village communities and elders, and among Tajik populations that live with Pashtuns and are under the influence of Pashtun traditions, for example in Logar. But many Tajik communities, along with Hazaras and Uzbeks, have different mobilising mechanisms, where community mobilisation is much more centered around the local strongman, local politician or through a political party or organisation that is active on the ground ⁽¹⁹⁾.

According to Giustozzi, the Taliban does not include many large *lashkars* in the traditional sense of the word, or tribal armies, in their ranks. It tries to obtain the tribal elders' cooperation for the mobilisation of smaller local units

⁽¹²⁾ BBC, Afghan Taliban: Mullah Mansour's battle to be leader, 23 September 2015.

⁽¹³⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 20.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Gossman, P., Skype interview, 19 February 2016.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 20; Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

(fronts) of, for example, 10 men ⁽²⁰⁾. As explained in the 2012 EASO report ⁽²¹⁾, the Taliban tries to reach out to local commanders, community and tribal elders to gain support. The Taliban relays information on the level of support it achieves in different communities on its English website, often indicating the responsibility of the Preaching and Guidance/Recruitment (*Dawat wal Irshad*) Commission of Islamic Emirate in obtaining community support ⁽²²⁾: 29 villages in Shinkot district in Ghor ⁽²³⁾; a local commander of 200 armed men in an area near the provincial capital of Ghor ⁽²⁴⁾; a tribe in the district of Dawlena in Ghor, including a tribal militia of about 250 fighters ⁽²⁵⁾; 11 villages in Bandar district in Faryab ⁽²⁶⁾; a local militia and population in Sangcharak, Sar-e Pul ⁽²⁷⁾; tribal elders in Hisarak, Nangarhar ⁽²⁸⁾; tribal elders, religious scholars and militia commanders in Gizab district in Uruzgan/Daykundi ⁽²⁹⁾; residents from the district of Ab Garmi (Badghis) reportedly declared their support and offered 30 armed men to the Taliban's ranks, while their costs would be covered by the locals ⁽³⁰⁾; in Paktika, there was an 'invitation and Amalgamation' or an 'absorption' process by the Taliban to convince enemy fighters (pro-government militia, local police, ...) to switch sides ⁽³¹⁾.

Reinforcing Giustozzi's view, Borhan Osman confirmed that in many villages there was a well-established agreement within the tribe on mobilisation of fighters. Large families usually contribute two fighters. In case of emergency, for example when facing an imminent attack, refusing this mobilisation would be difficult. It can be avoided by the family paying a 'fine' ⁽³²⁾.

Hakimi explains how recruitment is often group-based, rather than individual. Established armed groups have a command structure, battlefield experience and can be mobilised quickly ⁽³³⁾. In the 2012 EASO report ⁽³⁴⁾, it was explained how decades of war created a wide range of armed factions and groups, led by warlords, strongmen and commanders across the whole country.

However, Hakimi also says that Afghanistan has gone through fundamental social transformation throughout its warring history. He explains that tribal mobilisation mechanisms, depending on tribal loyalty and authority of tribal elders, dates back to the theories of ibn Khaldun (14th century) and are no longer valid as a single cause to explain recruitment mechanisms today. The political economy of the protracted conflict, the rise of local commanders and political strongmen, the growing importance of the drug trade, and the importance of transnational relations are just some of the factors that have contributed to socio-economic and political developments in Afghanistan in the past 40 years. According to Hakimi, one can no longer assume that tribal elders today still control the young men in their communities. Their traditional authority has been eroded by the jihadi commanders, who now rule based on patronage, for which many of them can nevertheless still rely on their tribal connections. Another factor contributing to the loss of influence of traditional tribal leaders are the mullahs and the use of a religious discourse by the Taliban. The third factor is the Taliban itself, which sees the tribal elders' authority as a threat. In Kandahar alone, more than 600 tribal elders have been killed by the Taliban. According to Hakimi, it is necessary to analyse the context in particular cases to understand what drives recruitment. At stake can be economic and political reasons, group dynamics, but also individual decisions, either of leaders or commanders, or decisions by individual recruits ⁽³⁵⁾.

Borhan Osman also refers to this breakdown of traditional family or tribal control mechanisms. Whereas in the past the decision of the head of family to join a faction would usually be supported by the whole family, this is no longer the case. Young men often decide themselves, without caring about the father's or tribal elders' position.

⁽²⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²¹⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, pp. 18-20.

⁽²²⁾ Diplomat (The), Is the Afghan Taliban's Leadership Finally Coalescing Once Again?, 13 April 2016.

⁽²³⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 29 villages declare support in Shinkot, 1 May 2016.

⁽²⁴⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 270 armed men join Mujahideen in central Ghor province, 27 May 2015.

⁽²⁵⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Locals including 200 armed men in Ghor declare support for Mujahideen, 20 January 2015.

⁽²⁶⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 11 villages in Bandar declare support for Mujahideen, 15 May 2014.

⁽²⁷⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Locals in northern Saripul declare support, 18 April 2015.

⁽²⁸⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Tribal elders pledge support to Islamic Emirate in Nangarhar, 11 July 2014.

⁽²⁹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Tribal elders and religious scholars in Gezab declare support for Mujahideen, 31 August 2013.

⁽³⁰⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Residents of Ab Garmi declare support for Islamic Emirate, 2 July 2015.

⁽³¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, An interview with the deputy head of Paktika province, 30 December 2013.

⁽³²⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽³³⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽³⁴⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 20.

⁽³⁵⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016; Hakimi, A., Fetishizing "culture": local militias and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, 24 January 2014; Harper's Magazine, 'Afghanistan: Six Questions for Thomas Barfield', 21 May 2010.

An indication of this can be observed in families where one brother is in the army and another is fighting with the Taliban. This phenomenon may also, however, stem from families seeing it as a coping strategy to have different members joining different factions in the conflict ⁽³⁶⁾.

1.2.2. Mobile Taliban units

Following Mullah Muhammad Omar's death in April 2013 (which was kept secret for two years) and Akhtar Muhammad Mansur taking over the leadership, a new military organisation was implemented in the Taliban's ranks. Mansur introduced a unit (*qet'a*) in which fighters are permanently deployed in groups of 200 men, more mobile and better trained and equipped. Within this unit, groups of about 20 fighters can rotate for training in military strategy and use of weapons. This *qet'a* structure was introduced in the battlefields in Helmand, but the units have reportedly also been deployed by Mansur in Kandahar, Zabul and Kunduz ⁽³⁷⁾. One of the most notorious commanders of such a mobile unit is Pir Agha, who commands more than 1,200 fighters operating in the south and west of Afghanistan ⁽³⁸⁾. Although the *qet'a* system has become more influential, the *mahaz* system is still in place ⁽³⁹⁾.

Giustozzi explains that the majority of full-time fighters in the mobile units are recruited in Pakistan (see section on [Pakistan as a base](#)). Local Taliban fighters are sometimes offered a position in the mobile units, where they can earn a higher salary, be promoted and build a career. These are the best, bravest or distinguished local fighters ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

1.2.3. Training camps

In June 2015, the Long War Journal (LWJ) reported that pictures of a training camp in a mountainous area for Taliban 'special forces' circulated on Taliban-related social media accounts. The recruits were seen doing physical exercises and being trained in the use of weapons, including handguns, heavy machine guns, and what looks like an anti-aircraft gun. They were also observed engaging in logistics training ⁽⁴¹⁾.

An important Taliban training hub is located in Gereshk (Nahr-e Saraj) district in Helmand province ⁽⁴²⁾. Another Taliban training base, including several camps, is located in the district of Dasht-e Archi in Kunduz, in an area under Taliban control ⁽⁴³⁾. In December 2014, the Taliban released a video about a training camp in the northern province of Faryab ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

In 2013, Helmand's provincial governor reported the presence of a Taliban training camp in the district of Deh-e Shu ⁽⁴⁵⁾. Khaama Press reported in 2015 about a Taliban training centre in Zarghoon city, in the province of Logar, as stated by the provincial police chief Gen. Daud Ahmadi ⁽⁴⁶⁾. According to Kate Clark, the accuracy of such reports by local officials cannot be assumed, but need more sourcing ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

1.2.4. Ideology, communication and propaganda channels

The Taliban movement has its origins in Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which determined its ideology and main objective of implementing Sharia in the Afghan state ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

⁽³⁶⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016; Hakimi, A., 'Fetishizing "culture": local militias and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan', 24 January 2014; Harper's Magazine, 'Afghanistan: Six Questions for Thomas Barfield', 21 May 2010.

⁽³⁷⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016; Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015.

⁽³⁸⁾ Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taliban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016; Yousafzai, S., The Cruellest Taliban, 11 February 2016.

⁽³⁹⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽⁴¹⁾ LWJ, Jihadists tout Taliban 'special forces' training camp in Afghanistan, 25 June 2015.

⁽⁴²⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

⁽⁴³⁾ Ali, Obaid, The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taliban takeover, 30 January 2016.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ LWJ, Jihadists tout Taliban 'special forces' training camp in Afghanistan, 25 June 2015.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ RAWA News, Taliban run training camp in Deshu: Naeem, 5 February 2013.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Khaama Press, Karzai had ordered not to attack the Taliban training center in Logar, 14 September 2015.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Afrasiab Khattak, Project Taliban, 30 April 2016; Semple, M., Rhetoric, ideology, and organizational structure of the Taliban movement, December 2014, pp. 17-18, 21-22.

The Taliban uses night letters ⁽⁴⁹⁾ to warn, threaten and to try to win over the population. For example in April 2015, UNHCR reported on night letters issued by the Taliban in Maidan Wardak in which it asked ‘local residents to cease their cooperation with the Government and encouraging men to join them in combat against Government forces’ ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

The Taliban has a Cultural Commission, under which a Multimedia Branch is responsible for uploading propaganda videos and other materials. It operates a website (English version: <http://shahamat-english.com/>); and social media accounts (for example Twitter: https://twitter.com/Islami_Emirate) ⁽⁵¹⁾. It has even developed and launched a news app in the Google Play Store, but it was quickly removed by Google ⁽⁵²⁾.

Madrassas

Some madrassas serve as propaganda and recruiting grounds for the Taliban. Reports of this can be found in Qarabagh district in Kabul province ⁽⁵³⁾; a madrassa named *Kokcha* in the Shinwari area in the district of Dasht-e Archi in Kunduz, run by Pakistanis under the supervision of the Haqqani network ⁽⁵⁴⁾; in Warduj district (Badakhshan), Deobandi madrassas have been present since long ⁽⁵⁵⁾; and many Taliban individuals studied in the Nur-ul-Mudaris in the district of Andar (Ghazni) ⁽⁵⁶⁾. (See also section on child recruitment – [schools and madrassas](#))

Clark clarified that madrassas are a normal part of the Afghan educational landscape. Most young rural boys, as well as some urban boys, go to madrassas, at some point in their education. Taleban, almost always have had some sort of a madrassa education ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

Universities

According to Borhan Osman, pro-Taliban students attend universities, and are referred to by other students as *Emaratis*. They openly support the Taliban in activities such as demonstrations. They are mostly active at the universities of Nangarhar, Khost, Kabul and Kandahar. They approach other students in dormitories, going from room to room, in order to hold long discussions with them. They also distribute Taliban propaganda materials, such as the *Tora Bora Front* magazine, Eid Messages, night letters and pamphlets. Militant-minded students reportedly went fighting during vacation, although probably not in high numbers ⁽⁵⁸⁾. Osman stated:

‘University campuses have also been the scene of targeted attacks, including the relatively recent assassination of the deputy governor of Kandahar province, Abdul Qadim Patyal, who was killed inside his classroom in Kandahar University in early November 2014. Security officials and independent observers, pointing to the long-standing presence of Taleban-affiliated students on campus, believe the assassin was probably a student of the university’ ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

It was reported that Wahabi and radical preaching occurs at the university of Fayzabad (Badakhshan), from where radicalised students joined the Taliban’s ranks active in the province ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Night letters are an important communication tool used by the Taliban to address the local community or individuals in areas where they are active. For more information, see: EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan, Insurgent strategies – intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans, December 2012, pp. 23-24; IRBC, Afghanistan: Night letters [Shab Nameha, Shabnamah, Shabnameh], including appearance, 10 February 2015.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ UNHCR, Afghanistan - Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, April 2015, p. 3.

⁽⁵¹⁾ LWJ, Taliban mass in northern Afghanistan to swear allegiance to new emir, 27 August 2015.

⁽⁵²⁾ Guardian (The), Taliban app removed from Google Play Store, 4 April 2016.

⁽⁵³⁾ Khaama Press, 4 young suicide bombers arrested in Kunduz province of Afghanistan, 9 April 2016.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz madrasa students undergoing ‘terrorist training’, 11 April 2016.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, 3 July 2015.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Rahman, F., Elections 2014 (14): Why two thirds of Andar’s polling centres may have never opened, 23 April 2014.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism Afghanistan’s new generation of Islamic activists, June 2015, pp. 14, 28-29.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan’s new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, pp. 29-30

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, 3 July 2015.

1.3. Ethnic and tribal affiliation

In 2015, all members of the Taliban's leadership council (*Rahbari Shura*) were Pashtun, except for one Tajik and one Uzbek⁽⁶¹⁾. By the end of 2015, Taliban leader Mansur had reportedly expanded the *Rahbari Shura* with five persons from non-Pashtun ethnicity (Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek)⁽⁶²⁾.

The Taliban consider it a hallmark of its movement that it is 'not tied to a specific race, tribe or region and neither does this process orbit around a few individuals and families with others holding second-class status'⁽⁶³⁾. Kate Clark, however, pointed out that the Taliban's statement should be considered as propaganda and still Pashtuns from the Kandahari region remain overwhelmingly dominant in the leadership.⁽⁶⁴⁾

The Taliban, according to Afrasiab Khattak, a Pakistani analyst and retired senator, is not seen as a Pashtun nationalist movement⁽⁶⁵⁾. This view was supported by Aziz Hakimi⁽⁶⁶⁾.

A study concluded that the majority of the Taliban's appointed provincial shadow governors (*wali*) are Pashtun, but the movement tends to nominate a person from an ethnic group present in the respective province⁽⁶⁷⁾.

Diverging opinions exist about the ethnicity factor in Taliban recruitment. Both Patricia Gossman (HRW) and Clark explain that the vast majority of Taliban recruits are Pashtun. Recruitment of other ethnicities is possible but less common⁽⁶⁸⁾. According to Giustozzi, the Taliban increasingly recruits from all ethnic groups in Afghanistan⁽⁶⁹⁾. Clark said it was greater than in the past. However, the scale and significance of other ethnic groups varied locally, and Pashtuns were still dominant, in both numbers and clout⁽⁷⁰⁾. Borhan Osman states that the recruitment by the Taliban is not determined by ethnicity. It depends on the local dynamics of the conflict. Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen and Chechen fighters have been recruited as well⁽⁷¹⁾.

1.3.1. Pashtun tribes

Tribal support for the Taliban is often rooted in the marginalisation of certain tribes by the government and in competition or rivalries among tribes. This is often the case for rural tribes belonging to the large confederation of Ghilzai, including Hotak and Tokhi tribes. The other large Pashtun tribal confederation are the Durrani tribes, who have more often access to the state's power structures and support the Afghan government. However, groups belonging to several Durrani tribes, including Alizai, Ishaqzai and Noorzai, are disillusioned with the government and strongly support the Taliban. The Pashtun tribal structures and affiliations are complex and multi-levelled (confederation, tribe, clan/village, family). The Taliban insurgency is not exclusively defined by tribal affiliations. Within a tribe, there can be disunity in the position towards the Taliban or other powers. Tribal identity or affiliation often does not correspond to the actual local situation or behaviour of the local population⁽⁷²⁾. Another dimension of this complex relationship is the Taliban itself, whose modus operandi erodes tribal structures and power⁽⁷³⁾. In this regard, it is important to refer to the remarks by Aziz Hakimi on the traditional tribal mobilisation mechanisms (see section on [Local Taliban fronts](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁾ BBC, Afghan Taliban: Mullah Mansour's battle to be leader, 23 September 2015.

⁽⁶²⁾ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015.

⁽⁶³⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Hallmarks of Islamic Emirate's Jihadi Management, 28 May 2015.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Afrasiab Khattak, Project Taliban, 30 April 2016.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016; Hakimi, A., Fetishizing "culture": local militias and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, 24 January 2014; Harper's Magazine, 'Afghanistan: Six Questions for Thomas Barfield', 21 May 2010.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Semple, M., Rhetoric, ideology, and organizational structure of the Taliban movement, December 2014, pp. 19-23.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Gossman, P., Skype interview, 19 February 2016; Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016; NY Times, A Taliban Prize, Won in a Few Hours After Years of Strategy, 30 September 2015; Khaama Press, Karzai had ordered not to attack the Taliban training center in Logar, 14 September 2015; Diplomat (The), Here's the Most Disturbing Thing About the Taliban Takeover of Kunduz, 2 October 2015.

⁽⁷²⁾ Tellis, A. J., Reconciling With The Taliban?, 2009, pp. 8 and 16-19; Kambaiz Rafi, 'The Afghan Insurgency and the Uncertainty of Peace Negotiations', 2015, pp. 17-19; Habib, E., AAN Reportage: Who fights whom in the Andar Uprising?, 12 August 2012; Meinshausen, P. and Wheeler, S., Tribes and Afghanistan: Choosing More Appropriate Tools to Understand the Population, 2010, pp. 1-9.

⁽⁷³⁾ Bennett-Jones, O., 'Across the Durand Line', 25 September 2014, pp. 27-29.

The Taliban's leadership includes individuals from different Pashtun tribes, including: Ishaqzai (Mullah Mansur), Nurzai, Alizai, Achakzai, Popalzai, Tokhi, Hotak (Mullah Omar), Taraki, Kakar and Suleimankhel ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

By way of example, the Taliban enjoy local support from communities of: Ishaqzai in Helmand ⁽⁷⁵⁾, Kakar in Zabul ⁽⁷⁶⁾, Nurzai in Farah and Shindand (Herat) ⁽⁷⁷⁾, Gadi in Baghlan-e Jadid ⁽⁷⁸⁾, Khogyani in Nangarhar (in the fight against Islamic State) ⁽⁷⁹⁾, and Zadran in south-east Afghanistan (Haqqani network) ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

1.3.2. Hazaras in the Taliban's ranks

Antonio Giustozzi says the Taliban recruits Hazaras. Some senior Hazara commanders are with the Taliban in Bamyan and Daikundi, and there are a couple of Taliban shadow governors or provincial-level military leaders who are Hazara. The expert is unaware of any mobile Hazara unit, therefore he assumes they are all local Taliban units. The community leaders and commanders decide in such cases to join the Taliban to protect the population from bandits or against the Taliban itself. Interest in joining the Taliban is local. These Taliban Hazara militias control the village without the interference of outsiders. The fighters of these units are mainly local Hazaras and get a salary and weapons provided by the Taliban ⁽⁸¹⁾.

A message was posted on the Taliban's website about Hazara elders in Pul-e Khumri (Baghlan) who pledged allegiance to the Taliban ⁽⁸²⁾. In a *New York Times* article, a Hazara Taliban commander was mentioned who was engaged in fighting in Kunduz ⁽⁸³⁾.

In an interview, Borhan Osman explained that there was not much extensive research on the matter. He studied some cases in the province of Ghazni and Uruzgan. However, while Osman noted that cooperation between Hazara communities and Taliban existed, recruitment of Hazaras by the Taliban is not widespread. Hazaras from Jaghuri and Qarabagh used to make agreements with the Taliban based on constructive negotiation among community, religious and military leaders. These agreements were made to improve security, but in 2014 there were a couple of incidents in which it seemed that Jaghori Hazaras, on the way to Qarabagh or to Ghazni City, were targeted by the Taliban. After these incidents, the agreements were renegotiated. The renewed agreements were also strengthened after Islamic State appeared on the scene and some Uzbeks kidnapped Hazaras in Zabul. The Hazaras and the Taliban came to an agreement that allowed the latter to be hospitalised in Hazara areas. The pact allowed them to receive food, fuel, and have wounded treated. Some young Hazara men may also be escorting these Taliban to let them safely pass through the area which is, according to Osman, a crossroad for the Taliban to reach more remote districts such as Malistan and Ajristan. According to Osman, these relations and the Taliban's operation do not seem to involve any active recruitment ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

Osman reported on another case in Ghazni province. It concerned Qarabaghi, a cluster of villages near the provincial capital of Ghazni, inhabited by a community of Shia Hazaras. They are surrounded by a Sunni population and have very normalised and friendly relations with them, including even inter-marriages. In this particular context, these Hazara communities had active Taliban fighters. In 2012, there were about a dozen young Hazara men fighting in Taliban ranks. A Hazara commander had joined the Taliban but got arrested. When he returned from detention in Bagram, he quit the Taliban. The Hazaras joined with the Sunni Pashtuns in collective security or governance initiatives which were sometimes directed by the Taliban. In this case of Qarabaghi, Osman did not see any hints of forced recruitment, as the outreach to the Taliban came from the community. When the Taliban members arrived,

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Semple, M., Rhetoric, ideology, and organizational structure of the Taliban movement, US Institute of Peace, December 2014, pp. 19-23; Telegraph (The), Mullah Mohammad Omar, Taliban leader – obituary, 30 July 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Biography of new Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, 31 July 2015.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, 21 October 2015.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ NY Times, Afghan Militant Group Faces Unusual Discontent, 5 November 2013; Afghan Bios, Zadran, Sangin Mullah Sangeen, 1 September 2011; Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽⁸²⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Hazarah Tribal elders pledge support to Islamic Emirate, 24 January 2015.

⁽⁸³⁾ NY Times, A Taliban Prize, Won in a Few Hours After Years of Strategy, 30 September 2015.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 19 August 2016.

the community leaders sheltered them and gave them food. They became friends and at some point some said that they could fight with them. Osman does not see how or why the Taliban would forcibly recruit people from the Hazara ethnic group or Shia sect because they need to be able to trust them ⁽⁸⁵⁾.

A few years ago, a Hazara pro-government militia commander in Gizab district (Daykundi) named Fedayi defected with a few dozen of his men to the Taliban. A video was released of him pledging allegiance to the Taliban. It was claimed that he had about 50 fighters but this remained unverified. Also his motives remained unknown. According to Osman, it might have been a temporary move in a local power struggle because he never heard of this circle becoming bigger ⁽⁸⁶⁾.

Finally, Osman reported about Sunni Hazaras in Bamyan and Parwan. In these communities, some Hazara commanders and individuals function within the Taliban's ranks or its civil (shadow) administration. According to Osman, this concerns only a few cases. Turkmen and Uzbek populations in Taliban ranks are much bigger than Sunni Hazaras ⁽⁸⁷⁾.

1.4. Incentives for recruitment

1.4.1. Economy and unemployment

Unemployment in Afghanistan rose after the withdrawal of foreign troops and aid organisations (2013-2015). Young people with university degrees have difficulties finding a job ⁽⁸⁸⁾. Several sources indicate unemployment and economic considerations as important incentives to join the Taliban ⁽⁸⁹⁾.

Afghan officials in Kunduz explained to Pajhwok how joblessness, poverty and the government's inattention has left youth with few other options but enlisting in the insurgents' ranks. An official claimed that hundreds of educated youth in Kunduz had joined the Taliban because they were unable to find work. He mentioned the district of Dasht-e Archi in this regard, where three Taliban commanders were operating. This was confirmed by locals ⁽⁹⁰⁾. According to local Afghan officials in Helmand, the Taliban promises youths that they will be allowed to sell seized weaponry in order to convince them to fight ⁽⁹¹⁾. In an article in the *Gardab* daily newspaper (Kandahar) the following information from the NDS was reported ⁽⁹²⁾:

'Gardab daily's findings suggest that insurgents in Kandahar Province have started to use different ways to inspire youngsters to join their lines, including offering different incentives such as cars, money and positions to the young men who join their fighting against ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces].'

Clark warns that the NDS is a party to the conflict and statements such as this need to be verified independently. ⁽⁹³⁾.

CNN footage showed a Taliban fighter recruiting two men. For both recruits, unemployment and the need to earn money were the incentives for joining the Taliban. One of them even stated he did not support the Taliban's ideology ⁽⁹⁴⁾.

A researcher at the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CCPS) says that most recruits join the Taliban because it pays well. Some commanders and fighters explained to him that they wanted to join the ANSF but they could not out of fear for repercussions by the Taliban ⁽⁹⁵⁾.

Aziz Hakimi says local history, dynamics and existing conflicts often play a determining role in recruiting communities or groups into the ranks of armed actors. Hakimi referred to the example of a land conflict in Achin (Nangarhar) between two branches of the Shinwari tribe. One of these branches contacted the US military for help and received

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 19 August 2016.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 19 August 2016.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 19 August 2016.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ RFE/RL, Youth Decry Unemployment In Southern Afghanistan, 31 March 2016.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Unemployment forces Kunduz youth to join rebels' ranks, 15 August 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Joblessness forcing Kunduz youth into joining rebels, 2 April 2016.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Joblessness forcing Kunduz youth into joining rebels, 2 April 2016.

⁽⁹¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recruiting Helmand youth, say police officer, 24 March 2016.

⁽⁹²⁾ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan, 30 April 2014.

⁽⁹³⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ CNN, Afghanistan: The Taliban's new recruits [video], 9 October 2015.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Trades Ideology For Profiteering, 5 November 2014.

money and weapons for fighting the Taliban. Instead they fought their adversaries in this land dispute, automatically driving the other branch into the arms of the Taliban, where they could find resources to balance the power in this dispute. In this case the land was a very important economic asset because it was a key location for the drugs trade ⁽⁹⁶⁾.

Hakimi gives another example of the economic benefits of joining the Taliban. In Nangarhar, Islamic State and the government imposed a ban on growing opium, but the Taliban allows the communities to harvest poppies. Within the Taliban ranks these communities received protection for their crops and economic activity. In one family, one son may work in the fields while the other is fighting with the Taliban. In Helmand, the drugs trade and poppy farming are significant economic drivers ⁽⁹⁷⁾.

1.4.2. Insecurity caused by other armed actors

In some cases, the local population sides with the Taliban in an attempt to seek protection against other armed actors. An example of this was the situation in Khanabad district (Kunduz), where harassment, abuses, illegal taxation and forced recruitment by local (pro-government) militias pushed the people into supporting the Taliban ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

This is also the case for some local Hazara militias who joined the Taliban for local interests, including protection against criminal groups (see section on [Hazaras in the Taliban's ranks](#)).

Another example is the district of Khas Uruzgan, where a local commander caused problems for local communities. Many families sent fighters to join the Taliban who moved troops to engage with this commander ⁽⁹⁹⁾.

Hakimi says the Taliban make use of local factionalism to infiltrate the power dynamics. Local communities or armed groups often welcome the Taliban insurgents and allow them to take control of their region in order to counter-balance the influence of predatory armed groups in the area. Hakimi also refers to the example of Khanabad in Kunduz, where local Pashtun farmers were harassed by ALP militias. They allied with the Taliban to get protection ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾.

1.4.3. Ideology

In the 2012 EASO report it was explained how religious persuasion was an important driver for recruitment by the Taliban ⁽¹⁰¹⁾. Borhan Osman explained how ideology may still be an important driver for young men, but he pointed at the shift in persuasive arguments used by the Taliban since most foreign troops and contractors left the country: whereas before it was about fighting the invaders, the foreigners and defending Islam; it now focusses more on re-establishing an Islamic Emirate and continuing the fight against the puppet government ⁽¹⁰²⁾.

Since the beginning of the movement, Taliban recruits and fighters have been driven by religious motivation. Often, anger over injustice, opposition to the government and foreign troops also play an important role ⁽¹⁰³⁾.

1.4.4. Grievances against the government

Community support for the Taliban often derives from discontent with the authorities or grievances over perceived government failures such as corruption. ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

⁽⁹⁶⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽⁹⁷⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ Ali, Obaid, The 2015 Insurgency in the North (3): The fall and recapture of Kunduz, 16 October 2015; IRIN, Abuses rise along with pro-Afghan government militias, 7 September 2015.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, pp. 32-33.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 19 August 2016.

⁽¹⁰³⁾ Ladbury, S., in collaboration with CPAU, Why do men join the Taliban and Hizb-i Islami? How much do local communities support them?, 14 August 2009, pp. 4-6; Mercicorps, Addressing anger, not just income, is key to fighting instability in Afghanistan, 11 January 2016.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 33; Huffington Post, Why Afghanistan Is Going To Fall To The Taliban Again. And It's Not Why You Think, 10 March 2015; Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), The Taliban in Afghanistan, 4 July 2014.

1.4.5. Adventure, honour and pride

Borhan Osman explains that youth in different regions in Afghanistan sees the Taliban as the winning side and joining its ranks is perceived as ‘cool’⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. Aziz Hakimi highlights the fact that after the fall of Kunduz city (end of September 2015), children without beards (a criterion for Taliban to assess the fighting age, see section on [child recruitment](#)), took selfies with Taliban fighters⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

1.5. Forced recruitment and the use of coercion

Antonio Giustozzi says that in Afghan social structures decisions are made by heads of families, tribal elders and community leaders (see section on [Local Taliban fronts](#)). The decision to mobilise fighters is made by them and Afghans do not refer to ‘forced recruitment’, as they do not think in terms of individual rights. The decisions made by leaders are legitimate and accepted by the social units (family and tribe). Therefore ‘forced recruitment’ is a concept that does not stem from the Afghan social context⁽¹⁰⁷⁾.

In UNHCR’s Monthly IDP updates, mention was made of IDPs reporting forced recruitment by insurgents, for example in: Paktya (end of 2014); Tagab district of Kapisa (December 2014); Logar and Herat provinces (February 2015). However, these reports do not mention what is exactly understood by ‘forced recruitment’ and there is no information on which actors were involved or on the prevalence of it⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.

Patricia Gossman (HRW) says that forced recruitment should not only be seen as Taliban fighters coming from the outside to a family, grabbing their children and telling them at gunpoint to fight for them. The actors of recruitment are already there, known to these children, and persuade them to join. They sometimes put pressure on the families. The coercion or pressure can come from a family member who is part of the Taliban. Families are sometimes given money for sons to join. So there is pressure or coercion but it is not always violent⁽¹⁰⁹⁾.

Borhan Osman says the prevalence of forced recruitment strategies is directly proportionate to the level of pressure an armed group is facing. In many areas the Taliban is seen as the victorious force and has a lot of volunteering fighters available, so it does not have to rely on coercion for recruitment. In other areas the Taliban need to find extra fighters might be more pressing, though the use of force or coercion for recruitment is exceptional⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

Osman highlights a new solution the Taliban has for this problem of shortages: the mobile special forces (see section on [Mobile Taliban units](#)) can be sent into an area to deal with a situation. This new military structure reduces the need for using forced recruitment at local level⁽¹¹¹⁾.

When asked about the obligation to replace deceased or incapacitated fighters by family members (the practice of ‘call-ups’ referred to in the 2012 EASO report⁽¹¹²⁾), Osman said that this seemed very strange to him. On the contrary, he believes the Taliban would show its respect to the family and even support them financially for the deceased family member⁽¹¹³⁾.

In the following sections, examples are provided of forced or coerced recruitment reported in different provinces. However, sourcing of these reports need to be checked. Especially where they are single source government officials, independent verification would be required⁽¹¹⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ UNHCR, Afghanistan - Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, December 2014; UNHCR, Afghanistan - Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, February 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan - Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, March 2015.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Gossman, P., Skype interview, 19 February 2016.

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹¹¹⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹¹²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 31.

⁽¹¹³⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

1.5.1. Badakhshan

In Badakhshan many educated young men and teachers, mainly Tajik, spontaneously reach out to the Taliban, says Osman. In this case, he says, there is no likelihood of forced recruitment ⁽¹¹⁵⁾.

1.5.2. Kunduz

In August 2015, it was reported by an anonymous resident and the administrative chief of the district of Dasht-e Archi in Kunduz, a Taliban stronghold and training hub, that the Taliban was forcing residents to join its ranks ⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

In September 2015, IRIN reported that a local schoolteacher from Dasht-e Archi said that the Taliban asked for recruits but did not use force ⁽¹¹⁷⁾.

However, when the Taliban temporarily seized the provincial capital of Kunduz, between 28 September and 13 October 2016, it reportedly forced individuals to join its ranks ⁽¹¹⁸⁾. On 30 September 2015, Al Jazeera reported that the Taliban was going from door to door in Kunduz demanding young boys as recruits from families ⁽¹¹⁹⁾.

In October 2015, Tolo News reported about a captured teenage Taliban fighter in Kunduz who claimed he was forced by the Taliban to fight against security forces ⁽¹²⁰⁾.

According to local Afghan officials, in January 2016 the Taliban controlled more than 300 schools in the province of Kunduz where it recruited students as fighters. This practice was reported in parts of Imam Sahib, Dasht-e Archi, Qala-I Zal, Khanabad and Chahar Dara districts in Kunduz, and also in the province of Nangarhar. A resident of Chahar Dara said the Taliban had allocated time at school for weapons training ⁽¹²¹⁾.

1.5.3. Kunar

The International Crisis Group reported on the case of Chapadara in Kunar in 2013, where the Taliban imposed road blocks resulting in food shortages. A former police commander said that this form of starvation could be a strategy to persuade people to join the insurgency ⁽¹²²⁾.

1.5.4. Helmand

Pajhwok reported on a Taliban recruitment drive in the northern districts of Helmand in August 2014. An Afghan military official said the Taliban was forcing locals to join its ranks due to severe losses suffered in previous battles in the province. The police chief of Helmand confirmed this. However, a local provincial council member said he was unaware of this recruitment drive, stating: ‘Locals have not yet said they are being forced by militants to join their ranks’. A local farmer said that he had never heard of insurgents compelling people to fight for them ⁽¹²³⁾.

Borhan Osman says that the Taliban, perceived as the winning side, has plenty of fighters in Helmand. In 2016, it had more than 5,000 well-equipped fighters available in the province. The likelihood of forced recruitment is very low there ⁽¹²⁴⁾.

1.5.5. Nangarhar

Borhan Osman explains that in some areas where the Taliban is facing opposition and pressure from local anti-Taliban forces, it needs to assert itself in the role of protector and may put some pressure on communities to contribute – financially or by providing fighters. This is the case in Nangarhar where it is confronted with Islamic State groups. In

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban extort money, recruit residents in Kunduz, 10 August 2015.

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ IRIN, Abuses rise along with pro-Afghan government militias, 7 September 2015.

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report on Kunduz Province, 12 December 2015, pp. 1-2 and 18.

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Al Jazeera, Afghan Taliban ‘recruiting boys’ from Kunduz families, 30 September 2015.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ Tolo News, Concerns Raised Over Taliban’s Recruitment Of Child Soldiers, 28 October 2015.

⁽¹²¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control 300 Kunduz schools, recruit students, 25 January 2016.

⁽¹²²⁾ ICG, Afghanistan’s Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014, p. 20.

⁽¹²³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban launch recruitment drive in Helmand: ANA, 19 August 2014.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

this case, the Taliban liaised with tribal elders from the Khogyani tribe and organised a couple of large gatherings in which it explained that the tribe, the area, and their properties were under attack from foreigners (Pakistani militants rebranding themselves as Islamic State). In these gatherings the Taliban relies on religious discourse, appeal to honour of the people, cultural codes etc. to create a consensus among the tribal elders to get their support. It asks for money, food, other supplies and recruits. However, asking for recruits is a last resort. The Taliban prefers to fight itself and will only ask local leaders to provide their local fighters in cases of severe shortage. The Khogyani elders agreed to support the Taliban against IS by providing supplies and not giving shelter to Islamic State fighters. In case of unexpected attacks at night, they might have asked for a couple of men (4-5) per village in order to be able to repel the attack but this mobilisation would have been temporary because the Taliban would move in its mobile special forces in the following days to fight back. Osman explains that he did not know about such a particular case but this is how it would happen, according to his information ⁽¹²⁵⁾.

1.5.6. Consequences in case of refusal

UNAMA reported on the case of a boy in Kunduz (events 28 September – 13 October 2016) who was told by the Taliban to carry a bag of ammunition. The boy ran away and was shot by Taliban fighters. UNAMA also reported that Taliban in Kunduz threatened to harm the family in case approached recruits would refuse to join its ranks ⁽¹²⁶⁾.

In an article in the Gardab daily newspaper (Kandahar), Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) officers were quoted saying that ⁽¹²⁷⁾ ‘insurgents are offering different incentives to the youngsters who choose to join their lines including cars, money and weapons. The insurgents would kill those who oppose to accept their offer.’ Clark comments that further checking would be needed to determine the accuracy of this statement ⁽¹²⁸⁾.

In January 2016, the Taliban reportedly asked locals in Shinwari district (Parwan) to wage an armed uprising against the government. The people refused and the Taliban seized a vehicle with seven people and shot them in the hands and legs ⁽¹²⁹⁾.

Borhan Osman says in cases of emergency, for example when facing an imminent attack, refusing mobilisation of fighters within a local context, village or tribe, would be difficult. It could be avoided by the family paying a ‘fine’. When the local community agrees to support the Taliban, such refusal would invoke a ‘high political cost’ ⁽¹³⁰⁾.

Osman says that tribes, communities, villages or areas located in regions where the Taliban has strongholds nearby who refuse to support the Taliban in general, including the recruitment of fighters, will be targeted by the Taliban. The Taliban will try to penetrate those areas, convince them, test loyalties, and finally force them into siding with the insurgency. This was the case with some Pashtun tribes in Helmand ⁽¹³¹⁾. It is also useful to refer to the many tribal elders that were eliminated by the Taliban because of their opposition (see reference to Hakimi under the section on [Local Taliban fronts](#)).

1.6. Pakistan as a base

In the 2012 EASO report, it was explained how Pakistan served as a logistical base and leadership safe haven or hideout for the Afghan Taliban ⁽¹³²⁾. Historically, the Taliban movement is strongly rooted in the Afghan refugee communities in Pakistan ⁽¹³³⁾.

The Taliban became less reliant on its bases in Pakistan after the withdrawal of international forces (process finalised at the end of 2014) allowed it to gain influence and control over more territory, providing the insurgents with more safe havens within Afghanistan ⁽¹³⁴⁾.

⁽¹²⁵⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report on Kunduz Province, 12 December 2015, pp. 1-2 and 18.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan, 30 April 2014.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ Clark, Kate, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

⁽¹²⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban shoot, injured 7 civilians in Parwan, 26 January 2016.

⁽¹³⁰⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹³¹⁾ Osman, Borhan, telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹³²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 20.

⁽¹³³⁾ Afrasiab Khattak, Project Taliban, The Nation, 30 April 2016.

⁽¹³⁴⁾ Reuters, In secret meetings, Taliban rejected Pakistan pressure on peace process, 14 March 2016; AP, Prospects of Taliban Peace Talks Dim as Front Lines Shift, 25 March 2016.

However, Antonio Giustozzi says that much of the Taliban’s recruitment still occurs in the Afghan refugee settlements and in madrassas in Pakistan. The majority of the full-time fighters in the Taliban’s mobile units are recruited there ⁽¹³⁵⁾. The expert refers to the main Shuras and says that, in addition, there are almost 300 smaller Taliban Shuras covering almost every town or area where Afghan refugees are living: one in Shaman, one in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Bajaur, etc. These Shuras are like local party branches and are responsible for recruitment ⁽¹³⁶⁾.

⁽¹³⁵⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽¹³⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

2. Islamic State in Khorasan

In 2014, groups started to emerge in Afghanistan that claimed to belong to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. In January 2015, certain figures claimed allegiance to the Islamic State via a video message, recognising the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. They created a so-called province of the Islamic State: the *Wilayat Khorasan*, or hereafter the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK) ⁽¹³⁷⁾. This group was eventually endorsed by the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq ⁽¹³⁸⁾. Several groups have appeared in provinces such as Nangarhar, Helmand, Farah, Logar and Zabul that mainly consist of disillusioned or disenfranchised Taliban commanders and/or fighters ⁽¹³⁹⁾. Regularly, ISK promoted pictures of training camps inside Afghanistan through social media. Three of these camps were, according to Bill Roggio, Afghanistan expert at the Long War Journal, likely located in Nangarhar, with one in Logar ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾. Attempts to infiltrate provinces other than Nangarhar were short-lived as these Taliban splinter groups met fierce resistance from their former Taliban comrades ⁽¹⁴¹⁾. The main group, and the only one with established links to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq ⁽¹⁴²⁾, settled in the southern districts of Nangarhar. Although there is a line of communication between the group in Nangarhar and IS in Syria and Iraq, their operational links should not be overestimated. ‘Although there have been a number of Afghans and Pakistanis travelling to Syria and Iraq, returning fighters did not establish ISK, nor do they constitute a significant number of the ISK rank and file’ ⁽¹⁴³⁾.

ISK’s main base is in Achin district, where its fighters entered from the Tira valley in Pakistan’s Khyber Agency ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾. They consist mainly of members of the Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan from Orakzai agency ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾. ISK’s leader, Hafez Saeed Khan, was previously a commander for the Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan (TTP) in Orakzai agency in Pakistan’s Federally Administrated Tribal Area’s (FATA).¹⁴⁶ These TTP-members fled the Pakistani military offensive in the FATA “Zarb-e Azb” and settled across the border in southern Nangarhar, later to be joined by more families from Orakzai and Bajuar agencies ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾. In Nangarhar, local ISK leadership comprises of former Taliban commanders ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾. According to researcher Aziz Hakimi, initially the Taliban welcomed these groups and allowed them to seek safety in Afghanistan (in return for the hospitality they enjoyed when they were expelled from Afghanistan in 2001). However, a series of events led them to fight each other ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾. At the origin of the conflict lies the kidnapping of a local powerbroker’s son in July 2015. This somehow led to antagonism between the Taliban and the Orakzai groups, which subsequently declared allegiance to the Islamic State ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾. The conflict was, according to Antonio Giustozzi, driven by tribal rivalries and competition among Taliban commanders ⁽¹⁵¹⁾. Clashes between ISK- and Taliban-affiliated groups raged in the second half of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, and also ANSF and IMF launched strikes against ISK. Government sources claim the ISK was dealt serious blows in Nangarhar and was expelled from Achin district ⁽¹⁵²⁾. UNHCR received information in February 2016 from a government source that many families who fled harassment, intimidation, targeting and armed conflict started returning to Achin district ⁽¹⁵³⁾. ISK retained limited presence in the Achin, Deh Bala and Chaparhar districts of Nangarhar province, and recent operations by the ANSF, supported by international

⁽¹³⁷⁾ Osman B., The Shadows of ‘Islamic State’ in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?, 12 February 2015.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ Dabiq, Wilayāyat Khurārān and the Bay’āt from Qawqāz in Dabiq 7. From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone, Rabi’Al-Akhir 1436 (January 2015). [warning: graphic content]

⁽¹³⁹⁾ Roggio B., US kills Islamic State’s deputy emir for “Khorasan Province” in airstrike: report, 9 February 2015.

⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Roggio, B. and Weis, C., Islamic State highlights ‘Sheikh Jalaluddin training camp’ in Afghanistan, 19 November 2015.

⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁴²⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail, 10 March 2016.

⁽¹⁴³⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016; Mansfield, D., The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s Continued Decline into the Insurgency, Violence and Widespread Drug Production, February 2016, p. 12.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Ruttig, T., Afghan Taliban Contain Islamic States Regional Reach, 17 November 2015.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016; Mansfield, D., The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s Continued Decline into the Insurgency, Violence and Widespread Drug Production, February 2016, p. 12.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Hakimi, A., Telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Mansfield, D., The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s Continued Decline into the Insurgency, Violence and Widespread Drug Production, February 2016, p. 12.

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan’: a nuanced view, 5 February 2016.

⁽¹⁵²⁾ UN General Assembly, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, p. 6.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ UNHCR, Major situations of conflict-induced displacement in the first months of 2016 Summary note for Afghanistan Protection Cluster, 24 February 2016, p. 2.

military air strikes, as well as attacks from the Taliban, led to the removal of ISK to remote locations near the border with Pakistan⁽¹⁵⁴⁾. Later local sources were quoted as stating that ISK returned to Achin and controlled it almost entirely, except for the district center⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.

Currently, the presence of ISK outside Nangarhar is limited. In southern Afghanistan, a group of several hundred fighters operating in Helmand and Farah was decimated by Taliban attacks and US drone strikes. In April 2016, it had no more than a dozen men, based in and around Kajaki district in Helmand⁽¹⁵⁶⁾. The ISK group in Farah was basically a Taliban splinter group⁽¹⁵⁷⁾, eventually crushed by the main Taliban group under the leadership of mullah Mansour⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

2.1. Recruitment

ISK had a certain degree of freedom of movement and control over the population in the districts where it had a firm presence, such as in Achin, Deh Bala, Spin Ghar and Nazyan in Nangarhar⁽¹⁵⁹⁾. In other districts, ISK is forced to work covertly and activities are limited to recruitment efforts and propaganda activities⁽¹⁶⁰⁾. A source in Kabul stated that ISK propaganda pamphlets were found in Badakhshan calling on Taliban fighters to join the ISK⁽¹⁶¹⁾. In April 2016, a USIP study claimed that ISK had appointed recruiters in nine provinces, including four in the north: Kunduz, Samangan, Sar-e Pul and Faryab⁽¹⁶²⁾.

A source in Kabul states that about 70 % of ISK fighters are TTP-members from the Orakzai-tribe and 30 % are local recruits⁽¹⁶³⁾.

In the following sections different drivers of recruitment into the ISK group will be discussed. People may have ideological reasons for joining ISK, as they feel attracted to its Salafist ideology. Others may be disillusioned with the Taliban or have grievances with it. Economic factors are another motivation to join the ISK. The use of force or coercion in recruitment strategies of ISK will also be examined.

2.1.1. Ideology

IS ideology is based on Salafism, which traditionally has no large following in Afghanistan⁽¹⁶⁴⁾. According to Borhan Osman, some Salafi groups were active in the *jihad* against the Soviets in the 1980s. During the 1980s, three Salafi groups each declared an Islamic State in Kunar, Nuristan and Badakhshan but failed to extend to other areas. In parts of Kunar and Nangarhar, Salafism remains an integral part of the religious landscape. In Badakhshan, Salafis seamlessly merged into local communities. Today, besides Nangarhar and Badakhshan, some Salafi sheikhs are present in Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat and Kandahar⁽¹⁶⁵⁾.

Apart from or through these established religious networks, Salafism is still appealing to a certain and growing segment of young people at universities⁽¹⁶⁶⁾. Borhan Osman describes a fringe of the Salafis of mainly young men: 'Often disconnected from society, in terms of not having a stable job or profession and not being a member of a prominent madrasa or identifiable religious community, some of them are developing increasingly jihadist tendencies'⁽¹⁶⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ UN General Assembly, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, p. 6

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ NY Times (The), In ISIS, the Taliban Face an Insurgent Threat of Their Own, 5 June 2015.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': a nuanced view, 5 February 2016.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail, 10 March 2016.

⁽¹⁶²⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail, 10 March 2016.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, pp. 11-12.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, pp. 11-12.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, p. 12.

However, it is only a small portion of those attracted to Salafism that is leaning towards the global jihadism of the Islamic State⁽¹⁶⁸⁾. And, according to Thomas Ruttig, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network, sympathy in extremist groups in universities has not translated into recruitment of fighters for the ISK⁽¹⁶⁹⁾.

ISK has used Salafi religious networks in Nangarhar to gain support, either by winning or by coercing their backing. Yet the group has demonstrated the will and ability to establish fronts outside this relatively small Salafist community. As three researchers stated in a USIP Peacebrief: ‘Ideology is an added asset and probably the strongest tie between IS-K and IS-central [in Syria and Iraq] but is only one component of a recruitment strategy that will continue to leverage “greed and grievance” motives’⁽¹⁷⁰⁾. These two motives, grievances or disillusionment with the Taliban and greed or economic motives, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

ISK is using different channels to spread its ideology. It has a network of Salafi religious communities it can use⁽¹⁷¹⁾. UNHCR reported that recruitment was often coupled with ‘vigorous activism in finding proselytes through religious schools and congregations’⁽¹⁷²⁾. The Internet and in particular social media are also significant tools. Borhan Osman says the ISK is specifically targeting young people through the Internet and social media⁽¹⁷³⁾. It also had a radio station called The Voice of the Caliphate which broadcasted its message all over Nangarhar for a few weeks but was destroyed in an airstrike in February 2016⁽¹⁷⁴⁾.

2.1.2. Disillusionment with the Taliban

Part of the ISK propaganda and recruitment effort focuses on the failures of the Taliban to expel international military forces after more than a decade of fighting. An article covering Islamic State recruitment efforts in 2014 mentions:

‘Afghan refugees living in camps on the Pakistani side of the border, Peshawar residents, and journalists working in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) all reported receiving printed materials promoting ISIS. An Afghan journalist who spoke to AT on condition of anonymity said Islamic State managed to find the “soft spot” of many locals, urging them to support the group in the name of Islam and to destroy the power of non-Islamic countries. In the east Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar, Islamic State’s message resonates with unemployed youth without previous militant leanings. “I have decided to join the Islamic Caliphate and participate in jihad against America and other infidels,” says Imamudeen, a teacher at a madrasah in Nangarhar province. “The Taliban could not win, but with Allah’s help our group will be victorious, because we are not fighting for power but for the Islamic Caliphate”’⁽¹⁷⁵⁾.

Part of the attraction to certain youth is that they represent a ‘cool new brand’⁽¹⁷⁶⁾.

Certain ISK propaganda focuses on the alleged relationship between Taliban and the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI. Portraying the Taliban as puppets of Pakistan, it urges all Taliban fighters to side with the Islamic State⁽¹⁷⁷⁾. Under the leadership of Rahim Muslim Dost, leader of ISK in Nangarhar in its initial stages, ISK presented itself as a religious alternative to the “impurity” of the Taliban⁽¹⁷⁸⁾. Eventually Muslim Dost broke with the ISK leadership declaring ISK had been hijacked by the Pakistani intelligence. USIP states that although there has been no evidence of such allegations, it has eroded the attractiveness of ISK as an alternative to the Taliban⁽¹⁷⁹⁾.

2.1.3. Economic reasons

Local sources quoted by Foreign Policy say the ISK is ‘awash with money’⁽¹⁸⁰⁾. External funding comes from the Persian Gulf countries, Turkey and, according to a USIP paper, even China. Internal revenue is extracted from controlling

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan’s new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, p. 3.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ Ruttig, T., Afghan Taliban contains Islamic State’s regional reach, 17 November 2015.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁷¹⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁷²⁾ UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 6.

⁽¹⁷³⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ Afghanistan Today, Af-Pak 2014: Under the flag of Islamic State, 26 November 2014.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail 10 March 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat, April 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Foreign Policy, On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 April 2016.

heroin production and the transnational trade in drugs and timber ⁽¹⁸¹⁾. According to Foreign Policy, ‘The group allegedly pays an ordinary fighter a salary of \$500 to \$1,000 per month — a small fortune in a country where a security guard usually earns no more than \$200 per month. These figures, however, could not be independently verified’ ⁽¹⁸²⁾. Borhan Osman said the salaries he heard mention were \$200 to \$500. He too stated such claims need to be independently verified. He also said some fighters merely joined for the money, with no ideology involved ⁽¹⁸³⁾. A western security official in Kabul stated that ISK’s initial approach towards the local population of the areas in its control was friendly. It paid recruits even better than the Taliban albeit, according to this source, only slightly better. This source warned of exaggerations when it came to rumours of what ISK pays its fighters ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾. According to Giustozzi, recent setbacks on the battlefield will likely slow recruitment efforts for ISK ‘even if abundant funding and the comparatively generous conditions offered to members still amount to an attractive package for many potential recruits’ ⁽¹⁸⁵⁾.

2.1.4. Forced recruitment and the use of coercion

The western security official stated that despite ISK’s initial friendly approach towards the villagers under its control, it started to behave much more aggressively once the war with the Taliban started; as such its popularity and village acceptance started dwindling ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾. A nonviolent outreach was replaced by the execution of elders, the destruction of shrines and the prohibition on growing opium poppy. These violent measures diminished the attractiveness of ISK as an alternative to the Taliban ⁽¹⁸⁷⁾. In particular, the ban on cultivation and trade in drugs (both poppy and marijuana) quickly eroded any local acceptance of the forces deemed foreign ⁽¹⁸⁸⁾. Borhan Osman said that eventually, in the limited areas under its control, ISK applied very brutal methods to force the population into submission and obedience. Osman was unsure if ISK had forcibly recruited fighters ⁽¹⁸⁹⁾. Antonio Giustozzi states that ISK would force inhabitants of the areas it controlled into providing support, but not into a fighting role. ISK recruits support elements among the local population for logistical tasks such as carrying goods and cooking. While ISK will pay a full salary to these people, it will also try to indoctrinate them and turn them into ideological sympathisers and eventually fighters ⁽¹⁹⁰⁾. However, in Kabul and Jalalabad, Aziz Hakimi says one can find many people who fled ISK-controlled areas for fear of forced recruitment, among other reasons ⁽¹⁹¹⁾. IDPs reported to UNHCR that a fear of forced recruitment by ISK was a reason for their displacement ⁽¹⁹²⁾. On social media videos circulated of the summary execution of, among others, so-called defectors ⁽¹⁹³⁾.

In areas where ISK tries to gain influence through covert operations and propaganda, it has no operational capacity to force people to join its ranks and will refrain from inviting all Taliban fighters to join. But it may do so in a very threatening tone, says a source in Kabul. On pamphlets found in Badakhshan all Taliban fighters were welcomed to join the side of the Islamic State and those who would not were all threatened with decapitation ⁽¹⁹⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., *The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat*, April 2016.

⁽¹⁸²⁾ Foreign Policy, *On the Trail of the Islamic State in Afghanistan*, 5 April 2016.

⁽¹⁸³⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail, 10 March 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ Giustozzi, A., *The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan’: a nuanced view*, 5 February 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail 10 March 2016.

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ Johnson, C.G., Karokhail, M. and Amiri, R., *The Islamic State in Afghanistan. Assessing the Threat*, April 2016; ISW (Institute for the Study of War), *Backgrounder, ISIS in Afghanistan*, 3 December 2015.

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ Mansfield, D., *The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s Continued Decline into the Insurgency, Violence and Widespread Drug Production*, February 2016, pp. 12-15.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ Hakimi, A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽¹⁹²⁾ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update*, September 2015.

⁽¹⁹³⁾ Khaama Press, *ISIS claims new barbaric killings in Afghanistan*, 20 June 2015.

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ Western Security Official, e-mail, 10 March 2016.

3. Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

Hezb-e Islami in Afghanistan has roots in the Sazman-e Naw Jawanan-e Musalman (Muslim Youth) organisation, on the Kabul University campus in the first half of the 1970s⁽¹⁹⁵⁾. After a disastrous attempt at a coup and the forced relocation of most of the leaders to Pakistan, splits in the movement led to the emergence, in 1977, of Hezb-e Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (other groups emerged as well)⁽¹⁹⁶⁾. Ideologically, Hezb-e Islami is influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani political party Jamaat-e Islami. It has sought to establish what it sees as an Islamic system not only through conventional political means, but also military tactics. During the armed resistance against the 1978 communist coup, and later the Soviet invasion, Hezb-e Islami emerged as a powerful, well-organised and aggressive Islamist faction. After Kabul fell to the mujahedin in 1992, Hezb-e Islami was one of the key factions engaged in a brutal power struggle among the factions. When the Taliban advanced from Kandahar towards Kabul, some Hezb-e Islami fighters and commanders switched to the Taliban, while others laid down their weapons with little resistance. While the Taliban ruled, Hezb-e Islami as a group was largely dormant. Its leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, lived in exile in Iran while other senior members lived in Pakistan or were scattered inside Afghanistan and other countries⁽¹⁹⁷⁾. After the intervention of the US-led coalition forces in late 2001, Hezb-e Islami members followed different trajectories. Hekmatyar and his closer circle rejected the intervention and political process laid out in Bonn and continues to pursue a jihad against foreign troops and the government. After 2001, they re-emerged first in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nuristan⁽¹⁹⁸⁾. Hezb-e Islami has always been a very junior player in the insurgency and, according to Borhan Osman, has shrunk further in recent years. Other Hezbis joined the government and launched their own parties in Kabul. The most influential, and the only party to use the same name, is Hezb-e Islami-ye Afghanistan (HIA), currently led by Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal. It registered as a party in September 2005 and is viewed by many as the inheritor or alternative to the original organisation. HIA became the most popular group to join for young men from a Hezbi background, especially the educated and urban⁽¹⁹⁹⁾.

Hezb-e Islami's leadership initiated negotiations with the Kabul Government, which led to a peace deal between the Government and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, signed in May 2016⁽²⁰⁰⁾.

Hezb-e Islami emerged as the mujahedin faction most favoured by Pakistan and its powerful intelligence agency, the ISI, as well as by the US and the CIA. Hezb-e Islami received the largest share of funding and arms from both countries during the 1980s⁽²⁰¹⁾. The Pakistani government also gave Hekmatyar the land outside Peshawar where the Shamshatoo refugee camp was built. 'Hezb-e-Islami granted social services — such as health care and educational facilities — to Afghan refugees in Shamshatoo. This social support network, which also helped to make Hezb-e-Islami the biggest and the most influential party among mujahedin groups in Afghanistan, aimed to attract more and more Afghans to the organization'⁽²⁰²⁾. An inhabitant of the camp told Jamestown in 2007: 'Whoever lives or has lived in the camp is a supporter of Engineer Hekmatyar and a member of Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan because this camp belongs to Hezb-e-Islami'⁽²⁰³⁾.

Borhan Osman and Antonio Giustozzi stress the difference between the closed and centralised organisation of Hezb-e Islami and the much more loosely organised and decentralised Taliban movement⁽²⁰⁴⁾. Giustozzi says Hezb-e Islami resembles a typical party as understood in the West, with offices and party branches that differ little from each other (unlike the different *shuras* in the Taliban). The party is organised as a Muslim Brotherhood type of party⁽²⁰⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, p. 9.

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, p. 10.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, p. 10; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015.

⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ Osman, B., Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism. Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists, 23 June 2015, pp. 9-11.

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., 'Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency', 2014, pp. 27 and 34; Guardian (The), Afghanistan ready to sign truce with notorious insurgent, 14 May 2016; BBC, Afghanistan signs draft deal with militant Hekmatyar, 18 May 2016.

⁽²⁰¹⁾ Ruttig, T., Gulbuddin ante partas – again (Updated), 22 March 2010.

⁽²⁰²⁾ Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Shamshatoo Refugee Camp: A Base of Support for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar', 24 May 2007.

⁽²⁰³⁾ Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Shamshatoo Refugee Camp: A Base of Support for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar', 24 May 2007.

⁽²⁰⁴⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016; Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

3.1. Recruitment

Borhan Osman states that recruitment into the Hezb-e Islami mainly happens through closed networks of families who have been party members for a long time. 'It is hard to imagine they recruit from people who are not Hezbis. They have a closed network contributing to them. The boys come from the same schools or refugee camps' ⁽²⁰⁶⁾.

The schools in the Shamshatoo refugee camp, autonomously governed by Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, are the party's major recruitment ground for fighters ⁽²⁰⁷⁾. According to an article in *Newsweek*:

'Refugee families are attracted to [Shamshatoo] schools, medical facilities, and crime-free security, but their impressionable sons are subjected to a daily barrage of jihadist messages in their schools, at the mosques, on video, in the local media, and on the streets. Even though new recruits are sworn to secrecy, each one who returns home seems to become an unofficial recruiter, merely by the war stories he tells' ⁽²⁰⁸⁾.

Apart from indoctrination, some young recruits see a career as a HIG fighter as a way out of the desperate economic situation in the camp ⁽²⁰⁹⁾. This view contrasts with Giustozzi's who says the party is very poor and has almost no means to pay its recruits ⁽²¹⁰⁾. According to Osman, HIG has little attraction outside its own base and remains very small ⁽²¹¹⁾.

The picture depicted by *Newsweek* is that of young boys who join the HIG fighters because they have poor prospects and have been brainwashed thoroughly thanks to very convincing recruiters. Most of the young men leave without consent of their parents, sometimes even to the despair of the parents ⁽²¹²⁾.

By 2015, some observers had serious doubts about the capacities of the Hezb-e Islami, whose last known attack inside Afghanistan was in Kabul in 2013 ⁽²¹³⁾. Afghan security analyst Ali Mohammad Ali, quoted by the Associated Press, says Hekmatyar can no longer run a private army because 'most of his people have joined the Taliban' or other militant groups, including the emerging militant Islamic State (IS) group which has established a presence in Hekmatyar's former strongholds in eastern provinces bordering Pakistan ⁽²¹⁴⁾.

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ *Newsweek*, How Afghan insurgents recruit high school students, 24 April 2011; ISW, Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), n.d.; Mackenzie Institute, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Faction of the Hezb-e Islami, Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), 16 December 2015.

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ *Newsweek*, How Afghan insurgents recruit high school students, 24 April 2011.

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ *Newsweek*, How Afghan insurgents recruit high school students, 24 April 2011.

⁽²¹⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²¹¹⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016

⁽²¹²⁾ *Newsweek*, How Afghan insurgents recruit high school students, 24 April 2011.

⁽²¹³⁾ AP, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar seeks comeback in Afghanistan, 27 November 2015.

⁽²¹⁴⁾ AP, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar seeks comeback in Afghanistan, 27 November 2015.

4. Pro-government militias

In Afghanistan, governments have, since long before the current phase of the conflict, relied on the parallel authority of rural leaders and their tribal forces, especially in the southeast of the country, according to an International Crisis Group (ICG) report. Notably the communist president Dr. Najibullah⁽²¹⁵⁾ started a policy of national reconciliation in 1986, aimed at tribal leaders. The programme offered money, weapons and uniforms to militias that switched sides from the mujahedin to the government. These examples have inspired US military planners since 2001 to develop local paramilitary concepts⁽²¹⁶⁾. Before conceptualising the Afghan Local Police (ALP, see part on [recruitment into ALP](#)), US military experimented with various types of community defense forces, often referred to by the Americans as ‘Village Stability Operations’⁽²¹⁷⁾. Examples include the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3), Critical Infrastructure Police (CIP), Community Based Security Solutions and Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure (ISCI)⁽²¹⁸⁾. Although many of the militias have now merged into the ALP programme, some of these militias continued under international military supervision, sometimes referred to as ‘Campaign Forces’. For example, the Khost Protection Force is a local force of between 4,500 to 5,500 fighters, outside the ANSF structure⁽²¹⁹⁾. The Khost Protection Force is set up and trained by the CIA and although there were rumours that the responsibility was handed over to the National Directorate for Security (NDS)⁽²²⁰⁾, the CIA is still running this ‘highly secretive paramilitary unit’⁽²²¹⁾.

Often militias fighting alongside the government against insurgents are called *arbakai* (plural *arbaki*). Originally, the institution of *arbakai* is based on the customary tribal code of the Pashtuns, the *Pashtunwali*.²²² *Arbaki* play the role of the police in the tribe, sub-tribe or community areas.²²³ ‘The *Arbakai* is a tribal based community policing system grounded in volunteer grassroots initiatives. They differ from those in militia or hired by private security companies. They have greater support and are embedded within the community. In Pashto ‘*Arbakai*’ stands for ‘messenger’. However, with reference to the security system, it is used in the broader context of security enforcement’⁽²²⁴⁾. One tribal elder quoted by Mohammed Osman Tariq defined the *arbakai* as ‘a group of voluntary adults who are selected by a special procedure, who carry out the responsibilities to implement the *Jirga*’s decisions, secure the territory of the tribe or the respected community and take action against those who want to perform an illegal act’⁽²²⁵⁾. The contemporary use of this term *arbakai* has diverted from the original sense. Today, the word is used for all kinds of semi-official or unofficial militias, especially in the north⁽²²⁶⁾.

Apart from militia outside ALP but under (international) military supervision, militias have sprung up around the country fighting along the pro-government forces and/or against the Taliban. Sometimes these militias are referred to as Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs)⁽²²⁷⁾. In other cases, a local armed militia fighting against the Taliban is sometimes referred to as a ‘local uprising’. Its members are referred to as *patsunians*⁽²²⁸⁾. This suggests a spontaneous and popular uprising. Some observers have questioned the spontaneous nature of these local uprising⁽²²⁹⁾.

⁽²¹⁵⁾ Dr. Najibullah governed Afghanistan between 1986 and 1992: EASO, Country of Origin Information report, Afghanistan Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 13.

⁽²¹⁶⁾ ICG, The Future of Afghan Local Police, 4 June 2015, p. 4.

⁽²¹⁷⁾ Moyer, M., Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police, October 2014, pp. 9-15; Clark, K., Torture, Illegal Armed Groups: signs of possible government action, 22 February 2013.

⁽²¹⁸⁾ ICG, The Future of Afghan Local Police, 4 June 2015, p. 5; HRW, “Just Don’t Call It a Militia” Impunity, Militias, and the “Afghan Local Police”, 12 September 2011, pp. 15-24; Moyer, M., Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police, October 2014, pp. 9-15.

⁽²¹⁹⁾ International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

⁽²²⁰⁾ NY Times (The), 25 Killed in Suicide Bombing Outside U.S. Base in Afghanistan, 12 July 2015.

⁽²²¹⁾ Raghavan, S., CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015; Jolly, D., Civilian Deaths Raise Questions About C.I.A.-Trained Forces in Afghanistan, 3 December 2015.

⁽²²²⁾ Tariq, M. O., Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan, December 2008, p. 2.

⁽²²³⁾ Tariq, M. O., Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan, December 2008, p. 3; Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²²⁴⁾ Tariq, M. O. (Crisis States Research Centre), Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan, December 2008, p. 3.

⁽²²⁵⁾ Tariq, M. O., Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan, December 2008, p. 3.

⁽²²⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²²⁷⁾ Clark, K., Torture, Illegal Armed Groups: signs of possible government action, 22 February 2013; Derksen, D., Reintegrating Armed Groups in Afghanistan, 7 March 2014; Hewad, G., Legal, illegal, militia recruitment and (failed) disarmament in Kunduz, 10 November 2012.

⁽²²⁸⁾ Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016; Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

⁽²²⁹⁾ Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, April 2013.

4.1. Recruitment into ALP

In 2010, a ‘village protection force’, the Afghan Local Police (ALP), was created by presidential decree under the Ministry of the Interior. The idea came from the American military which had experience with such “village-based tactics” in Vietnam, Iraq and with the many precursors to the ALP⁽²³⁰⁾. The programme was part of a broader American initiative, Village Stability Operations, a counter-insurgent strategy aimed at arming local militias to establish security and stability areas around villages⁽²³¹⁾. The ALP programme is bilaterally funded by the United States and embedded in the command structure of the Ministry of the Interior. It aims to provide a community-based policing capability as a part of counter-insurgency efforts, in partnership with and trained largely by United States Special Forces. Its maximum strength increased from 10,000 in 2010 to 30,000 in 2013. By October 2014, 28,707 Afghan Local Police troops were covering 150 districts in 29 of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan⁽²³²⁾. The aim, according to researcher Hakimi, was to create a force to “hold” an area, after Afghan and/or international military came, “cleared” an area of insurgents and withdrew⁽²³³⁾.

In 2015, the Afghan government, faced with an ever-expanding insurgency, wanted to expand the ALP programme that had reached its limit of 30,000 men. Because the programme is funded by the Americans, it asked the international community for further support to fund another 15,000 ALP officers⁽²³⁴⁾. However, as the international community was hesitant, the Afghan government felt compelled to fund local militias, using money from its own national budget to pay for them⁽²³⁵⁾. For that reason the government created its own fund, aimed at arming ‘local uprisings’, called the National Uprising Support Strategy. The aim is to create pro-government armed groups in 25 provinces in places where the ANSF presence is limited. Such groups have no basis in Afghan law and are not accountable to local populations⁽²³⁶⁾. The aim is to include these militias in the ALP programme when the international community is convinced of their usefulness⁽²³⁷⁾. In some areas, that has already happened. One of the earliest and more well-known uprisings, the uprising in Andar district, Ghazni province, has now been turned into an ALP⁽²³⁸⁾.

Unlike the insurgent groups or other militias fighting alongside the government or international military forces, the ALP has a formalised mechanism of recruitment. According to the *Procedure on the Regulation and Establishment of the ALP*, the need for the establishment of the local police force is determined by provincial security committees headed by provincial governors and is approved by the Ministry of the Interior. A local police force is created where there is a dire need for the force and when the local population is ready for and consents to its establishment. Priority is given to areas that face threats from the armed opposition⁽²³⁹⁾.

According to the *Procedure on the Regulation and Establishment of the ALP* recruitment of local police should be conducted by the Department of Local Police in cooperation with the Independent Department of Local Governance (IDLG). The members of the ALP are recruited after the local council or *shura* is asked to assess the candidates for the ALP force. Finally, all candidates are vetted by the Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Interior and the National Directorate for Security (NDS)⁽²⁴⁰⁾. NDS vetting is carried out to exclude criminals and insurgents⁽²⁴¹⁾.

Aziz Ahmad Hakimi, researcher at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), describes in detail how the ALP in Wardak province was established. American Special Forces and Afghan provincial officials organised a *shura* of all village elders. In this *shura* they called upon the elders with a mixed religious and nationalist rhetoric

⁽²³⁰⁾ ICG, *The Future of Afghan Local Police*, 4 June 2015, pp. 5-6.

⁽²³¹⁾ Saum-Manning, L., *VSO/ALP: Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense*, December 2012, p. 7.

⁽²³²⁾ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan*, 15 May 2015, paragraph 9.

⁽²³³⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽²³⁴⁾ ICG, *The Future of Afghan Local Police*, 4 June 2015, pp. 1-2.

⁽²³⁵⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽²³⁶⁾ Clark, K., *The Bloodiest Year Yet: UN reports on civilian casualties in 2015*, 14 February 2016.

⁽²³⁷⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽²³⁸⁾ Habib, E., *The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police*, 2 April 2013.

⁽²³⁹⁾ Cecchinell, Lola, *Back to Bad: Chahrdara between Taliban and ALP – a district case study*, 6 November 2013; AIHRC, *From Arbaki to Local Police, Today’s Challenges and Tomorrow’s Concerns*, 2012.

⁽²⁴⁰⁾ Cecchinell, Lola, *Back to Bad: Chahrdara between Taliban and ALP – a district case study*, 6 November 2013; AIHRC, *From Arbaki to Local Police, Today’s Challenges and Tomorrow’s Concerns*, 2012.

⁽²⁴¹⁾ Hulslander, R. & Spivey, J., *Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police*, June 2012, p. 132.

to present their sons as volunteers into the ALP ⁽²⁴²⁾. International Crisis Group provides a similar picture, outlining how, in the beginning of the ALP programme, ‘US military organized meetings of elders to nominate local men between 18 and 45 as volunteers’ ⁽²⁴³⁾.

4.2. Recruitment into militias

Often, both ALP and other militias are recruited from the existing Illegal Armed Groups ⁽²⁴⁴⁾. Aziz Hakimi says that when you examine the recruitment of militias, you have to look at the history of these militias. They are generally not created at the time they are called upon to help the government to fight the insurgency. They often already existed, already played a role in that area and, depending on the local power dynamic, were siding with one of the sides in the conflict. As in the example of the two Shinwari sub-tribes given by Hakimi (see section on Taliban, [economic incentives](#)), recruitment to these groups had often already happened before they joined one of the warring parties ⁽²⁴⁵⁾. The majority of the fighters in these groups are members of an existing group, be it a remnant of a former mujahedin group, an armed group around a local strongman or politician, a tribal defence or policing force or *arbakai*, or even a criminal organisation. According to Dorronsoro and Baczkko: ‘militias (both ALP and informal) are both the product of, and actors in, local scenarios’ ⁽²⁴⁶⁾. Christian Bleuer and Obaid Ali found that ‘while some [militias in Kunduz] are led by former mujahedin or ‘jihadi’ commanders, others are led by men far too young to have a jihadi background. A local journalist argued that in the chaotic environment of Khanabad all the local commanders feel a strong need to protect themselves and their interests with as large a group of armed supporters as possible’ ⁽²⁴⁷⁾.

Still, these militias recruit for a fight that is in many areas of Afghanistan more intense than ever before. And they will do so in a way very similar to that used by local Taliban militias: they will mobilise in particular through village elders or through local commanders and strongmen ⁽²⁴⁸⁾.

4.2.1. On the role of a shura or strongman

The local shura thus formally plays an important role in the recruitment into the ALP. Recruitment often happens through the local strongman or warlord ⁽²⁴⁹⁾. For example, in the case of Kunduz, according to Lola Ceccinel, ‘recruitment often came down to giving a uniform to the local commanders and militiamen without consulting or seeking vetting from community elders’ ⁽²⁵⁰⁾. A study by the American Joint Special Operations University from October 2014 found that traditional Afghan society was shattered since 1978. ‘Afghan communists, Soviets, warlords and Taliban killed and drove out the traditional elites during the late 20th century. [...] In many villages, *shuras* and *jirgas* ceased functioning, or turned into puppets of strongmen’ ⁽²⁵¹⁾. When, after 2001, the Afghan government and its international allies tried to resuscitate these institutions, they discovered that in many villages the powerbrokers managed the decision-making process behind the scenes ⁽²⁵²⁾. While as the procedure prescribed having *shuras* determining the composition of the ALP, this was not possible in many villages, because of crumbling traditions and governance. Both warlords and insurgents often benefitted from this and influenced the *shuras* behind the scenes. Some villages could not even determine which elder belonged to the *shura* because of internal feuds and accusations of complicity with the insurgents ⁽²⁵³⁾. Aziz Hakimi believes that the pre-modern social structures of *shura* and *jirga* are unsatisfactory explanations for the ongoing dynamics in the conflict (see Hakimi in section on [Local Taliban fronts](#)) ⁽²⁵⁴⁾.

⁽²⁴²⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽²⁴³⁾ ICG, *The Future of Afghan Local Police*, 4 June 2015, p. 7.

⁽²⁴⁴⁾ Hewad, G., *Legal, illegal, militia recruitment and (failed) disarmament in Kunduz*, 10 November 2012.

⁽²⁴⁵⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016

⁽²⁴⁶⁾ Dorronsoro, G., & Backo, A., *The Militia System in Kunduz*, February 2016, p. 4.

⁽²⁴⁷⁾ Bleuer, C. and Ali, O., *Security in Kunduz Worsening Further: The case of Khanabad*, 28 October 2014.

⁽²⁴⁸⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016; Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016;

⁽²⁴⁹⁾ HRW, ‘Just Don’t Call It a Militia’ Impunity, Militias, and the ‘Afghan Local Police’, 12 September 2011; Hakimi, A.A., ‘Getting savages to fight barbarians: counterinsurgency and the remaking of Afghanistan’, 23 October 2013; AIHRC, *From Arbakai to Local Police. Today’s Challenges and Tomorrow’s Concerns*, March/April 2012, pp.18, 22-23.

⁽²⁵⁰⁾ Ceccinel, L., *Back to bad : Chahardara between Taleban and ALP – a district case study*, 6 September 2013.

⁽²⁵¹⁾ Moyer, M., *Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police*, October 2014, p. 18.

⁽²⁵²⁾ Moyer, M., *Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police*, October 2014, p. 18.

⁽²⁵³⁾ Moyer, M., *Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police*, October 2014, p. 20.

⁽²⁵⁴⁾ Hakimi, Aziz, telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

Researcher on the Afghan conflict at the University of Ghent and at the Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), Lucile Martin, stresses an important difference. She studied the system of *arbakai* in the southeast of Afghanistan, where traditional structures have remained stronger. She concludes that the ALP in many instances has a very different mandate and structure from what is described when discussing the traditional *arbakai*. She suggests that, where tribal structures have remained intact, the ALP is more likely to function as a *shura*-sanctioned *arbakai*, and will have more community acceptance of its mandate and role. In other villages, the ALP resulted in the creation of a militia under the control of a local strongman, rather than a village-level policing force. Many abuses, including forced recruitment, are more likely to happen in cases where the institution has lost its communal backing ⁽²⁵⁵⁾.

Also, the *shura* recruiting among the villagers is very typical among Pashtuns. This is, to a lesser extent, also valid for certain Tajik communities that have copied the egalitarian system of some Pashtuns. Among Hazaras and Uzbek, for example, community mobilisation is much more centered around the local strongman, local politician or through a political party or organisation that is active on the ground ⁽²⁵⁶⁾.

Not all agree that the militias are mainly products of an ethnic patchwork or tribal society. Looking at militias in the ethnically heterogeneous province of Kunduz, Dorrnsoro and Baczo state that ‘militias mobilize and establish polarization strategies on an ethnic basis — with the support of Western forces that are deeply steeped in a (historically false) vision of Afghanistan as a tribal and ethnic mosaic without a state’ ⁽²⁵⁷⁾.

According to Dorrnsoro and Baczo ‘the degree of ethnic homogeneity is decisive in understanding the effects of militias’ identity-based strategies in local frameworks — which are largely defined by the borders of districts that determine funding from and nominations by the state and the Western coalition’ ⁽²⁵⁸⁾.

The Western intervention has in itself created ways of self-identifying for militias along ethnic lines or district lines, according to the situation. Dorrnsoro and Baczo identify three militia models: militias built on a community-based model (i.e. the ethnic homogeneity of the district), models of ethnic polarisation (e.g. ethnic heterogeneity, or a militia recruiting among the ranks of a minority) and anarchy (e.g. a number of uncoordinated militias, a range of patronage and ethnic networks):

In the community-based model in ethnic homogenous districts, militia members are recruited along ethnic lines and the entire district is seen as unified politico-military player that has mobilised against an external threat;

- In ethnically mixed districts, militias are formed along ethnic lines and coincide with macro-ethnic divisions. This leads to recruitment coinciding with ethnicity and party affiliation: ‘Pashtuns siding with Hezb-i Islami and Etehad-i Islami; Tajiks with Jamiat-i Islami; and Uzbeks and Turkmen with Jumbesh-i Melli’;
- In the last model, militias can be centered around important local families and political actors, resulting in many rival legal and illegal militias often dividing even ethnic homogenous villages: ‘Political tensions are driven, not by ethnic dividing lines — the villages, as noted above, being rather homogenous — but to ultra-local rivalries regarding land, marriage or blood-debts inherited from the 1980s’ ⁽²⁵⁹⁾.

Besides shuras and local strongmen ‘[a] sizeable percentage of ALP projects recruit former insurgents, both Taliban and Hezb-e Islami’, according to Fabrizio Foschini ⁽²⁶⁰⁾. Deede Derksen found that often those insurgent fighters joining the Afghan government-initiated Peace and Reconciliation Process (APRP) joined the ALP. They did so in the first place for their own protection, as APRP participants often face retaliation by their former comrades. They and their families are often targeted and assassinated for joining the peace process ⁽²⁶¹⁾. Another reason for insurgents to join the ALP is resources. Derksen stated that in Baghlan many small militia commanders, previously fighting for the Taliban or Hezb-e Islami, joined the ALP, following — what she calls — ‘an old rationale of commanders joining the side with most resources — as long as these resources lasted’ ⁽²⁶²⁾. The US Special Forces were keen to accept Hezb-e Islami commanders in Baghlan into the ALP, as they tried to balance the ethnic powers in the province ⁽²⁶³⁾. Derksen found many examples of ALP commanders switching back and forth, to and from the Taliban ⁽²⁶⁴⁾.

⁽²⁵⁵⁾ Martin, L., e-mail, 19 March 2016.

⁽²⁵⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²⁵⁷⁾ Dorrnsoro, G., & Backo, A., The Militia System in Kunduz, February 2016, p. 4.

⁽²⁵⁸⁾ Dorrnsoro, G., & Backo, A., The Militia System in Kunduz, February 2016, p. 4.

⁽²⁵⁹⁾ Dorrnsoro, G., & Backo, A., The Militia System in Kunduz, February 2016, pp. 5-6.

⁽²⁶⁰⁾ Foschini, F., No Country for Good Policemen?, 21 May 2012.

⁽²⁶¹⁾ Derksen, D., The politics of disarmament and rearmament in Afghanistan, May 2015, p. 20.

⁽²⁶²⁾ Derksen, D., The politics of disarmament and rearmament in Afghanistan, May 2015, p. 43.

⁽²⁶³⁾ Moyer, M., Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police, October 2014, p. 22.

⁽²⁶⁴⁾ Derksen, D., The politics of disarmament and rearmament in Afghanistan, May 2015, p. 42.

4.2.2. On the individual choice

As mentioned above, recruitment in ALP and militias is very similar: depending on the local dynamic, either a local *shura* or local strongman will be the main actor of recruitment⁽²⁶⁵⁾. These local powerbrokers mostly rely on volunteers⁽²⁶⁶⁾. According to researcher at Kings' College, Deedee Derksen, the concept of 'volunteer' is in the Afghan context rather relative: the actions of an individual are very much restricted by the social context of the group to which he or she belongs. Individual choice is, according to Derksen, subordinate to the aims of the group and these aims are quite often decided by a local strongman rather than the community council or *shura*. Therefore recruitment into the local pro-government militia (ALP or other) does not differ much from recruitment into the local Taliban militias⁽²⁶⁷⁾.

However, individual choices are existent in Afghanistan. Hakimi states that young men are increasingly self-conscious about their choices and in many cases will act against the will of their parents or village elders⁽²⁶⁸⁾. Often, young men join a warring party against the will of their parents (see [Child recruitment by Armed Opposition Groups](#)). Investigative reporter Mathieu Aikins states that young men who leave home to independently join the ANSF will more easily choose the ALP, as recruitment and vetting procedures are less rigid as, for example, with recruitment to the ANA⁽²⁶⁹⁾. These evolutions match the breakdown of traditional society in Afghanistan, as depicted above.

Another factor that leads young men to make individual choices separate from their families or tribes is the concept of *andiwāl*, comradeship, which can be a very powerful motivator. Referring to masculinity and honour, Hakimi states: 'you're less a man when you sit at home and your friends are either fighting jihad or liberating your country'⁽²⁷⁰⁾.

4.2.3. Forced recruitment and the use of coercion

Certain researchers have suggested that, in general, militias in particular areas are more likely to use force or indirect pressure when recruiting⁽²⁷¹⁾. Borhan Osman states that because of the absence of a strong religious ideology in the recruitment rhetoric in pro-government militias and because the aim of these militias often serves the political fortunes of the local strongman, commanders will more easily resort to coercive strategies of recruitment. In what he calls not-so-rare cases, they have used very direct force. Osman recalls a situation in Ghazni where the local pro-government militia collected several young men from a village and held them at a military installation for two weeks⁽²⁷²⁾. A local schoolteacher from Khanabad district in Kunduz also told the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) that the Taliban often behave better than local militias fighting alongside the government. He confirms that the Taliban ask for food, tax and recruits, but do not impose demands by force⁽²⁷³⁾. A source of Christian Bleuer and Obaid Ali stated that 'most of the residences in Khanabad have to 'voluntarily' offer a young member of their families to a local armed group in order to secure their own protection. Otherwise, they have to arm themselves and protect their house, night and day'⁽²⁷⁴⁾. Borhan Osman says that there is not one ethnicity more likely to use force when recruiting than another. All very much depends on the particular behaviour of the local commander doing the recruitment, regardless of his ethnicity⁽²⁷⁵⁾.

On the possibility of leaving a local armed group, AAN reports from Khanabad:

'The result is the heavy recruitment of local youth and an increasingly complex situation as commanders seek to secure the absolute loyalty of recruits. The main tactic used by commanders is to have the recruit create an immediate and personal enemy from among the enemies and rivals of the commander by carrying out an attack or killing. Here the commander takes into account both ethnicity and family relations, as the recruit's family could be considered a 'rival' if they attempt to pull their son or brother away from the commanders' influence. For example, if the new recruit is not related to the family of the commander, then the commander will create a situation where the recruit has to attack a member of his family, such as a cousin, making it harder for the

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016; Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽²⁶⁶⁾ Tariq, M. O., Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan, December 2008, p. 3; Hakimi, A.A., Getting savages to fight barbarians: counterinsurgency and the remaking of Afghanistan, 23 October 2013, p. 395; ICG, The Future of Afghan Local Police, 4 June 2015, p. 7.

⁽²⁶⁷⁾ Derksen, D., telephone interview, 13 January 2014.

⁽²⁶⁸⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽²⁶⁹⁾ Aikins, M., Portrait of an Afghan Assassin, 7 October 2013.

⁽²⁷⁰⁾ Hakimi, A.A., telephone interview, 21 April 2016.

⁽²⁷¹⁾ Gossman, P., skype interview, 30 March 2016; Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽²⁷²⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽²⁷³⁾ Matta, B., Abuse rise along with pro-Afghan government militias, 7 September 2015.

⁽²⁷⁴⁾ Bleuer, C. and Ali, O., Security in Kunduz Worsening Further: The case of Khanabad, 28 October 2014.

⁽²⁷⁵⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

recruit to leave the commanders group and return to his own family. If the recruit is a relative of the commander's family, then the commander pushes him to shoot someone from amongst the commander's rivals. The alternate use of these recruitment tactics ensures the commander's control over his young recruits. First of all, the recruit will not be able to join other parties because of the killing, and secondly he cannot return to his family because of the newly created intra-family enmity' ⁽²⁷⁶⁾.

However, in a case from Helmand, described by Mathieu Aikins, the family was able to convince the local militia to let their sons, who joined without consent, return to their families ⁽²⁷⁷⁾. The level of coercion used to recruit, or the possibility to leave an armed group, very much depends on the relationship between the family/clan/village and the recruiting commander. This depends on the history of the family or clan and its position in the village or area ⁽²⁷⁸⁾.

4.2.4. Economic incentives

ALP officers receive around \$150 per month ⁽²⁷⁹⁾. It is unclear whether or how much unofficial militiamen receive as a wage.

The mobilising rhetoric for joining the ALP, according to Borhan Osman, lacks the religious component that is strong with the Taliban. In the north, and among older established Jihadi networks, there still may be some ideological (anti-Taliban), ethnic or nationalist rhetoric involved. But in some areas, especially Pashtun areas in the south, there's no ideological, religious or spiritual reward in joining anti-Taliban militias. These recruits are forced to join out of poverty ⁽²⁸⁰⁾. Patricia Gossman (HRW) says that since there are not many other jobs, joining the ALP is seen as a very reasonable option economically for many young boys. Besides the wage, 'there's certain leeway for extortion and "illegal taxation" of local residents' ⁽²⁸¹⁾.

A teacher of the Khanabad district in Kunduz interviewed by AAN in June 2013 stated: 'Insecurity in the district is due to the lack of job opportunities [...] youth are being used by political groups [...] the government should pay more attention to this issue, as unemployment rates will increase, more youth will join illegal armed groups or insurgents' ⁽²⁸²⁾.

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ Bleuer, C. and Ali, O., Security in Kunduz Worsening Further: The case of Khanabad, 28 October 2014.

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ Aikins, M., Portrait of an Afghan Assassin, 7 October 2013.

⁽²⁷⁸⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽²⁷⁹⁾ IWPR, Afghan Local Police defect over pay, 31 August 2011.

⁽²⁸⁰⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽²⁸¹⁾ Gossman, P., skype interview, 30 March 2016.

⁽²⁸²⁾ Bleuer, C. and Ali, O., Security in Kunduz Worsening Further: The case of Khanabad, 28 October 2014.

5. Child recruitment

5.1. Prevalence

In accordance with Resolution 1612, the UN Security Council lists all parties that recruit or use children. Mentioned by the UN Security Council in June 2015 are: Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police, Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the Taliban forces, including the Tora Bora Front, the Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia and the Latif Mansur Network. All of these parties have been listed for at least five years and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators by the UN Security Council ⁽²⁸³⁾. AAN reported that the leader of the Tora Bora Front, in October 2015, declared it defunct. Clark pointed out that Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia is named incorrectly and should be Jama'at al-Da'wa ila al-Qur'an wal-Sunna ⁽²⁸⁴⁾.

Regarding the number recruited, several UN sources say there are a few dozen every year and this number is decreasing. The UN Secretary General documented from 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2014 the recruitment and use of 556 boys and four girls, of which 401 (or 75 %) were recruited and used by armed opposition groups. In 2014, the UN Secretary General reported 55 cases of recruitment by armed opposition groups, five cases by the ANSF and two by a pro-Government militia in Kunduz province ⁽²⁸⁵⁾. UNAMA mentions, for 2014, that recruitment and use of children both in support and combat roles was observed throughout the country. It recorded 41 cases of recruitment by Anti-Government Elements, five cases by Afghan national security forces and one by a Pro-Government armed group ⁽²⁸⁶⁾. The UN Security Council reported in June 2015 on the recruitment and use of 68 children (65 boys, 3 girls) of which 22 were verified (all boys), one each by the ANP and the Afghan local police and 20 associated with the Taliban and other armed groups. This marks a decrease in child recruitment and use in Afghanistan compared with 2013, when 97 children were reportedly recruited and used ⁽²⁸⁷⁾. Taking into account widespread underreporting, these sources assume the actual numbers to be much higher ⁽²⁸⁸⁾.

According to Child Soldiers International: 'information gathered from research in six provinces showed that child recruitment by the ANSF and the Taliban tended to be higher in areas experiencing higher levels of violence and insecurity' ⁽²⁸⁹⁾. Child Soldiers International reports that child recruitment by Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) mostly affects the southern (Kandahar and Helmand) and eastern (Paktia, Khost and Paktika) provinces, because of the stronger presence of AGEs in these parts of the country ⁽²⁹⁰⁾.

5.2. Child recruitment by armed opposition groups

The Taliban has an internal policy of not recruiting children. According to its Code of Conduct, the *Lahya*, article 69: 'beardless youths cannot be kept in barracks or military bases' ⁽²⁹¹⁾. It is suggested that this provision is grounded in the Islamic Law, *sharia* ⁽²⁹²⁾. Kate Clark adds that this measure is aimed at preventing sex with boys ⁽²⁹³⁾.

However, in a report of February 2016, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports on a rise of child recruitment in the north of Afghanistan since mid-2015, coinciding with major Taliban offensives in the region, especially in Kunduz. HRW interviewed the relatives of 13 minors between 14 and 17 years old who were recruited as Taliban soldiers, trained

⁽²⁸³⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 48.

⁽²⁸⁴⁾ Kate Clark, e-mail, 16 May 2016; Ruttig, T., On Kunar's Salafi Insurgents, 14 January 2010; Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015.

⁽²⁸⁵⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 18.

⁽²⁸⁶⁾ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Afghanistan: Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2015, pp. 18-19.

⁽²⁸⁷⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p.6.

⁽²⁸⁸⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 18; UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p.6.

⁽²⁸⁹⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, p.5.

⁽²⁹⁰⁾ Child Soldiers International, Briefing on the Situation of the Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Forces and Insurgent Groups in Afghanistan to the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2015, p. 11.

⁽²⁹¹⁾ Clark, K., The Lahya: Calling the Taliban to Account, 4 July 2011, p. 15.

⁽²⁹²⁾ Munir, M., 'The Layha for the Mujahideen: an analysis of the code of conduct for the Taliban fighters under Islamic law', March 2011, footnote 81.

⁽²⁹³⁾ Kate Clark, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

and used to fight and plant IEDs, among other duties⁽²⁹⁴⁾. In a subsequent interview, the author of the report, Patricia Gossman (HRW) could not give any concrete statistics on the prevalence of child recruitment among opposition forces. She stated that declarations of hundreds of children per village were probably exaggerated, yet would not call child recruitment a marginal phenomenon. She called it ‘a consistent feature, and increasing’. In the districts in Kunduz that were under firm control of the Taliban, she called child recruitment ‘fairly widespread’⁽²⁹⁵⁾. In response to the HRW report, the Taliban denied any use of child soldiers, called the HRW report ‘baseless’ and reiterated that such recruitment was strictly forbidden by referring to article 69 of the *Lahya*⁽²⁹⁶⁾. Yet UNAMA received ‘consistent, credible reports that the Taliban used large numbers of child soldiers during the attack on Kunduz. UNAMA sources indicated that medical facilities in Kunduz treated ‘at least 200’ injured child fighters between 28 September and 13 October. Most of them were boys reportedly aged between 10 and 17’⁽²⁹⁷⁾. Outside Kunduz, the Taliban has, in recent months, been accused of recruiting children in Helmand, Takhar and Badakhshan⁽²⁹⁸⁾.

Expert on the Taliban, Antonio Giustozzi, confirmed during an interview that the Taliban has banned the recruitment of children. In practice though, even the young men often don’t know their own ages, so this ban is not easy to enforce. Local commanders will allow post-puberty boys and young men to join the Taliban. In accordance with the *Lahya*, whenever young men grow a beard or have facial hair, they are considered ready to be recruited, regardless of age⁽²⁹⁹⁾. Giustozzi also says that pre-puberty minors generally are not recruited as fighters. He confirms that there are cases where the Taliban will force young men, both under and above 18, to become carriers, messengers, spies, etc. He refers to this practice as ‘forced labour’ rather than ‘forced recruitment’⁽³⁰⁰⁾.

According to the UN sources, the Taliban continued to recruit children to carry out suicide attacks and to manufacture, transport and plant improvised explosive devices, and used them in active combat and as spies⁽³⁰¹⁾. Children have also been deployed to drag away wounded Taliban and collect dropped weapons⁽³⁰²⁾.

Between September 2010 and December 2014, 20 children were killed carrying out suicide attacks, according to a report by the UN secretary general on children and armed conflict⁽³⁰³⁾. Examples include the use by the Taliban of three boys to (unknowingly) transport pressure-plate IEDs in a wheelbarrow. The IEDs detonated prematurely killing the two boys, aged six and 10, and injured the third, an eight-year-old boy in Ghazni city in August 2013⁽³⁰⁴⁾. On 9 February 2015, a 14-year-old suicide bomber detonated explosives near an ANSF checkpoint in Sharan district, injuring six civilians and five national police officers. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack’⁽³⁰⁵⁾. Regularly, would-be child suicide bombers that had been caught before detonation or surrendered to the police are mentioned in the press. Such examples where the ANSF announced it had detained a child suicide bomber in the first four months of 2016 include:

Four boys between 16 and 17 were detained in Kunduz in April 2016 for planning a suicide attack against the provincial governor’s compound. They hailed from Ghor province and were indoctrinated to execute the suicide mission in a madrassa in Qarabagh district in Kabul province⁽³⁰⁶⁾.

- NDS claimed to have arrested a 17-year-old earlier in April 2016 who intended to commit a suicide attack in the 5th district of Kabul city⁽³⁰⁷⁾.
- A 12-year-old boy from Peshawar surrendered to the police in Nangarhar in March 2016, saying he received two years of training to blow himself up in a madrassa in Peshawar⁽³⁰⁸⁾.

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016.

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ Gossman, P., skype interview, 30 March 2016.

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ Mujahid, Z., Report by Human Right Watch concerning recruitment of child soldiers in ranks of Islamic Emirate is baseless, 17 February 2016.

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA and OHCHR, Afghanistan. Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015, p. 18.

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recruiting Helmand youth, say police officer, 24 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recruit hundreds children in Badakhshan, 5 January 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban accused of using children soldiers in Takhar, 19 November 2015.

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽³⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2015, pp.18-19; UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 6.

⁽³⁰²⁾ Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014.

⁽³⁰³⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 20.

⁽³⁰⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2015, pp. 18-19.

⁽³⁰⁵⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 6.

⁽³⁰⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 teenage suicide bombers detained in Kunduz, 9 April 2016.

⁽³⁰⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Teenage suicide bomber detained in Kabul, 3 April 2016.

⁽³⁰⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Child suicide bomber surrenders to Nangarhar police – video, 23 March 2016.

According to Afghan government officials quoted by the BBC, more than 90 % of juvenile would-be suicide bombers who have been arrested are ‘trained, lied to, and brainwashed or coerced in Pakistan’⁽³⁰⁹⁾. But there is also evidence of training child soldiers in madrassas in Taliban-controlled parts of Afghanistan⁽³¹⁰⁾. (See section on [Methods of Recruitment](#))

The Haqqani Network is believed to be responsible for complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of Kabul⁽³¹¹⁾. Antonio Giustozzi claims that about 70 % of suicide bombings in Afghanistan are carried out by the Haqqani network. He describes how they recruit the potential suicide bombers: they recruit pious boys at a very young age, about seven or eight years old, and specifically choose those who are less intelligent. They will put them together in special madrassas, where the curriculum resembles much the other madrassa’s curriculum, with additionally military training and preparation for the task ahead. When deemed ready, they’re deployed, regardless of their age⁽³¹²⁾.

The Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISK) seems to have a particular focus on children, says Borhan Osman. ISK is not restrained by an internal policy, as is the case with the Taliban, and has no principal problem with minors joining its ranks. ISK even seems to prefer recruiting minors and specifically reaches out to them in its propaganda. In the areas under its control, it has turned schools into recruitment hubs⁽³¹³⁾. In a documentary on ISK by Najibullah Quraishi for the American Public Broadcasting System (PBS), ISK members are seen training children as young as three years old in their schools and those under 18 are seen as future suicide bombers⁽³¹⁴⁾. The Islamic State in Syria and Iraq sets the standard by broadly publicising its efforts in recruiting and brainwashing children, an effort which it calls the “Cubs of the Caliphate”⁽³¹⁵⁾. In Afghanistan, ISK released a video entitled “Cubs of the Caliphate Camp” in which a dozen young boys are trained to handle small arms and get open field training. According to Bill Roggio of the Long War Journal, the video was probably shot in Nangarhar⁽³¹⁶⁾. A tribal elder from Achin was quoted in September 2015 by Khaama Press as saying that ISK has started forced recruitment of young men and children to fight for the group and that ISK loyalists were also going from house to house to identify young women and girls and forcing them into marriage⁽³¹⁷⁾.

Children are brainwashed in many ways. To persuade them, children are told that Afghan girls and women are raped by “invading foreign forces” and that the Koran is being burned by Americans; that it is their religious duty to resist the “infidel” coalition forces and that they and their parents will go to paradise; that the Afghans they intend to kill “deserve to die” because “they are not true Muslims”, or are “American collaborators”. Nevertheless, according to the BBC, children are rarely told who their specific target is and why they deserve to die⁽³¹⁸⁾. To bring them to the point that they will actually give away their life for this cause, children are told they will go straight to heaven, where all problems of poverty, boredom and drudgery will come to an end; they are told they will feel no pain or that only the target will die in the explosion. In some cases they are given an amulet that they are told will help them survive⁽³¹⁹⁾.

According to the UN Security Council ‘[c]hildren continued to be victims of sexual violence by armed opposition groups, including the Taliban and the Haqqani Network. In August 2013, a media report alleged that Taliban commanders had committed acts of sexual abuse against young boys. Children detained on national security-related charges reported that boys had been sexually abused by the Taliban and Haqqani network commanders while being trained to carry out suicide attacks’⁽³²⁰⁾. These allegations have been recurrent in the press, the only source being NDS⁽³²¹⁾. Clark cautions that such reports need independent verification⁽³²²⁾.

⁽³⁰⁹⁾ Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014.

⁽³¹⁰⁾ Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014; HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016; UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 6.

⁽³¹¹⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, pp. 4-5.

⁽³¹²⁾ Giustozzi, A., telephone interview, 14 April 2016.

⁽³¹³⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽³¹⁴⁾ PBS, ISIS in Afghanistan, 17 November 2015.

⁽³¹⁵⁾ Benotman, N., and Malik, N., Children of Islamic State, March 2016; Bloom, M., e.a., Depictions of Children and Youth in the Islamic State’s Martyr Propaganda, 2015-2016, 28 February 2016.

⁽³¹⁶⁾ Roggio, B., Islamic State joins others in training children for Jihad in Afghanistan, 28 January 2016.

⁽³¹⁷⁾ Khaama Press, ISIS recruit child soldiers, force marriage on young women in Afghanistan, 17 September 2015.

⁽³¹⁸⁾ Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014.

⁽³¹⁹⁾ Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014; Tribune (The), Instant Paradise: An Afghan child bomber’s story, 18 April 2016; BBC, Afghan ‘suicide vest girl’ reveal family ordeal, 13 January 2014.

⁽³²⁰⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p.10.

⁽³²¹⁾ Khaama Press, Haqqani network leaders sexually abuse teenager boys, 26 December 2013; Pajhwok Afghan News, ‘Teen bomber gang-raped in Taliban custody’, 26 April 2016.

⁽³²²⁾ Kate Clark, e-mail, 16 May 2016.

Girls are recruited only in very rare cases. Danielle Bell, head of the Human Rights Unit at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), was quoted by Deutsche Welle as saying: ‘In five years of monitoring and reporting, the UN has verified one case of child recruitment of a girl who was a trained suicide bomber’⁽³²³⁾. The BBC has reported two cases, the case of the 10-year-old girl, Spozhmai, in Helmand in 2014 and a case from 2011 in Uruzgan⁽³²⁴⁾.

5.2.1. Methods of recruitment among children

5.2.1.1. Economic reasons and lack of opportunities

The faltering economy is also one of the major drivers of recruitment with the Taliban. In October 2015, CNN reported from Kabul: ‘Several would-be recruits who talked to a local freelance cameraman working for CNN said the only reason they joined the Taliban was because they couldn’t put food on the table’⁽³²⁵⁾. This is even more the case for child soldiers than for regular fighters (see section on Taliban, [economic incentives](#)). Kandahar University economics professor, Ahmad Wali Popal, is quoted by Khaama Press as saying ‘child soldiers come from poor families, mainly those who have lost the head of their family or the one who was responsible for the earnings and management of their respective family’⁽³²⁶⁾. According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, some parents, due to poverty, even sell their children to the Taliban to become suicide bombers⁽³²⁷⁾.

In districts of Badakhshan under control of the Taliban, such as Warduj, Yamgan and parts of Jurm, the insurgents are said to heavily recruit among youths between 12 and 16 years old. With the economy weakened since the Taliban captured these districts, people are said to send their sons to join the insurgents because of poverty. Children are also used to motivate other children to join the Taliban⁽³²⁸⁾.

Reviewing 2015’s displacement trends, UNHCR stated that ‘[p]overty and lack of coping mechanisms, including during the more prolonged phases of displacement, is also thought to be a factor that contributed to recruitment [of children by armed forces and armed groups] as a subtle form of coercion’⁽³²⁹⁾.

Poverty combined with boredom is also stated as making young men susceptible to recruitment. In a report from Helmand province, IRIN reported in December 2015 that, due to the intense fighting in many of the province’s districts, more than 150 schools had closed and about 100,000 children were left without education. The report stated: ‘Lack of education and job opportunities have left young men with few options, and the Taliban has been capitalising on the situation. “In such circumstances, a little propaganda, a little inducement, can swing loyalties,” a tribal elder from Nad Ali in Helmand was quoted saying⁽³³⁰⁾. Disillusionment with the education system is also quoted by Giustozzi and Ali as one of the main reasons why high-school boys join the insurgency⁽³³¹⁾.

5.2.1.2. Schools and madrassas

The UN Security Council reports that children have allegedly been taken and in some cases abducted to Pakistan for military training. These reports involve ‘the use of religious schools in both Pakistan and Afghanistan for child recruitment and military training by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. In many cases, the children’s parents claimed to be unaware that their children had undergone military training’⁽³³²⁾.

Especially poor families are pressured to send their kids to madrassas as education, board and lodging are generally free. Insurgents have tacitly encouraged parents to send their sons to religious schools in neighbouring Pakistan for Islamic studies. Another reason could be the many school closures in Afghanistan due to the conflict. Sending a son to

⁽³²³⁾ DW, Child soldiers: what is their role in the Afghan conflict, 13 February 2016.

⁽³²⁴⁾ Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014.

⁽³²⁵⁾ CNN, Failing Afghan Economy Helping Taliban Return to Power, 9 October 2015.

⁽³²⁶⁾ Khaama Press, Child soldiers a tool to sustain power in the Afghan war, 14 November 2015.

⁽³²⁷⁾ RFE/RL, ‘Mother and Father Sold Me’ – Afghan Children Reveal ‘Heartbreak’ of Human Trafficking, 10 February 2016.

⁽³²⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recruit hundreds children in Badakhshan, 5 January 2016.

⁽³²⁹⁾ UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 4.

⁽³³⁰⁾ Sarwary, B., School closures fuel Taliban recruitment, IRIN News, 16 December 2015.

⁽³³¹⁾ Giustozzi, A. & Ali, A.M., Reaching Boiling Point: High School Activism in Afghanistan, October 2015, p. 36.

⁽³³²⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, p. 6.

the madrassas can also give a family immunity from Taliban attacks⁽³³³⁾. According to an article by AFP, child suicide bombers frequently run away from home to madrassas in Pakistan, crossing the semi-porous border. Education in a Pakistani madrassa is seen as a cultural rite of passage in parts of Kandahar province⁽³³⁴⁾.

The HRW report about the surge in child recruitment in the north of Afghanistan exclusively reported on recruitment through the madrassas. It describes how madrassas have been run by the Taliban in Kunduz and other provinces in the north since 2012. As they gained more ground and consolidated their power in certain districts, Taliban commanders increasingly used madrassas not only for indoctrination, but also for military training:

‘Boys begin indoctrination as young as six years old, and continue to study religious subjects under Taliban teachers for up to seven years. According to relatives of boys recruited by the Taliban, by the time they are 13, Taliban-educated children have learned military skills including use of firearms, and the production and deployment of IEDs. Taliban teachers then introduce those trained child soldiers to specific Taliban groups in that district’⁽³³⁵⁾.

Pajhwok Afghan News quoted several government officials that reported massive use of child soldiers in fighting in Takhar’s districts Khwaja Ghar and Darzab in the autumn of 2015. They too claimed these young men were indoctrinated and recruited in local madrassas⁽³³⁶⁾. Patricia Gossman (HRW) confirmed that recruitment by Taliban was occurring in madrassas in Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan⁽³³⁷⁾.

Some madrassas are used for manufacturing IEDs. In September 2013, in Gardez city, Paktya province, six boys were wounded when the IED they were assembling detonated inside a madrassa⁽³³⁸⁾.

Apart from madrassas, recruitment of minors and youngsters can also happen in the regular school system. A study by Antonio Giustozzi and Ali Mohammad Ali from October 2015 researched political activism in high schools in Afghanistan. In this report, examples from Parwan, Laghman, Balkh, Paktia, Ghazni, Nangarhar, Wardak and Zabul are given of young men leaving school to join the insurgency. One of the main reasons why they join the insurgency is their disappointment with the educational system. It seems all of these minors joined voluntarily or were recruited “horizontally” by peers. Three minor Taliban activists in schools in Nangarhar, Wardak and Zabul confirmed to the authors of the report that they sent other students to the Taliban to fight⁽³³⁹⁾.

5.2.1.3. Forced recruitment and the use of coercion

Patricia Gossman (HRW) states that the recruitment of children into the Taliban generally does not involve Taliban commanders removing children from their homes at gunpoint, but through other means of pressure on the family, including threats⁽³⁴⁰⁾. For example, when under pressure or planning a major offensive, such as the attack on Kunduz in September 2015, the Taliban may revert to coercion to boost manpower. UNAMA stated in December 2015 in its report on the events in Kunduz in September–October 2015: ‘Credible sources reported that many of the boys complained that they had been forced to take up arms by Taliban who threatened that their families would be harmed if they refused’⁽³⁴¹⁾. Some of these minors have been in the media, telling they were forced to fight⁽³⁴²⁾. The Taliban reportedly went door-to-door ‘taking young boys from every family as a form of forced recruitment’⁽³⁴³⁾.

However, a local schoolteacher from Khanabad district in Kunduz told the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) shortly before the fall of Kunduz at the end of September 2015 that the Taliban often behaves better than local militias fighting alongside the government. He confirmed that the Taliban asks for food, tax and recruits, but does not impose demands by force⁽³⁴⁴⁾.

⁽³³³⁾ IRIN, Afghanistan Taliban forces students out of school, into madrassas, 17 February 2009.

⁽³³⁴⁾ Tribune (The), Instant Paradise: An Afghan child bomber’s story, 18 April 2016.

⁽³³⁵⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016.

⁽³³⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban accused of using children as soldiers in Takhar, 19 November 2015.

⁽³³⁷⁾ Gossman, P., Skype interview, 19 February 2016.

⁽³³⁸⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 19.

⁽³³⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A. & Ali, A.M., Reaching Boiling Point: High School Activism in Afghanistan, October 2015, p. 36.

⁽³⁴⁰⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016; Gossman, P., skype interview, 30 March 2016.

⁽³⁴¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015, p. 18.

⁽³⁴²⁾ Tolonews, Concerns raised over Taliban recruitment of child soldiers, 28 October 2015.

⁽³⁴³⁾ Al Jazeera, Afghan Taliban ‘Recruiting Boys’ from Kunduz Families, 30 September 2015.

⁽³⁴⁴⁾ Matta, B., Abuse rise along with pro-Afghan government militias, 7 September 2015.

Expert on the Taliban in the Afghanistan Analysts Network, Borhan Osman, says that where child recruitment occurs, in breach of the Taliban's own internal rules, it usually does not reject minor volunteers. Still, he said, cases are known of children being forced to become suicide bombers ⁽³⁴⁵⁾.

5.2.1.4. Possibility of refusing or leaving

Sources are divided on whether a child could refuse or avoid recruitment. Both Borhan Osman and Antonio Giustozzi mention the possibility of paying to avoid enrollment. However, there are sources that indicate that refusing is not an option (see section on Taliban, [local Taliban fronts](#) and [consequences in case of refusal](#)).

Even when recruited on a more or less 'voluntary' basis, sources do not agree on whether it is possible for a minor to leave the ranks of the Taliban if he would wish. Of the 13 cases HRW documented in the north in 2015, all of the boys were brainwashed in the madrassas and joined the ranks of the Taliban 'voluntarily'. However, in all these cases the family opposed to the recruitment of their sons. It was almost impossible for the families to retrieve their sons once they were recruited by the Taliban. HRW knew of only one case of a family securing a boy's release ⁽³⁴⁶⁾. Apparently the family had found the situation for their released son so dangerous that they immediately sent him to Iran. Patricia Gossman of HRW said: 'You can't just leave the Taliban and expect that you will be safe' ⁽³⁴⁷⁾. However, Antonio Giustozzi and Ali Mohammad Ali examined several cases of recruitment through peers in high schools. In some cases, where the family firmly opposed the enrollment, teachers told the researchers that the family members forced the youngsters to leave the Taliban ⁽³⁴⁸⁾.

Borhan Osman says the fate of a deserter can depend on the reason why he left the insurgents. Leaving the Taliban should not be seen as a betrayal. Therefore families who extricate their sons from the Taliban will often send them abroad for business or labour. In this way, they are taking the fighter completely out of the situation to avoid any suspicion that he may have joined government forces. The more senior or higher up in the ranks of the Taliban, the less easy it is to quit ⁽³⁴⁹⁾.

5.3. Child recruitment by ANSF

In its annual reporting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict of 2014, UNAMA mentions 'a consistent decrease in reported and verified incidents of recruitment of children by the ANP, with only one reported case by the ANP and one verified case by the ALP in 2014, a sharp reduction from 13 incidents in 2013 and seven and six incidents respectively in 2011 and 2012. Given the high degree of underreporting, however, this trend may not accurately reflect the actual scale of child recruitment into both forces' ⁽³⁵⁰⁾. In later updates of the protection of civilians in armed conflict reports – the midyear report of 2015 and the annual report of 2015 – UNAMA does not mention the use of child recruits ⁽³⁵¹⁾.

Reporting on the period September 2010 – December 2014, the UN Secretary General stated: 'Regarding the 159 children reportedly recruited and used by the Afghan National Security Forces, the country task force was able to verify 38 cases in detail, including 27 children recruited by the Afghan Local Police, nine by the Afghan National Police, including the National Border Police, one by the Afghan National Army and one by a pro-Government militia group led by Nabi Gechi in Kunduz province' ⁽³⁵²⁾.

Looking at 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that Kandahar and Helmand provinces in the south, Farah province in the west, and Paktya province in the southeast remained centres for child recruitment ⁽³⁵³⁾.

⁽³⁴⁵⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽³⁴⁶⁾ HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016.

⁽³⁴⁷⁾ Gossman, P., skype interview, 30 March 2016.

⁽³⁴⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A. & Ali, A.M., Reaching Boiling Point: High School Activism in Afghanistan, October 2015, p. 36.

⁽³⁴⁹⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽³⁵⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2015, pp. 18-19.

⁽³⁵¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2015, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, August 2015, pp. 19-24; UNAMA, Afghanistan: Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, pp. 16-23

⁽³⁵²⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 20.

⁽³⁵³⁾ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on the achievements of technical assistance in the field of human rights in 2013, 10 January 2014.

In 2011, the Government adopted an Action Plan for the Prevention of Underage Recruitment and in July 2014 a Road Map towards compliance with this plan. This included the adoption of a presidential decree criminalising child recruitment by government security forces, which came into effect on 2 February 2015. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior issued a directive prohibiting the use of children at national police and local police checkpoints, including in support roles, stating that the perpetrators would be sanctioned ⁽³⁵⁴⁾. Several ANSF commanders interviewed by the British NGO Child Soldiers International confirmed receiving a letter from the central government prohibiting the recruitment of children and stated that the practice had halted since ⁽³⁵⁵⁾.

Efforts also continued to strengthen age-assessment procedures and disseminate guidance to recruitment units. UNICEF led a countrywide assessment of the ANSF's age-verification practices and procedures to identify gaps and inconsistencies and supported a national birth registration strategy to strengthen protection against underage recruitment ⁽³⁵⁶⁾.

An awareness campaign using broadcast media has highlighted the risks of recruitment among vulnerable communities in the north that were affected by recent fighting ⁽³⁵⁷⁾.

However, in September 2015, Child Soldiers International stated that '[t]he Afghan government has so far failed to implement proactive mechanisms to identify, verify and release children from the ranks of the Afghan National Security Forces' ⁽³⁵⁸⁾. 'The few deterrents put in place by the government to prevent child recruitment [...], such as the introduction of monitoring units, appear so far to have been inadequate. In July 2015, the MoI made a commitment to establish Child Protection Units (CPUs) in all ANP and ALP recruitment centres. However, by December, only six had been established in ANP recruitment centres. An absence of capacity and dedicated resources has impeded efforts to expand these CPUs to all 34 provinces in Afghanistan' ⁽³⁵⁹⁾. Early 2016, CPUs were present in Herat, Ghor, Badghis, Farah, Mazar and Jalalabad ⁽³⁶⁰⁾. Since their establishment in 2011, until the end of 2014, these CPUs reportedly prevented the recruitment of 422 children to the ANP (411 boys and 11 girls) ⁽³⁶¹⁾.

Between October and December 2015, Child Soldiers International conducted research in six provinces (Uruzgan, Kunar, Kunduz, Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad), and confirmed that the recruitment and use of children by ANSF was ongoing, mainly due to inadequate age-verification procedures and the prevalence of opportunities to falsify identity documents ⁽³⁶²⁾.

5.3.1. ANA

Although the Afghan National Army (ANA) is not mentioned by UNAMA or the UN Security Council as an institution where child recruitment occurs ⁽³⁶³⁾, Child Soldiers International reported that it received 'credible information of the recruitment of three children by the ANA in 2015 in two separate incidents' ⁽³⁶⁴⁾. A study by Hagar International in 2014 found indications of child recruitment into the ANA in Nangarhar ⁽³⁶⁵⁾. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, mentioned that some cases of child recruitment were documented with ANA ⁽³⁶⁶⁾.

⁽³⁵⁴⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 6; UNAMA, Afghanistan: Annual Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2015, pp. 18-19; Child Soldiers International, Briefing on the situation of underage recruitment and use of children by armed forces and insurgent groups in Afghanistan to the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2015.

⁽³⁵⁵⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016.

⁽³⁵⁶⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 7; Child Soldiers International, Briefing on the situation of underage recruitment and use of children by armed forces and insurgent groups in Afghanistan to the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2015.

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⁽³⁵⁹⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, pp. 5-6.

⁽³⁶⁰⁾ DW, Child soldiers: what is their role in the Afghan conflict, 13 February 2016.

⁽³⁶¹⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 23.

⁽³⁶²⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, pp. 1-2

⁽³⁶³⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015; UNAMA, Afghanistan: Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016.

⁽³⁶⁴⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, p. 8.

⁽³⁶⁵⁾ Hagar International, Forgotten No More: Male Child Trafficking in Afghanistan, 3 April 2014, p. 48.

⁽³⁶⁶⁾ Zerrougui, L., Two years of 'children, not soldiers' campaign bring tangible progress in Afghanistan, 16 March 2016.

5.3.2. ANP

As for the Afghan National Police (ANP), the UN Security Council mentioned rare cases of child recruitment, but also warned of underreporting ⁽³⁶⁷⁾. ‘Among the main concerns are: poor socioeconomic conditions that result in families compelling their children to join the Afghan National Security Forces for financial reasons; lack of adequate capacity and/or information within the Afghan National Security Forces for assessing the age of children; lack of clear policy directives; widespread impunity and lack of accountability; limited availability of birth certificates; identity documents that are easily falsifiable. Despite a significant increase in birth registration, from 6 per cent in 2003 to 37.4 per cent in 2012, more than half of children in the country remain unregistered’ ⁽³⁶⁸⁾.

Child Soldiers International depicts a similar state of affairs with recruitment into the ANP:

‘Across the country, recruitment processes within the ANP are not standardised. There is significant regional variation, and the process generally lacks adequate age verification measures and is vulnerable to manipulation. First, a recruit must fill in an application form with basic personal details, then they visit several government agencies for criminal records checks and physical aptitude tests. The only formal identity document required is a *Tazkira* (national ID card). In the absence of a universal and centralized system for storing population data, there are no adequate measures in place to prevent the falsification of a recruit’s age during the process. [...] Low levels of birth registration compound this problem. [...] Remoteness and insecurity in much of the country also remains a serious obstacle to conducting universal birth registration. [...] Age verification procedures therefore remain ineffective and individuals are often informally recruited without *Tazkiras* because of the difficulties in obtaining them. In an environment where economic incentives to obtain regular employment are high, individuals pay bribes to fake a child’s age in a *Tazkira*, thus enabling them to be recruited. In the absence of reliable biometric data, officers involved in the recruitment process employ other methods to identify underage recruits. These include asking them to bring their younger or older siblings to the recruitment centre so they can be compared physically, checking for hair on their bodies, and referring to social markers such as their marital status, all of which are manifestly unreliable means of determining age. In Jalalabad, in practice the responsibility for verifying the age of prospective recruits lies with the deputy governor, who employs visual checks of an applicant’s physique and face to determine their age’ ⁽³⁶⁹⁾.

One person who joined ANP with falsified identity papers at the age of 15 or 16, told CSI that about a quarter of the 60 new recruits he had undergone basic training with were younger than him. ³⁷⁰

5.3.3. ALP

Within the ANSF, child recruitment is most prevalent in the ALP ⁽³⁷¹⁾. The UN Secretary General stated: ‘There was one verified case of child recruitment attributed to the Afghan Local Police in 2014, compared to 13 in 2013, seven in 2012 and six in 2011. However, given the high degree of underreporting, this trend may not accurately reflect the actual scale of child recruitment into those forces’ ⁽³⁷²⁾. Here again, concern is raised regarding the lack of oversight of recruitment processes ⁽³⁷³⁾. Similar to recruitment into the ANP, all that is required is a *Tazkira*. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this document is unreliable as an age-verification tool ⁽³⁷⁴⁾. In an interview Borhan Osman states that, especially within the ALP, the rules of recruitment set out by the central government are loosely applied on the ground (see also [Recruitment into the ALP](#)). Osman says this has worsened since the drawdown of the international military forces (IMF). ‘When there were Americans supervising, there was less likelihood of recruiting minors. But now, with no third party in supervision, it’s completely in the hands of the [Afghan] government and the local elites. And they often do not seem to be really bothered about recruiting minors’ ⁽³⁷⁵⁾. Child Soldiers International confirmed that the ALP was strongly underpinned by local patronage networks. ‘Often, when a man joins the ALP, male members

⁽³⁶⁷⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 6.

⁽³⁶⁸⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 7.

⁽³⁶⁹⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, pp. 9-10.

⁽³⁷⁰⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, p. 10.

⁽³⁷¹⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, pp. 1-2; New York Times, Taliban Gun Down 10-Year-Old Militia Hero in Afghanistan, 2 February 2016.

⁽³⁷²⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 23.

⁽³⁷³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul reiterates commitments to end use of child soldiers, 20 February 2016.

⁽³⁷⁴⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, pp. 11-12.

⁽³⁷⁵⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

of his entire extended family are also recruited into the same unit *en masse*, and put on the government payroll while bypassing the official recruitment procedures. This includes children. When a recruit dies on duty, often a younger sibling will be recruited to fill the vacancy’⁽³⁷⁶⁾.

5.3.4. The role of minors in the ANSF

Borhan Osman confirmed that some minors in ANSF take up a fighting role⁽³⁷⁷⁾. Minors are in effect recruited formally into the ranks of the ANSF⁽³⁷⁸⁾, also in combat positions⁽³⁷⁹⁾.

Child Soldiers International stated in September 2015 that ‘[c]hildren continue to be used as “tea boys” and guards at distant outposts by commanders’⁽³⁸⁰⁾. In describing the way minors usually join ANP, Child Soldiers International stated:

‘Aside from formal recruitment, informal association of children with the ANP often begins with volunteering as support staff, sometimes to support the work of their older male siblings who are official police officers. These children perform a range of functions such as cooking and tea making, before eventually “picking up the gun.” In most cases, children are provided basic weapons training before being allowed to handle weapons. Information gathered by Child Soldiers International shows that these children receive a stipend or a salary for the tasks they deliver’⁽³⁸¹⁾.

Deedee Derksen, researcher at Kings College on militia networks, confirms that boys are often involved in the militias from a young age. At an early age, they work as a messenger, tea boy, etc. But after a while they may be asked to handle a gun and are gradually enrolled as fighter in a warring party, regardless of their age.³⁸²

A special form of exploitation is the recurrent practice of *bacha bazi* (“dancing boys”), or young boys recruited for sexual purposes. The practice is generally associated with men in positions of power⁽³⁸³⁾, and this includes militia commanders as well as commanders within the ANSF⁽³⁸⁴⁾. According to Child Soldiers International, the practice is ‘considered a deeply ingrained cultural tradition in some areas’⁽³⁸⁵⁾. Patricia Gossman (HRW) called it a ‘persistent problem’ with the militias and some ALP⁽³⁸⁶⁾.

⁽³⁷⁶⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, pp. 11-12.

⁽³⁷⁷⁾ Osman, B., telephone interview, 4 April 2016.

⁽³⁷⁸⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 22.

⁽³⁷⁹⁾ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, p. 6; Azami, D., How the Taliban groom child suicide bombers, 15 December 2014.

⁽³⁸⁰⁾ Child Soldiers International, Briefing to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Afghanistan, 21 September 2015.

⁽³⁸¹⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, p. 5.

⁽³⁸²⁾ Derksen, D., telephone interview, 13 January 2014.

⁽³⁸³⁾ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, paragraph 39.

⁽³⁸⁴⁾ Vice, This is what winning looks like, 29 December 2014; Khaama Press, New documentary unveils recruitment of children for dance in Afghanistan, 6 March 2016.

⁽³⁸⁵⁾ Child Soldiers International, Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by Parties to the Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, March 2016, p. 5.

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference (31 March 2016)

During the EASO COI Specialist Network (CSN) meeting (4 December 2015), the need for updated information on recruitment practices by armed actors in the Afghan conflict was expressed by participants from 10 EU+ countries. An initial discussion was held on terms of reference (ToR) for such an update.

EASO received an offer from Belgium's COI service, Cedoca, to co-draft this update.

This was followed-up by a request from EASO to the CSN and UNHCR for input on the ToR. The ToR were finalised in a meeting between EASO and the co-drafter (Cedoca, Belgium) on 23 March 2016.

Taliban recruitment

- Organisation and structure of the Taliban
- Developments in the modus operandi and control of territory
- Recruitment methods and incentives
- Forced, coerced and induced recruitment
- Role of the tribal and family structures
- Replacement of incapacitated fighters
- Role of religious structures
- Possibilities to leave the ranks of the Taliban
- Ethnicity and recruitment by Taliban

Recruitment by other insurgent groups

- Haqqani Network
 - Organisation
 - Recruitment methods
 - Regions and ethnicities
- Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar)
 - Organisation
 - Recruitment methods
 - Regions and ethnicities
- Islamic State in Khorasan
 - Organisation
 - Recruitment methods
 - Regions and ethnicities

Recruitment by ALP

- Recruitment and vetting procedure
- Practice versus procedure
- Regional differences

Recruitment by pro-government groups outside government control

Child recruitment

- Underage recruitment by ANSF
 - Ages, sex, vulnerability
 - Prevalence
 - Role of children in the conflict
- Child recruitment by other armed actors
 - Ages, sex, vulnerability
 - Prevalence
 - Role of children in the conflict

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