



Afghanistan Security situation

Country of Origin Information Report



June 2019



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ISBN: 978-92-9476-992-3

doi: 10.2847/585139

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A 83rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron Airman observes a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook at an undisclosed location in Afghanistan. The 83rd ERQS is the Air Force Central Command's first dedicated joint personnel recovery team, utilizing Air Force Guardian Angel teams and Army CH-47 Chinook crews.

Acknowledgements

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

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

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

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

The following national asylum and migration departments reviewed this report:

Norway, Landinfo, Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre

Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

The following external organisations reviewed parts of this report:

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

ARC Foundation – Asylum Research Centre Foundation

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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Disclaimer

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

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

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

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

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

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

The drafting process (including reviewing) for this report was finalised on 30 May 2019. Any event taking place after this period is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [Methodology](#) section of the introduction.

¹ The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: [url](#)

Glossary and Abbreviations

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

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

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

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

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

	and are protected against direct attacks unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities. ⁶
CTC	US Combating Terrorism Center
DFR	Dropped from Rolls personnel are those soldiers and police who leave the organisation prior to the end of their contract for reasons that include desertion or being absent without leave for over a month. ⁷
Eid ul-Fitr	‘Festival of breaking the fast’ that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Ground engagements	Ground engagements include kinetic ground operations, stand-off attacks, crossfire and armed clashes between parties to the conflict. Ground engagements include attacks or operations in which small arms, heavy weapons and/or area weapons systems, i.e. mortars and rockets are fired. ⁸
HIG	Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
IEC	Independent Election Commission
IED	<p>Improvised Explosive Device. A bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. IEDs can broadly be divided into four categories:</p> <p>Command-Operated IEDs – Radio or remote controlled IEDs operated from a distance that can enable operators to detonate a pre-placed device at the precise time a target moves into the target area. Magnetic-IEDs are IEDs attached by a magnetic or other device and are a sub-category of command-operated IEDs.</p> <p>Victim-Operated IEDs – These detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch which could be a pressure plate (PP-IED) or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device, resulting in an explosion.</p> <p>Other IEDs – This category includes command-wired IEDs and timed-IEDs and IEDs where the trigger/switch type for detonation could not be determined.</p> <p>Suicide IEDs – Separately from data on IEDs, UNAMA documents civilian casualties resulting from complex and suicide attacks. Suicide IEDs are generally either Body-Borne IEDs (BB-IEDs) or Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs (SVB-IEDs). Body-Borne IEDs refer to situations where a suicide bomber wears an explosive vest or belt while Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs is defined as the detonation of a vehicle rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside the vehicle, or the</p>

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

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

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

	detonation of a BB-IED by the driver or a passenger while inside the vehicle. ⁹
IEHCA	Islamic Emirate High Council of Afghanistan
IMF	International Military Forces
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IS, ISKP	Islamic State, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Islamic State in Afghanistan is referred to as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).
Khost Protection Force	A 'campaign force' that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. There are longstanding allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions. ¹⁰
KIA	Killed in Action ¹¹
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
LeT	Lashkar-e-Tayyiba
Loya Paktia	'Greater Paktya', an area encompassing the provinces of Paktya, Paktika and Khost
MoD	Ministry of Defense
Mol	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUG	National Unity Government
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OFS	Operation Freedom's Sentinel
PGF	Pro-Government Forces. Afghan National Security Forces and other forces and groups that act in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations and are directly or indirectly under the control of the Government of Afghanistan ¹²
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
Red Unit/Red Brigade	In 2015, the Taliban established a 'special forces' unit named Red Unit or Red Brigade ('sra qet'a' in Pashto). They are better equipped and trained and are generally used as a 'rapid reaction force'. ¹³
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RS	Resolute Support
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
TAAC	Train, Advise, and Assist Command

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

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

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

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

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

TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
USDoS	United States Department of State
Ushr	An Islamic tax (normally 10%) on certain products, for example agricultural products.
USIP	United States Institute of Peace

Introduction

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

The report aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for international protection status determination (PSD; refugee status and subsidiary protection). The terms of reference can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Methodology

This report is an update of the EASO COI report Afghanistan Security Situation first published in January 2015, and updated in January 2016, November 2016, December 2017 and May 2018.¹⁴

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

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

Based on various sources consulted by EASO,¹⁵ these key elements can be broken down into topics and/or indicators. Examples include: parties to the conflict; intensity level of the violence; nature of the violence; regional spreading of the violence; targets of the violence; risk of collateral damage; use of arms and tactics; possibility to reach areas – security of transport (roads and airports); and indirect effects of the violence/conflict.

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

Members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference that were finalised by the co-drafters in September 2014 taking all the inputs into account. In March 2015, EASO held a practical cooperation meeting on Afghanistan in Brussels, in which the participating EU+ countries¹⁶ gave feedback on the first EASO COI Report - Afghanistan Security Situation of January 2015.

The terms of reference were further consulted with EU+ countries and UNHCR during the process for developing and updating country guidance notes on Afghanistan (2016-2019), for which this report is produced.

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

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

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

The reference period for describing events was from January 2018 until February 2019. A number of specialised paper-based and electronic sources were consulted.

In order to ensure that the drafters respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. This quality process led to the inclusion of some additional information, in response to feedback received during the respective reviews, until 30 May 2019. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Sources

As a co-drafter of the report, the Austrian Country of Origin Information Department (Bundesamt für Fremdwesen und Asyl [BFA] Staatendokumentation) provided a map of airports with scheduled passenger service as of 25 March 2019 and another map of security incidents from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019 along with data on incidents using the following sources:

Administrative units (districts and provinces of Afghanistan):

- AIMS (Afghanistan Information Management System), n.d., AIMS Political Divisions Map (398 Districts), <https://esoc.princeton.edu/subfiles/aims-political-divisions-map>, accessed 25 March 2019

International borders (neighbouring states):

- GADM (Database of Global Administrative Areas), n.d., Global Administrative Areas version 2.8, <http://gadm.org/version2>, accessed 25 March 2019

Roads, airports, railway lines, cities:

- Geofabrik, OpenStreetMap Data Afghanistan, n.d., <https://download.geofabrik.de/asia/afghanistan.html>, accessed 25 March 2019
- OurAirports.com, Airports near Afghanistan, <http://ourairports.com/search?q=Afghanistan>, n.d., accessed 25 March 2019
- Flightradar24.com, Flight Tracker, <https://www.flightradar24.com/34.01,67.19/7>, n.d., accessed 25 March 2019
- Ariana Afghan Airlines, Ariana Afghan Airlines, <https://www.flyariana.com/>, n.d., accessed 25 March 2019
- Kam Air, Kam Air, <https://www.kamair.com/>, n.d., accessed 25 March 2019

Security-related incidents:

Global Incident Map (n.d.): Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, www.globalincidentmap.com, accessed 1 March 2019

Relying on internet-based global news media reports, Global Incident Map collects security-related incidents connected to terrorism worldwide and provides a geo-referenced display of such incidents, broken down by types, on an online map, accessible upon payment. Any such incident listed always comes with a citation. The original classification by incident type was retained, except for the two categories 'Other suspicious activity' and 'General terrorism news', which was clustered into the broader category 'other, undefined', as they did not fit into any of the more specific categories.

Incidents listed in this database were qualified as security-relevant. Double entries were removed manually. The information provided includes the coordinates (latitude, longitude) of the village or the nearest town or city, not the actual location of the incident.

Further sources were used for cross-checking:

- ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project), ACLED Data, <http://www.acleddata.com/data/>, n.d., accessed 1 March 2019
- INSO (The International NGO Safety Organization), Afghanistan, <https://www.ngosafety.org/country/afghanistan>, n.d., accessed 1 March 2019

As a rule, set by Global Incident Map, security-related incidents do not include criminal incidents, but incidents which it ascribes to or associates with insurgents, including bomb attacks (successful or attempted), targeted assassinations or assassination attempts, abductions, arson attacks, attacks with firearms and gunfights. Activities performed by state actors are subsumed under the category ‘arrests, captures, kills’.

Furthermore, this report relies extensively on data provided by UNAMA in their reports on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan. UNAMA uses a robust methodology to verify reported incidents by corroborating and cross checking incidents, conducting on-site investigations, and consulting a broad range of credible and reliable sources. For verification of each incident involving a civilian casualty, UNAMA requires at least three different and independent sources. Unverified incidents are not included in its reporting.¹⁷ According to analysts, this stringent verification standard also means ‘there may be many more casualties than UNAMA is able to confirm’.¹⁸

Structure and use of the report

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

Provinces and districts

The provincial chapters in this report are organised alphabetically and have the following structure: a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population; the conflict background takes a longer term look at the security situation in a province, including the armed actors active in the province. A section on recent trends in the security situation describes the nature of the violence, targets, locations, and casualties within the timeframe from 1 January 2018 until 28 February 2019. Finally, conflict-induced displacements are described in a separate section.

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

There are a number of provinces and districts for which the administrative boundaries are unclear. For example, it is unclear whether the district of Gizab belongs to Uruzgan or Daykundi province.¹⁹ Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Faryab province.²⁰

¹⁷ UNAMA’s full description of their methodology can be found at: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. i-ii

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

¹⁹ Norway, Landinfo, Respons. Afghanistan: Gizab-distriktet, 11 December 2014, [url](#)

²⁰ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

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

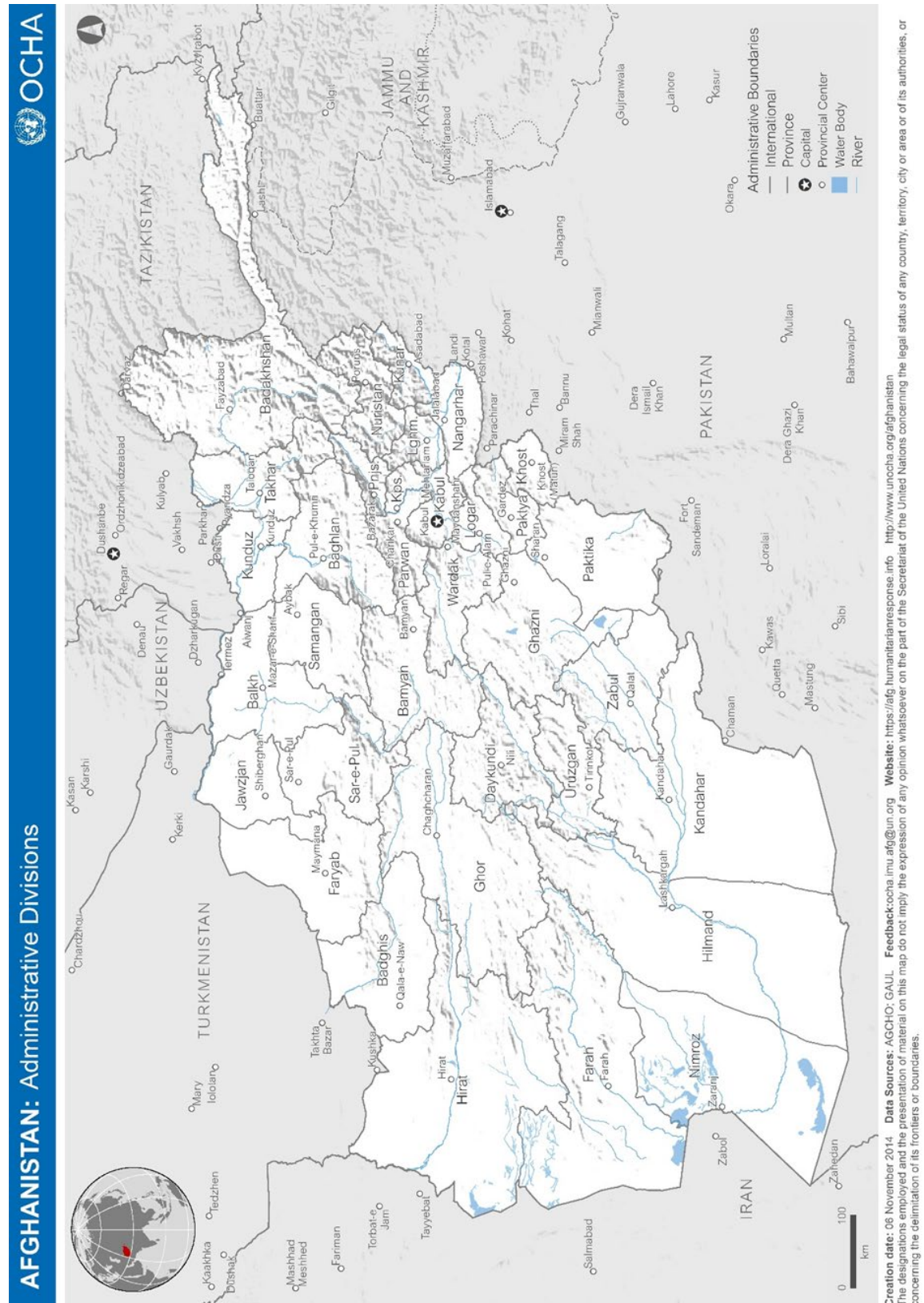
'[t]here is not one unified agreed district and province boundary dataset currently in use. There are various 'official' versions. [...] The boundaries within these different datasets have changed over time. Some districts have been passed across to other Provinces for administrative purposes. Some new districts have been created over time. Some areas within Afghanistan are still referred to as districts by locals of the area, even though they have never had boundaries created for them and never been treated as a district'.²¹

In absence of an official list of districts, EASO chooses in principal to follow the administrative divisions of the provinces used by UNOCHA, as they produce very clear maps and use the same division systematically in all their publications.²²

²¹ Brittan, R., Managing Director Alcis, e-mail, 16 August 2017.

²² All their relevant maps can be found at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographics>

Map



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions©UNOCHA

1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

1.1 Conflict background

1.1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan

The so-called *Saur* Revolution on 27 April 1978 brought the Afghan communists to power.²³ In 1979, the government of the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to support the communist Afghan government headed by Babrak Karmal. The invasion was followed by a decade of armed conflict between the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops, and armed opposition groups, often referred to as the ‘mujahideen’. These groups were divided into several different factions, but they all participated in a nation-wide armed uprising that lasted until the government finally collapsed in 1992, following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.²⁴

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as ‘Civil War’ saw different mujahideen groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fighting for control of Afghanistan.²⁵ War between the competing mujahideen factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches.²⁶ This led to the emergence in 1994 of a group called the Taliban, who brought stability in areas under their control, which won them support from segments of the population.²⁷ They gradually gained more control and conquered Kabul in 1996. By 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the Afghan territory. But by the end of the year, as a consequence of the 11 September attacks in the US, they were ousted by a US-led military operation.²⁸ The US gave its support to the mujahideen front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as Northern Alliance or Northern coalition.²⁹

On 22 December 2001, based on the Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai,³⁰ a Pashtun, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004.³¹ The Taliban had reorganised and increased their presence substantially by 2006 in Wardak, Logar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces and began expanding along the western edge of Kabul province.³² Other anti-government elements (AGEs) operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani network³³ and Al Qaeda affiliates, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).³⁴ This

²³ Clark, K., An April Day that Changed Afghanistan 2: Afghans remember the ‘Saur Revolution’, AAN, 27 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁴ Barfield, T., A Cultural and Political History, 2010, p. 234; BBC News, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 31 January 2018, [url](#); Ipsos/ICRC, Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey, June 2009, [url](#), p. 10; Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), pp. 7-9.

²⁵ BBC News, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 31 January 2018, [url](#); HRW, Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, July 2001, [url](#), pp. 13-17; International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), p. 3

²⁶ Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), p. 10

²⁷ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahim, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, [url](#), p. 22.

²⁸ CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 4 July 2014, [url](#)

²⁹ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), p. 5

³⁰ Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), p. 13; UNAMA, Eighth Anniversary Today of 2001 Afghan Interim Authority, 22 December 2009, [url](#)

³¹ Guardian (The), The Afghan interim government: who’s who, 6 December 2001, [url](#); New York Times (The), Election of Karzai Is Declared Official, 4 November 2004, [url](#)

³² International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), p. 7

³³ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), pp. 14-15

³⁴ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014, [url](#), p. 6.

insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and suicide bombs and complex³⁵ attacks, intimidation of civilians and targeted killings to destabilise the country. This was countered by searches, clearance operations and bombings by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international military forces.³⁶

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the security situation deteriorated after 2005. The conflict deepened throughout 2007 and 2008, directly affecting around a third of the country.³⁷

From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread into all regions of Afghanistan.³⁸ By the end of 2014, a transition of security responsibility from international troops to the ANSF was completed. The support for the further development of the ANSF continued 'under a new, smaller non-combat NATO-led mission ("Resolute Support")'.³⁹

After the 2014 international military withdrawal, the Taliban have fastly expanded their presence countrywide.⁴⁰ The report of the UN Secretary General in August 2017 noted that the Taliban had been able to control larger parts of the country and the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan Province (ISKP) added 'a new, dangerous dimension' to the situation.⁴¹

According to UNAMA, in 2018 fighting intensified particularly in the east, southeast and in some areas within the south. The Taliban 'made territorial gains in sparsely populated areas, and advanced their positions in areas that had not seen fighting in years'.⁴² Human Rights Watch noted that although the Taliban claimed to target government and foreign military facilities only, their indiscriminate use of force killed and injured hundreds of civilians.⁴³

1.1.2 Political landscape

The disputed 2014 presidential election resulted in a political compromise which led to the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), under the Presidency of Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Divisions within the government, particularly between Ghani and Abdullah and their camps, severely compromised the NUG's effectiveness.⁴⁴ According to the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN) in January 2017, 'its complex power-sharing arrangements [have] paralysed governance in Afghanistan'.⁴⁵

A series of violent events in Kabul in May-June 2017 caused a political crisis, resulting in a 'significant shift in the political climate' marked by a rift between President Ghani and key members of the Jamiaat-e Islami party.⁴⁶ The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG⁴⁷ and

³⁵ See [Glossary](#).

³⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014, [url](#), pp. 5, 9, 21

³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report On Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2008, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸ UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, [url](#), p. 2.

³⁹ NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, Afghanistan: Growing Challenges, 30 April 2017, [url](#)

⁴¹ UN Secretary-General, Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 10 August 2017, [url](#), p. 3.

⁴² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 8

⁴³ HRW, World Report 2019 - Afghanistan, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Foreign Policy, NUG One Year On: Struggling to Govern, 29 September 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁵ AAN, What to Watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017, 27 January 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁶ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

in the first eight months of 2017, the government made progress on high-level appointments, which had previously been a source of tension.⁴⁸

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018. In September 2017, the UN Secretary General called this timeline 'ambitious' but 'achievable'.⁴⁹ However, as a result of security challenges and voter registration reforms the long-delayed parliamentary elections were rescheduled again to October 2018.⁵⁰ Parliamentary elections were held in 32 provinces on 20-21 October 2018.⁵¹ Voting in Kandahar was delayed by a week after the assassination of the provincial police chief in a Taliban-claimed attack two days before the original date of the elections.⁵² Voting in Ghazni was postponed indefinitely due to security issues and disagreements around constituencies and will be held at the same time as the presidential election.⁵³

Although voter turnout in Kabul and other urban centres was reportedly high, technical and organisational problems occurred at some of the 4 900 polling stations across the country. In some polling stations machines registering fingerprints and portrait photos aiming to prevent double voting did not function properly while in others election staff had difficulties handling them.⁵⁴

From the beginning of the voter registration period until the day before the elections UNAMA verified 152 election-related security incidents that resulted in 496 civilian casualties (156 deaths, 340 injured). Similar to the trends observed during the presidential election of 2014, in the 2018 election 'UNAMA verified reports of the Taliban warning citizens not to register to vote in the elections, fining citizens and/or confiscating the national identity cards (tazkiras) of those who did register and threatening to punish election-related staff if they continued their work, including with death'.⁵⁵

In December 2018 the IEC announced a three-month delay for the presidential election which was originally scheduled for 20 April 2019. Provincial and district council elections were planned for 20 July 2019, along with the previously postponed parliamentary vote in Ghazni province. Reasons for the postponement included winter weather conditions across much of the country in April and also the expense of holding four elections separately.⁵⁶ In March 2019 the elections have been postponed again, this time to 28 September 2019 in an attempt to 'to iron out problems with the voting process'.⁵⁷ IEC has published the preliminary list of presidential candidates that includes incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former national security adviser, Muhammad Hanif Atmar and also Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁵⁸ Interior Minister Amrullah Saleh, once a devoted critic of the president stepped down from his position to join Ghani's team as a candidate for the post of vice president.⁵⁹ Appointing Saleh was an effort from the ethnic Pashtun Ghani to neutralize a political opponent and to get the support of the Tajiks, among whom Saleh has a strong backing.⁶⁰

⁴⁸ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017, [url](#), p. 2; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 13

⁵⁰ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan's elections: All you need to know, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹ Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵² CNN, Kandahar goes to the polls in Afghan parliamentary vote delayed by violence, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵³ Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Diplomat (The), Afghan Parliamentary Elections Marred by Technical Troubles and Insecurity, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁶ France24, Afghan presidential election delayed until July 20, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan's 2019 elections (2): Who is running to become the next president?, AAN, 11 February 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan Presidential Race Takes Shape as Ghani's Challengers Emerge, 18 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Reuters, Afghanistan's Ghani launches bid for second presidential term, 20 January 2019, [url](#)

1.1.3 Peace talks

After the collapse of the Doha peace talks in June 2013, talks did not resume before the new president, Ashraf Ghani, was inaugurated in September 2014.⁶¹ In January 2015, the Taliban stated that its preconditions for entering peace talks were the end of foreign military presence, the establishment of an Islamic government and the implementation of *sharia*.⁶² After the death of Mullah Omar was revealed in July 2015, a power struggle broke out within the Taliban which, at least in part, prevented further progress in the peace talks.⁶³

In January 2016, the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China formed a Quadrilateral Coordination Group to take forward the peace talks. However, the Taliban refused to engage with this process.⁶⁴ In September 2016, the government signed a peace deal with Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG). Describing HIG as a 'fading insurgent group', Borhan Osman explained in 2016 the likely effect of this deal on the battlefield as 'unlikely to significantly lower the current levels of violence'.⁶⁵

In 2017, President Ghani offered the Taliban a 'last chance' for reconciliation at the 'Kabul-process', 'an international conference aiming to set the stage for peace talks and restore security in Afghanistan'.⁶⁶ However, according to a September 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General '[n]o discernible progress has been made in fostering negotiations between the Government and the Taliban'.⁶⁷

In February 2018 the Afghan government presented very 'concrete proposals for peace talks with the Taliban' which, according to AAN, was 'the most complete peace offer that has been publicly announced since 2001'. Although President Ghani's peace plan was offered 'without any preconditions', it was made clear that issues as women's rights or the basic values of the constitution were not up for negotiation. While the proposal included the prospect of establishing a Taliban office in Kabul, the possibility of a ceasefire and also lifting the sanctions on those Taliban leaders who would join the negotiation, the Taliban accused Ghani of 'missing the point' namely their key demand on the withdrawal of foreign troops.⁶⁸

In June 2018 'President Ghani called a unilateral halt to all offensive government actions' over the Muslim holiday of Eid ul-Fitr which the Taliban also joined.⁶⁹ However, the Taliban rejected the President's idea of extending the ceasefire and continued to refuse official negotiations with the Afghan government.⁷⁰

International diplomatic efforts intensified towards peace with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation in September 2018⁷¹ and with Russia hosting a meeting in November 2018 on the peace process that was attended by 11 countries and the Taliban as well.⁷²

Both tracks of negotiations continued in 2019. The Moscow meeting in the beginning of February 2019 brought together the Taliban delegation led by chief negotiator, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai

⁶¹ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁶² UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 27 February 2015, [url](#), p. 3

⁶³ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁴ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁵ Osman, B., Peace With Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?, AAN, 29 September 2016, [url](#)

⁶⁶ DW, Ashraf Ghani offers Taliban 'last chance' for peace, 6 June 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁸ Ruttig, T. and Bjelica, J., Who shall cease the fire first? Afghanistan's peace offer to the Taleban, AAN, 1 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹ Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to imagine their country at peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Ruttig, T., Getting to the Steering Wheel: President Ghani's new set of peace proposals, AAN, 4 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ USDOS, Zalmay Khalilzad - Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, n.d., [url](#)

⁷² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 9

and senior Afghan politicians led by former President Hamid Karzai. The talks were scheduled just a week after the US and the Taliban finished six days of negotiations in Qatar.⁷³ According to AAN co-director and senior analyst Thomas Ruttig, while in Doha progress was being made in the form of an agreed draft framework, the negotiations so far did not involve the Afghan government, one of the main three parties to the conflict, since their inclusion is blocked by the Taliban.⁷⁴ The next round of talks, the highest level negotiations yet, began on 25 February 2019 between the insurgent group and the US involving Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's deputy leader.⁷⁵ Although his presence could improve the chances of making progress, it is not clear how a deal could be reached given the absence of discussion between the Taliban and the Afghan government.⁷⁶

A consultative Loya Jirga was initially planned in Kabul in March 2019 with the goal of creating a framework for the Afghan government to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban. The gathering of Afghan politicians and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders was supposed to discuss negotiations with the Taliban along with the government's 'values and red lines', however it was postponed.⁷⁷

1.1.4 International context

In 2017, the US decided to slow down its troop withdrawal and, in August, President Donald Trump promised to deploy more American troops to Afghanistan to continue to train Afghan forces.⁷⁸

However, in late December 2018 media reported that President Trump decided to withdraw around 7 000 troops from Afghanistan, about half of the remaining US force there.⁷⁹ As of December 2018, there were an estimated 14 000 US troops in Afghanistan.⁸⁰ Around 8 500 of them are part of the Resolute Support Mission, a 17 000-strong international NATO force that is training and advising the Afghan military.⁸¹ The timing and extent of the potential withdrawal of US troops remained uncertain as of February 2019, although US acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan stated that any potential withdrawal from Afghanistan would be 'coordinated' with other NATO members.⁸²

In 2016-2017 Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan were tense⁸³ and remained tenuous in 2018.⁸⁴ Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists⁸⁵ and escalating border tensions resulted in Pakistan building a fence on the border to prevent the movement of militants.⁸⁶ USDoD noted that even though Pakistani military operations disrupted some militant safe havens, certain groups, such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network enjoyed freedom of movement in Pakistan.⁸⁷ Following Imran Khan's inauguration as Prime Minister of Pakistan in August 2018, the two countries continued efforts to improve their relations.⁸⁸ As part of a 'confidence-building measure' and showing

⁷³ New York Times (The), In Moscow, Afghan Peace Talks Without the Afghan Government, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Ruttig, T., "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed": First steps in Afghan peace negotiations, AAN, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵ New York Times (The), U.S. and Taliban Begin Highest-Level Talks Yet on Ending Afghan War, 25 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶ BBC News, Afghan peace talks: Taliban co-founder meets top White House envoy, 25 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷ RFE/RL, Afghan Loya Jirga Aimed At Discussing Peace Talks Delayed, 3 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸ New York Times (The), Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details, 21 August 2017, [url](#); New York Times (The), U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁹ RFE/RL, What Would A U.S. Troop Reduction In Afghanistan Mean?, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰ CNN, US military ordered to begin planning to withdraw about half the troops in Afghanistan, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

⁸² RFE/RL, U.S. Vows 'No Unilateral' Troop Reduction In Afghanistan, 14 February 2019, [url](#)

⁸³ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017 [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁴ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁸⁵ Daily Pakistan, Pakistan desires peace, stability in Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif, 2 September 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Dawn, Pakistan holds 'keys to war', says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 24

⁸⁸ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

that Pakistan opted for a constructive role in the Afghan peace talks, Islamabad released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar who had been imprisoned since 2010. Mullah Baradar was appointed as a new leader for the Taliban's political office in Qatar, effectively making him the chief negotiator on behalf of the insurgent group for the peace talks with the US.⁸⁹ However, in January 2019 President Ghani suggested that Pakistan was a safe haven for militants and their cross-border activities by saying that the 'keys to war are in Islamabad, Quetta, [and] Rawalpindi'.⁹⁰

In 2017, there were several accounts of Russia and Iran actively supporting the Taliban.⁹¹ According to USDOD, Iran is trying to grow ties with the Afghan government through trade and economic investments while providing support to the Taliban without alienating Kabul.⁹² Tehran viewed the Taliban as a useful tool to resist US influence on its border. Providing military equipment to them puts enough pressure on the United States without the risk of military retaliation.⁹³

Although Russia denied organising talks between Taliban representatives and an Afghan delegation led by Hamid Karzai, Moscow hosted meetings on the peace process in November 2018 and February 2019 and according to RFE/RL it is 'highly unlikely such a high-profile event would be allowed to take place in Moscow without the Kremlin's blessing'.⁹⁴

1.2 Actors in the conflict

1.2.1 Pro-government forces

The Pro-Government Forces (PGF) include the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) other forces and groups acting in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations directly or indirectly under the control of the Government of Afghanistan and also include International Military Forces (IMF) and other foreign intelligence and security forces.⁹⁵

In 2018, UNAMA attributed 24 % of civilian casualties to Pro-Government Forces documenting 2 612 civilian casualties (1 185 deaths and 1 427 injured) that PGF were responsible for. Compared to 2017, this shows a 24 % increase in civilian casualties attributed to PGF that was mainly driven by a considerable increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations by IMF and from search operations by ANSF and pro-Government armed groups.⁹⁶

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or Afghan National Defense And Security Forces (ANDSF) is an 'umbrella' term that includes the Afghan Border Force, Afghan Local Police, Afghan National Army, Afghan Air Force, Afghan National Police, Afghan National Civil Order Force, Afghan Special Forces, Afghan Territorial Army, and the National Directorate of Security.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ RFE/RL, 'Hopeful Moment': How An 'Afghan-Led, Afghan-Owned' Peace Process Might Look, 29 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰ Dawn, Pakistan holds 'keys to war', says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹ Business Insider, Russia appears to now be helping out the Taliban, 27 January 2017 [url](#); Washington Post (The), Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms, 24 April 2017 [url](#); Wall Street Journal (The), Iran Backs Taliban With Cash and Arms, 11 June 2015 [url](#); VoA, Afghan Lawmakers to Investigate Growing Ties Between Taliban, Russia and Iran, 5 December 2016 [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Governor Accuses Iran Of Supporting Taliban, 31 July 2017 [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 [url](#), p. 9. Some observers are more sceptical about Russia's direct involvement. See: Atlantic (The), Is Russia Really Arming the Taliban?, 25 August 2017, [url](#)

⁹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 27

⁹³ USIP, Iran and Afghanistan's Long, Complicated History, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴ RFE/RL, 'Intra-Afghan' Talks Under Way In Moscow Amid Continuing Violence, 5 February 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban: Russia meeting 'not about direct talks' with Kabul, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 59, 65

⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 62

According to USDOD the ANDSF's total authorised force level remained 352 000 personnel as of December 2018. This includes 227 374 ANA and 124 626 ANP personnel, but excludes 30 000 Afghan Local Police (ALP), who are under the command of the Ministry of Interior (MoI).⁹⁸ However, according to the US military's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the actual personnel strength of the ANDSF as of 31 October 2018 was 308 693 personnel which is considered the lowest since the Resolute Support (RS) mission started in January 2015.⁹⁹

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Washington's top priority was to build up new security forces but low morale, corruption and desertion are plaguing this process.¹⁰⁰ USDOD noted that attrition remained a problem for both the ANA and the ANP.¹⁰¹ Reasons for attrition included fatalities, soldiers going AWOL¹⁰² or declining to re-enlist.¹⁰³ In January 2019, President Ghani stated that more than 45 000 members of the Afghan security forces have been killed since he took office in 2014.¹⁰⁴ According to SIGAR, 'green-on-green' insider attacks (ANDSF personnel being attacked from within their own ranks, sometimes by an insurgent infiltrator) remain a significant problem for the ANDSF.¹⁰⁵

In December 2018, USDOD attributed the greatest portion of ANA and ANP attrition¹⁰⁶ rates to the number of personnel 'dropped from the rolls' (DFR)¹⁰⁷ but also noted that DFR rates for both the ANA and the ANP are at the lowest they have been during Resolute Support Mission. DFRs occur for a number of reasons, including low pay, delays in pay, harsh living conditions, denial of leave, intimidation by insurgents and seasonality. USDOD found poor leadership to be the single greatest contributor to DFRs with soldiers and police growing 'disillusioned with leaders who fail to take care of them with leave, promotion, and pay in accordance with standing policies'. Although both the ANA and the ANP have policies to prevent personnel from being absent without leave, enforcement of these policies and accountability remained inconsistent.¹⁰⁸

In 2017, the Afghan government started implementing a four-year 'Road Map' to streamline and bolster the ANSF. The aim of the plan is to ensure the government's control over population centres by tackling leadership issues, resource management and rampant corruption, and by doubling the size and combat power of the Special Forces, strengthening the air component, and moving the police away from a combat missions to civil policing.¹⁰⁹

According to USDOD, the ANDSF's 2018 Annual Campaign Plan 'marked the transition from a defensive, reactive posture to a deliberate offensive posture'. Although the ANDSF is making efforts to become more offensive, ANDSF intelligence failed to detect preparation prior to the attacks on provincial centres in Farah (May 2018) and Ghazni (August 2018), which suggests intelligence capabilities require significant improvement.¹¹⁰

UNAMA attributed 1 535 civilian casualties (606 deaths and 929 injured) to ANSF in 2018.¹¹¹

⁹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 41

⁹⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 79

¹⁰⁰ DW, Afghanistan security forces suffer steep decline in numbers, says SIGAR, 1 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁰² See [Glossary](#).

¹⁰³ Al Jazeera, 'Will never rejoin': Record casualties take toll on Afghan forces, 23 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ BBC News, Afghanistan's Ghani says 45,000 security personnel killed since 2014, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 80

¹⁰⁶ See [Glossary](#).

¹⁰⁷ See [Glossary](#).

¹⁰⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 42-43

¹⁰⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017, [url](#), p. 94; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 2-3; Marty, F. J., Expanding Afghanistan's Special Operations Forces: Doubling their success or further diluting their mission?, AAN, 2 October 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 36

¹¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 34

Afghan National Army (ANA)

The ANA reports to the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and is part of the armed forces of Afghanistan.¹¹²

The ANA General Staff controls all of Afghanistan's ground and air forces, including the ANA conventional forces, the Afghan Air Force (AAF), the Special Mission Wing (SMW), the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC), the Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF) and the Afghan Border Force (ABF).¹¹³

According to USDOD, the authorised strength of ANA was 227 374 as of December 2018,¹¹⁴ while SIGAR reported that the actual strength of ANA and AAF as of October 2018 was 190 753 personnel (not including civilians). This represents a 24 415-person increase from the same period in 2017, although the figures are skewed due to the transfer of 30 689 personnel from two MoI force elements (ANCOP and Afghan Border Police) to MoD. The ANA's 190 753 personnel consisted of 83 534 soldiers, 72 456 non-commissioned officers and 34 763 officers. The majority of attrition was experienced by ANA's soldier ranks (1 827), followed by non-commissioned officers (908), and officers (529).¹¹⁵

The ANA is organised into one division and six regional corps, as well as Special Forces units and the Air Force. Each corps typically comprises three to four infantry brigades and various specialty battalions.¹¹⁶ The 201st Corps, 203rd Corps, 205th Corps, 207th Corps, 209th Corps, and 215th Corps are responsible for different geographic regions, while the 111th Capital Division is independent and is responsible for security in Kabul.¹¹⁷

As part of the government's 'Road Map' the Afghan Border Police and Afghan National Civil Order Police were transferred to the ANA.¹¹⁸ The Afghan Border Force, previously known as the Afghan Border Police transferred from the MoI to the MoD in December 2017 with the aim of creating seven ABF Brigades under the operational control of ANA corps commanders. The ABF's mission is to maintain security in border zones and support ANA operations.¹¹⁹

The reorganization of the Afghan National Civil Order Police was completed in March 2018 with the transfer of the majority of the 13 000 personnel to the MoD.¹²⁰ Despite the reorganization the renamed Afghan National Civil Order Force's (ANCOF) mission did not change: they deal with civil unrest, react to insurgent activities in remote and high-threat areas, conduct civil order presence patrols, and provide crisis response to public unrest and terrorist attacks in urban and metropolitan areas.¹²¹

President Ghani announced the establishment of the Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA TF) in April 2018.¹²² The goal was to create a local security force that is more effective, professional, sustainable and led by MoD. Contrary to the ALP, the MoD will command and control locally recruited, but nationally trained ANA TF personnel.¹²³ Each company (*tolai*) recruits soldiers from a particular district but is led by officers from outside that district, already serving in the regular ANA or being in the ANA reserves. The aim is for the ANA TF is to be 36 000 strong.¹²⁴ The first three companies

¹¹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017, [url](#), p. 41.

¹¹³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 69

¹¹⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 69

¹¹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 83

¹¹⁶ USIP, Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces, May 2016, [url](#), p. 14.

¹¹⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 70

¹¹⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017, [url](#), pp. 94, 106-107; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹¹⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 70-71

¹²⁰ NATO, Ministry of Defense takes command of police unit, 27 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²¹ GlobalSecurity, Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF), n.d., [url](#)

¹²² Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

¹²³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 39

¹²⁴ Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

completed training in September 2018 and are functioning in their home districts under the leadership of ANA.¹²⁵

The Afghan Air Force (AAF) is 'the primary air enabler for the ANA ground forces by providing aerial fires and lift support to ground forces across Afghanistan' with their headquarters in Kabul. As USDOD noted, human capital limitations are one of the largest challenges that AAF has to face with only a limited number of Afghans meeting the needed qualifications.¹²⁶

UNAMA documented a steady increase in civilian casualties caused by aerial operations of PGF in 2018. 1 015 civilian casualties (536 deaths and 479 injured) were recorded from 173 aerial operations conducted by Pro-Government Forces, marking a 61 % increase in civilian casualties caused by this tactic compared to 2017. While in 2016 and 2017 the AAF was responsible for most of the civilian casualties caused by aerial operations, in 2018 with the majority of casualties were attributed to international military forces.¹²⁷

Afghan National Police (ANP)

According to USDOD, the ANP's mission is 'to maintain civil order; reduce corruption; prevent the cultivation, production, and smuggling of illegal narcotics; provide security for individuals and the community; and safeguard legal rights and freedoms'.¹²⁸ The ANP's total authorised strength as of December 2018 was at 124 626.¹²⁹ The actual strength of the ANP, as of October 2018, was 117 940 personnel. This figure represents a 28 398-person decrease since October 2017, which was mostly due to the transfer of 30 689 ANCOP and ABP personnel to MoD.¹³⁰

While the ANP focuses on working alongside the ANA to fight the insurgency, the long-term goal of the ANDSF Road map is to transition the ANP to a more traditional community police force.¹³¹

The Afghan National Police's geographical zones approximately match those of the ANA Corps boundaries, but not entirely.¹³²

Afghan Local Police (ALP)

In August 2010, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was created as a security initiative led by the Ministry of Interior and funded by the US government.¹³³ Officially, the ALP reports to the MoI at national level but, in practice, since June 2015, it has been subordinated to the Afghan Uniform Police,¹³⁴ however it is not counted as part of the ANSF's authorised end strength.¹³⁵ The ALP provide security within villages and rural areas to protect the population and the facilities from insurgent attacks. Members of ALP are recruited in agreement with local elders and employed within villages.¹³⁶

According to SIGAR, ALP district leaders and checkpoint leaders coordinate the ALP's daily activities. The 'guardians', the lowest rank, make up the overwhelming majority of ALP personnel.¹³⁷

¹²⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 26

¹²⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 72

¹²⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 38

¹²⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 98

¹²⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 99

¹³⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 96-97

¹³¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 99

¹³² SIGAR, Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan, September 2017, [url](#), p. 121.

¹³³ LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](#)

¹³⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, [url](#), p. 107

¹³⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017, [url](#), p. 104; Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 100-101

¹³⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, [url](#), p. 107; SIGAR, A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction, October 2015, [url](#), p. 2

As of November 2018, the ALP had around 28 000 guardians, of whom 23 000 were fully trained.¹³⁸ Their training is a four-week course that includes ‘instruction in the use of weapons, checkpoint defence, human rights, avoiding civilian casualties, dealing with detainees and hygiene’.¹³⁹

According to LA Times ‘ALP members often supply their own weapons and are paid salaries of about 100 USD or more per month’, a much smaller amount than the salaries of soldiers and police. Some are not paid on time and according to allegations, some ALP units supplement incomes through illegal means. ALP members have sustained disproportionately heavy casualties because they are often deployed in remote areas.¹⁴⁰ They are particularly targeted by the Taliban which, according to the co-director of the Afghanistan Analyst Network, Kate Clark, ‘suggests that in some places at least, they are a difficult enemy for the insurgents to deal with’¹⁴¹ since they have ‘intimate knowledge of the enemy’ and are prepared to stand and defend territory.¹⁴²

The goal of the US initiative to create ALP was to mobilise local communities to substitute government forces that had been failing according to US military. However, with the expansion of the programme, ALP units were increasingly captured by local powerbrokers and/or local ethnic, tribal or factional interests and were abusive against the local population. In Ghazni province’s Andar district for example, uprising forces and ALP managed to drive out the Taliban of much of the district, but later lost the community support due to their abusive behaviour.¹⁴³ According to SIGAR, as of September 2018, 70 ALP personnel were determined to be under the influence of power brokers across nine provinces. This marks a significant decrease from 219 personnel in July 2018 across 12 provinces. Furthermore, 63 % of ALP personnel determined to be under the influence of power brokers were in Nangarhar, Takhar and Kunar.¹⁴⁴

Based on an overview of different studies on the ALP, some ALP-groups are considered to have brought stability and security and have been welcomed by communities. Other ALP units, especially those who are imposed on communities, have been more problematic. This is especially the case in the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Baghlan and Kunduz and in certain districts in Uruzgan, Ghazni and Wardak.¹⁴⁵ AAN gave the example of Yahyakhel district of Paktika province, where the ALP operates in an inclusive, accountable way. Here the ALP stays under the control of the tribes who work together, in a partnership instead of having the force monopolised by only one ethnic or tribal group.¹⁴⁶

UNAMA attributed a total of 38 civilian casualties (14 deaths and 24 injured) to the Afghan Local Police in 2018, adding that recruitment and use of children remained a problem in the force.¹⁴⁷

Pro-Government Militias

UNAMA defines a pro-government armed group as:

‘an organized armed non-State actor engaged in conflict and distinct from Government Forces, rebels and criminal groups. Pro-Government armed groups do not include the Afghan Local Police, which fall under the command and control of the Ministry of Interior. These

¹³⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 100

¹³⁹ Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid and exist, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid and exist, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴² Osman, B. and Clark, K., Enemy Number One: How the Taliban deal with the ALP and uprising groups, AAN, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 101

¹⁴⁵ Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 34, 14

armed groups have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan. Armed groups have the capacity to employ arms in the use of force to achieve political, ideological or other objectives; are not within the formal military structures of States, State-alliances or intergovernmental organizations; and are not under the control of the State(s) in which they operate. In some cases, armed groups receive direct/indirect support of the host Government or other States. This definition includes, but is not limited to, the following groups: “national uprising movements”, local militias (ethnically, clan or otherwise based), and civil defence forces and paramilitary groups (when such groups are clearly not under State control)’.¹⁴⁸

A specific local security structure that has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years is the *arbaki*, community or tribal armies.¹⁴⁹ From the beginning of the insurgency, different paramilitary initiatives have been developed and formalised to support the Afghan government and assist the formal armed forces of Afghanistan. The government and international military forces have also relied on militias that are not part of any formal government entity, for conducting searches, night raids or executions. The formalised paramilitary initiatives have all ceased except for the ALP (see [section on ALP](#)), now operating within the official security structures.¹⁵⁰

In 2015, the government developed a ‘National Uprising Support Strategy’ to cover areas in Afghanistan where ANSF presence was limited. The NDS reportedly hired village or tribal elders to ‘propose “national uprising” group members, who NDS subsequently vets’. The strength of these armed groups varied from 22 to 500 fighters, commanded by NDS or ANP.¹⁵¹ The Afghan government, NDS and CIA are known to arm strongmen to fight the Taliban and other militants but some militia leaders use their new power to fight local turf wars. According to the LA Times, various militias and personal armed groups also battle amongst themselves over political influence.¹⁵²

In 2017, UNAMA documented abuses by pro-Government armed groups especially in Faryab, but also in Jawzjan, Samangan, Daikundi, Khost, Kunduz, Paktya, Helmand and Balkh provinces.¹⁵³ Because of the links these local militia often have to local or national powerbrokers, their human rights abuses often occur in an atmosphere of impunity.¹⁵⁴

Pro-Government armed groups caused 180 civilian casualties (99 deaths and 81 injured) in 53 incidents, and were responsible for 12 conflict-related abductions throughout 2018. This represents a 94 % increase in civilian casualties caused by pro-Government armed groups compared to 2017. Civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government armed groups mainly occurred during ground engagements (43 %) and search operations (28 %), with the latter becoming a main concern. The majority of these casualties were caused by the Khost Protection Force in Khost, Paktya, and Paktika provinces, while the remaining civilian casualties mainly occurred in Faryab and Takhar provinces.¹⁵⁵

Kate Clark described the Khost Protection Force as a ‘campaign force’ that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. Similar militias include the Kandahar Strike Force and Paktika’s Afghan Security Guards. There are longstanding allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions.¹⁵⁶ UNAMA added that the

¹⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 65

¹⁴⁹ Seraj, A., Opinion: The Arbaki can secure Afghanistan better than the US, 5 November 2014, [url](#); HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, September 2011, [url](#), pp. 13-14.

¹⁵⁰ HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, September 2011, [url](#), pp. 1-2; Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, AAN, 2 April 2013, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url](#), pp. 65-66

¹⁵² LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2017, February 2018, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁵⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017, [url](#), p. 94; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, [url](#), pp. 60-61

¹⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 35-36

¹⁵⁶ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

Khost Protection Force functions outside of the regular military command and control structures and its operations are often not coordinated with the local authorities.¹⁵⁷

In 2018, UNAMA verified 22 incidents involving 107 civilian casualties (70 deaths and 37 injured) as a result of operations by the Khost Protection Force. This shows a significant increase compared to 2017, when UNAMA attributed five civilian casualties (three deaths and two injured) to the Khost Protection Force.¹⁵⁸

The majority of civilian deaths attributed to the Khost Protection Force were caused by intentional shooting, mostly during search operations.¹⁵⁹

International Military Forces

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

“‘international military forces’ include all foreign troops forming part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission as well as US Forces-Afghanistan who, in addition to participating in the Resolute Support Mission, are also engaged in counterterrorism operations as part of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. The term also encompasses Special Operations Forces and other foreign intelligence and security forces’.”¹⁶⁰

From 2010 on, the process of gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF was implemented, to be completed by the end of 2014.¹⁶¹ On 31 December 2014, ISAF’s mandate expired and on 1 January 2015, this led to the transition from NATO’s ISAF combat mission to a new non-combat mission, Resolute Support, with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF.¹⁶²

According to NATO, the total Resolute Support Mission strength was around 17 000 in February 2019, with the goal to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces.¹⁶³ In total, 39 countries contribute to RS with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.¹⁶⁴ As of December 2018, nearly 14 000 US military personnel were serving in Afghanistan as part of the US Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS) mission. Around 8 500 of them are assigned to the NATO RS mission, while remaining US military personnel ‘serve the OFS mission in support roles or in conducting air operations, training the Afghan special forces, and conducting counterterror operations’.¹⁶⁵

In 2018, UNAMA attributed 674 civilian casualties (406 deaths and 268 injured) to international military forces with 94 % of those casualties resulting from aerial operations.¹⁶⁶

1.2.2 Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

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

“‘Anti-Government Elements’ encompass all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as “Taliban” as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels

¹⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁵⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 65

¹⁶¹ NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, [url](#)

¹⁶² NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, updated on: 27 February 2015, [url](#); UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, [url](#), p. 2.

¹⁶³ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁴ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 77

¹⁶⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 35

including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as “*Daesh*”, Islamic State and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf a party to the conflict.¹⁶⁷

Besides the main AGE forces (Taliban, including the Haqqani network), several smaller groups have (re)appeared which are sometimes even more radical than the Taliban. Examples of such groups are: the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP),¹⁶⁸ the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU),¹⁶⁹ East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM),¹⁷⁰ Jundullah,¹⁷¹ Lashkar-e-Islam,¹⁷² Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (mainly based in India, but according to USDOS also active in Afghanistan)¹⁷³ and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).¹⁷⁴ USDOD noted in December 2018 that ‘collectively, terrorist and insurgent groups continue to present a formidable challenge to Afghan, U.S., and coalition forces. The presence of more than 20 terrorist organisations in the region creates the largest concentration of terrorist and extremist organisations in the world.’¹⁷⁵

According to an article by the International Business Times (IBT), ISKP and the Taliban share the goal of overthrowing the Afghan government, though ‘the former views itself as part of a global movement, while the latter confines its operations to Afghanistan’.¹⁷⁶

Hezb-e Islami, a group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, made an agreement with the Afghan government in 2016.¹⁷⁷ Hezb-e Islami, which is sometimes referred to as Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), had been called the ‘second-largest insurgent group in Afghanistan’ in the past.¹⁷⁸ According to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), ‘in return for Hezb’s renunciation of violence, the government promised to free Hezb prisoners, incorporate former insurgents into the security services, and resettle thousands of Afghan refugees living in Hezb-affiliated camps inside Pakistan.’¹⁷⁹ Moreover, Hekmatyar was allowed to return to Kabul after two decades in exile. USIP found no evidence that Hezb-e Islami commanders joined other insurgent groups such as the Taliban or ISKP after the agreement. Instead, commanders opposed to it reportedly stayed in Pakistan.¹⁸⁰

In its 2018 annual report on civilian casualties, UNAMA states that

¹⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report, October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁸ UN Secretary General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. IV-VI; AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Middle East Institute, Uzbekistan ups its involvement in Afghanistan, 31 January 2018, [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

AAN experts however doubt a significant ETIM presence in Badakhshan. Callahan, T. and Marty, F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷² USDOS, Rewards for Justice - Reward Offer for Information on Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and Factions Key Leaders, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 315; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷⁴ Washington Post (The), Pakistani Taliban leader Mullah Fazlullah killed in U.S. airstrike in Afghanistan, 15 June 2018, [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p.23; USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 336

¹⁷⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁷⁶ IBT, Isis letter reveals tribal rifts in Afghanistan faction amid war with Taliban and US, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Diplomat (The), What Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Return Means for Afghanistan, 3 May 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, [url](#)

'In 2018, UNAMA attributed 6,980 civilian casualties (2,243 deaths and 4,737 injured) to Anti-Government Elements, a three per cent increase compared with 2017. [...] UNAMA attributed the majority of civilian casualties – 63 per cent – to Anti-Government Elements, with 37 per cent attributed to Taliban, 20 per cent to *Daesh*/ISKP, and six per cent to undetermined and other Anti-Government Elements.'¹⁸¹

Most of the insurgent groups have their roots in prior phases of Afghanistan's conflict history, some even dating back to the first mujahideen period in the 1970s,¹⁸² others to the 1990s.¹⁸³ A more detailed account of their respective backgrounds remains, however, beyond the scope of this report.

Taliban

Thomas Ruttig, co-founder and director of AAN, stated in August 2017 that the Taliban remain '[...] the strongest component among the insurgents by far.'¹⁸⁴ The Taliban leadership ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 and regrouped after its removal from power.¹⁸⁵ According to Antonio Giustozzi, scholar and author of several books on the Taliban, the Taliban '[...] does not have a unified shadow government.'¹⁸⁶ The Taliban have several commissions, among them a military commission¹⁸⁷ and a command structure with, at the lowest level, field commanders overseeing individual groups of fighters.¹⁸⁸ The governing structure and military command is defined in the Taliban's Layha or Code of Conduct.¹⁸⁹ The Taliban issued their first Layha in 2006; the most recent one was published in 2010.¹⁹⁰

The present leader of the movement is former Taliban chief justice Haibatullah Akhundzada.¹⁹¹ He is reportedly a member of the Noorzai tribe from Kandahar. Serajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Mohammad Yaqub, son of Mullah Omar, have been announced as deputies.¹⁹² The Taliban refer to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.¹⁹³

After the announcement of the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2015, a group of Taliban led by Mullah Mohammad Rasool split away from the mainstream Taliban.¹⁹⁴ This faction, known as the Islamic Emirate High Council of Afghanistan (IEHCA), is reportedly active in western Afghanistan. Mullah Rasool was arrested by Pakistani authorities in 2016.¹⁹⁵ His group clashed several times with the Akhundzada-led Taliban in the last years, e.g. in the province of Herat in 2018.¹⁹⁶ In June 2018, the Rasool Taliban reportedly agreed to a truce with government forces. According to the US military news website Stars and Stripes, 'in announcing its cease-fire, it acknowledged it was reciprocating the

¹⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸² Gopal, A. and Strick van Linschoten, A., Ideology in the Afghan Taliban, AAN, 29 June 2017, [url](#); Ruttig, T., How It All Began, AAN, 2013, [url](#)

¹⁸³ CSIS, From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan, March 2010, [url](#), p. 5-7

¹⁸⁴ Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahim, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of Anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, AREU, January 2012, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), pp. 14

¹⁸⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, [url](#), pp. 19-21; BBC News, Who are the Taliban?, 26 May 2016, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Taliban's new chief replaces 24 'shadow' officials, 27 January 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, [url](#), pp. 19-21

¹⁸⁹ Clark, K., The Layha: Calling the Taleban to Account, AAN, 4 July 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., One Land, Two Rules (1): Service delivery in insurgent-affected areas, an introduction, AAN, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ Foreign Affairs, Why the Taliban Isn't Winning in Afghanistan, 3 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹² DuPée, M., Red on Red: Analyzing Afghanistan's Intra-Insurgent Violence, CTC Sentinel, January 2018, [url](#), p. 27; Tolo News, Haibatullah Named Taliban's New Leader, 26 May 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹³ See the Taliban's website: <http://www.alemarah-english.org/>

¹⁹⁴ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, AAN, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ DuPée, M., Red on Red: Analyzing Afghanistan's Intra-Insurgent Violence, CTC Sentinel, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 29-30

¹⁹⁶ Stars and Stripes, Taliban vs. Taliban clash in Afghanistan's west leaves 40 dead, 2 November 2018, [url](#); Ariana News, Infighting Leaves 45 Taliban Militants Killed or Wounded in Herat, 30 November 2018, [url](#)

government's eight-day truce, unlike the main Taliban group, which had earlier announced a three-day cease-fire during the Eid holiday without mention of Kabul's peaceful gesture..¹⁹⁷ According to the Pakistani newspaper Daily Times, IEHCA might disintegrate as two of its key figures left the group to join the main faction of the Taliban in late 2018.¹⁹⁸

In a report on recruitment to the Taliban, Landinfo, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, categorised Taliban fighters into two types: full time professional fighters, often recruited in the madrassas, and part-time local fighters, loyal to a local commander and embedded in the local society.¹⁹⁹ Giustozzi estimated the total manpower of the Taliban to exceed 200 000 in 2017, of which 150 000 were reportedly fighters. Approximately 60 000 of these were members of full-time mobile units, while the remaining were part of local militias. Giustozzi however estimated that the number of full-time fighters active at one and the same time within Afghanistan rarely exceeds 40 000.²⁰⁰ In January 2018, an unnamed US defence official cited in the media estimated the total Taliban strength in Afghanistan to be 60 000, though the same article cites the Long War Journal (LWJ) stating this was a 'low-end estimate'.²⁰¹ According to Giustozzi, fighting is mostly carried out by full-time fighters of the mobile units.²⁰²

In 2015, the Taliban established a 'special forces' unit named Red Unit or Red Brigade (*'sra qet'a'* in Pashto). The fighters of the Red Unit are better equipped and trained. They are generally used as a 'rapid reaction force'²⁰³ for quick interventions and special operations.²⁰⁴ At the end of 2017, the strength of the Red Unit was approximately about 7 500 fighters.²⁰⁵

The large majority of the Taliban are still Pashtuns, 'although there is a growing minority of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Baloch, and even several hundred Hazara members (including Shias)'.²⁰⁶ In some northern areas, the Taliban are reportedly already predominantly non-Pashtun, as they draw recruits from the local population.²⁰⁷

For further information on the structure, leadership, force strength, aims and objectives of the Taliban, please refer to the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#). For more information on the local Taliban fronts and recruitment practices, please refer to Landinfo's Report titled [Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban](#), dated 29 June 2017.

The 2018 spring offensive of the Taliban was named '*al-Khandaq*', referring to a seventh century battle in which the forces of the Prophet Mohammed prevailed over a month-long siege of Medina by Arab and Jewish tribes. Prior to the start of the Taliban's spring offensive, the government forces conducted a pre-emptive strike against various insurgent groups throughout Afghanistan termed *Nasrat* (meaning victory in Arabic). In the wake of the '*al-Khandaq*' operation, the Taliban launched attacks

¹⁹⁷ Stars and Stripes, Taliban splinter group declares open-ended truce with Kabul, 10 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Daily Times, Taliban splinter group fights for survival after two leaders quit, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, 29 June 2017, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁰⁰ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), pp. 12-13

²⁰¹ NBC News, The Taliban is gaining strength and territory in Afghanistan, 30 January 2018, [url](#)

²⁰² Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), pp. 12-13

²⁰³ Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban touts "Special Forces Unit", 6 November 2017, [url](#); National Interest (The), How the Taliban Would Take Over Afghanistan, 10 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Observe Asia, The Red Brigade: the Taliban's special forces play growing role in conflict, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 13

²⁰⁷ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 13; Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

in the provinces of Badakhshan, Ghazni, Kunduz, Paktika and Zabul, as well as in Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Kandahar, and Logar.²⁰⁸

According to UNAMA, between January and September 2018, civilian casualties from ground engagements reached their lowest level since 2013. Among other reasons, this might be attributed to a shift of strategy by the insurgents towards an increased usage of suicide Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). UNAMA however noted that the decreasing number of civilian casualties '[...] also suggests that parties undertook measures to protect civilians from harm during ground operations.'²⁰⁹

In August 2018, the Taliban launched a major attack against Ghazni city. While the insurgents purportedly mainly targeted government forces' security checkpoints and government offices, the fighting caused over 200 civilian casualties (69 deaths and 141 injured), as well as intentional damage on civilian property, according to UNAMA.²¹⁰ In the wake of the 2018 parliamentary election, the Taliban warned the population throughout Afghanistan not to get involved in the election process, as it would potentially target all polling stations. UNAMA verified 388 civilian casualties in total (52 deaths and 336 injured) on election day, of which all but 59 casualties (14 deaths, 45 injured) can be attributed to AGEs, according to UNAMA.²¹¹

For further information on the peace process please see [1.1.3 Peace talks](#).

Haqqani network

The Haqqani network is an insurgent network with origins in the 1970s mujahideen groups.²¹² Its founder, Jalaluddin Haqqani,²¹³ has been attacking Afghan government officials since the early 1970s.²¹⁴ In September 2018, Jalaluddin Haqqani reportedly died aged 71. His son Serajuddin Haqqani had already taken over the leadership of the group at an earlier point of time.²¹⁵ Although the network has maintained an autonomous position it is considered part of the Taliban.²¹⁶ Serajuddin Haqqani was appointed deputy leader of the Taliban in July 2015.²¹⁷ Regarding the Haqqani network's strength, the USDOS stated that it '[...] is believed to have several hundred core members, but it is estimated that the organization is able to draw upon a pool of upwards of 10 000 fighters.'²¹⁸ According to USDOS, the Haqqani network '[...] is active along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and across much of south-eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Loya Paktia, and has repeatedly targeted Kabul in its attacks.'²¹⁹ The group's leadership has historically maintained a power base around Pakistan's tribal areas.²²⁰

²⁰⁸ Jamestown Foundation (The), Taliban Demonstrates Resilience With Afghan Spring Offensive, 2 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, [url](#), p. 5

²¹⁰ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, [url](#), p. 7

²¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

²¹² Ruttig, T., Talking Haqqani, AAN, 1 July 2010, [url](#)

²¹³ Ruttig, T., Talking Haqqani, AAN, 1 July 2010, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), pp. 294-295

²¹⁴ Ruttig, T., Talking Haqqani, AAN, 1 July 2010, [url](#)

²¹⁵ AP, Death of Afghan group's founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁶ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²¹⁷ DuPée, M., Red on Red: Analyzing Afghanistan's Intra-Insurgent Violence, CTC Sentinel, January 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²¹⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 294

²¹⁹ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 294

²²⁰ VoA, What Is the Haqqani Network?, 1 June 2017, [url](#); Economic Times (The), US asks Pakistan to act against Haqqani network, other terror groups, 27 February 2018, [url](#)

Al Qaeda and affiliated groups

In June 2014, the UN Secretary-General reported incidents linked to Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups, mainly operating from Pakistan in the east of Afghanistan.²²¹ Al Qaeda-affiliated groups were reportedly not organised under a coordinated leadership, but they contributed to security problems in border regions with Pakistan.²²² In August 2015, the leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, pledged allegiance to the Taliban.²²³ Al Qaeda was the main target of US drone strikes until 2016. By 2018, Al Qaeda reportedly '[...] has shrunk to relative obscurity [...] supplanted by newer threats such as a local branch of the Islamic State.'²²⁴ USDOS however stated in 2018 that

'although al-Qa'ida (AQ) in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been seriously degraded, remnants of AQ's global leadership, as well as its regional affiliate al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), continued to operate from remote locations in the region that historically have been exploited as safe havens. Afghan and Pakistani forces continued to contest AQ's presence in the region [...]'²²⁵

During peace talks with US officials, the Taliban reportedly agreed in January 2019 to bar international terror groups such as Al Qaeda from Afghanistan.²²⁶

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)/Jundullah

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is an insurgent network consisting of Uzbek adherents to a Salafist-jihadist ideology operating in Afghanistan since the 1990s. IMU allied with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance and later the coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom. In 2001, some IMU fighters followed the defeated Taliban into exile in Pakistan.²²⁷ After publicly admitting Mullah Omar's death, IMU purportedly switched allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015.²²⁸ Subsequently, violent clashes between IMU and the Taliban took place in the province of Zabul in 2015.²²⁹ In October 2015, the Taliban reportedly established a special unit to fight against IMU/ISKP and by December 2015, it had '[...] killed hundreds of IMU fighters in Zabul, including its emir, Uthman Ghazi.'²³⁰ In 2016, a faction of IMU loyal to the Taliban split away from the IS-affiliated part of IMU, according to USDOS.²³¹ In November 2015, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported fractures in the ranks of IMU.²³² Alliances and motives of different dispersed IMU groups became hard to assess²³³ and some of its fighters have been active in Syria and Iraq.²³⁴

A northern group called Jundullah separated from IMU in 2009. The group consists of non-Pashtun Afghans and was said to operate under the umbrella of the Taliban in the north-east of Afghanistan in 2016, even though it had independent command structures. According to AAN, some Jundullah

²²¹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014, [url](#), p. 6

²²² UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, [url](#), pp. 10-11

²²³ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁴ Politico, Whatever happened to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan?, 15 August 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 165

²²⁶ Telegraph (The), Taliban agree Isil and Al-Qaeda will be barred from Afghanistan in major concession during talks with US, 24 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁷ CSIS, From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan, March 2010, [url](#), pp. 5-8

²²⁸ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taliban, AAN, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

²²⁹ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taliban, AAN, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

²³⁰ ICT, Central Asian Jihadists in the Front Line, 4 September 2017, [url](#)

²³¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 302

²³² RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015, [url](#)

²³³ Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 38; RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015, [url](#)

²³⁴ RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015, [url](#)

fighters pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in 2015.²³⁵ This led to armed resistance by the Taliban, causing several Jundullah fighters to flee Kunduz and Takhar.²³⁶

According to AAN's Obaid Ali, the Pashtun Taliban found it 'a challenge to bring the non-Taliban militant groups (IMU and Jundullah) under their banner [in northern Afghanistan]. When they managed to, temporarily, both groups continued to run autonomous fronts and kept separate command structures.'²³⁷

USDOS estimated IMU's strength at 200-300 members.²³⁸ Jundullah and IMU are mainly active in Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Balkh, Baghlan, Sar-e Pul, as well as Faryab and Jawzjan.²³⁹

Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)

The first reports about a branch of IS (also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) in Afghanistan date back to the summer of 2014.²⁴⁰ Initially, the recruited commanders often included discontented Afghan and Pakistani Taliban.²⁴¹ According to AAN, they have been 'quickly decimated in five of the six provinces where they emerged and most of their leaders were killed – mainly by the Taliban who tried to prevent a home-grown rival insurgency group from gaining a foothold on what they considered their own battleground.'²⁴²

Eventually, the group based in Nangarhar won recognition as the head of IS' 'provincial' chapter for Khorasan in Afghanistan.²⁴³ The Nangarhar group envisages global expansion of the caliphate and designates the region of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics as the Wilayat Khorasan (ISKP – Islamic State Khorasan Province).²⁴⁴

ISKP has its stronghold in certain southern districts of Nangarhar,²⁴⁵ where they are fighting with the Taliban for control.²⁴⁶ At its peak in 2015, ISKP was the dominant insurgent group in eight districts of Nangarhar. However, according to AAN,

'ISKP territory had shrunk to four districts by the end of 2015, with territory mainly re-taken by the Taleban. ISKP then dug in through 2016 in all its remaining districts, that is, Achin, Kot and Nazyan in the south-eastern districts (Bati Kot had returned to Taleban control), as well as Deh Bala in the south-west. ISKP's hold over these districts looked firm until mid-March, or the beginning of the Afghan spring 2017, when US and Afghan special forces stepped up their attacks against it. [...] What has added to the pressure on ISKP's Mamand stronghold is not only the penetration of US and Afghan forces into Pekha to the east, but also the group's loss of Kot district to the west.'²⁴⁷

²³⁵ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

²³⁶ Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat's IS-affiliated 'island' survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

²³⁷ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²³⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, [url](#), p. 302

²³⁹ BBC Monitoring South Asia, Afghan MP says Uzbek rebel group recruiting fighters in Afghan north, 10 April 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ Osman, B., Messages in Chalk: 'Islamic State' haunting Afghanistan?, AAN, 17 November 2014, [url](#); LWJ, Mapping the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 March 2015, [url](#)

²⁴¹ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban touts defection of Islamic State 'deputy', 4 December 2017, [url](#)

²⁴² AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, [url](#)

²⁴³ Osman, B., The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, AAN, 27 July 2016, [url](#); AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Jamestown Foundation, Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death, 3 September 2015, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); Reuters, Islamic State beheads 15 of its own fighters: Afghan official, 23 November 2017, [url](#); Clark, K., and Osman, B., More Militias? Part 2: The proposed Afghan Territorial Army in the fight against ISKP, AAN, 23 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ RFE/RL, Taliban, IS Face Off In Afghanistan, 30 October 2017, [url](#); Quilty, A. "Faint lights twinkling against the dark": Reportage from the fight against ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017, [url](#)

ISKP presence reportedly spread to the neighbouring provinces of Kunar²⁴⁸ and, according to government sources, Laghman.²⁴⁹ In July 2018, the UN reported that ISKP attempted to expand its territory and was at the time mainly present in Nangarhar, Nuristan, and Kunar. Furthermore, UN mentioned activities of (self-proclaimed) IS fighters in Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e Pul and Badakhshan.²⁵⁰ Another source stated that ISKP is present in Kunar, Paktika, Paktya, Logar, and Khost in eastern and north-eastern Afghanistan, while it has also been active in the provinces of Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Samangan, Badghis, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Badakhshan.²⁵¹

According to an analysis published by the US Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, ISKP '[...] has been successful in reinforcing its organizational capacity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan by fostering partnerships with regional militant groups.'²⁵² Since 2014, several groups have pledged allegiance to IS or ISKP in Afghanistan, e.g. TTP factions or IMU,²⁵³ while others cooperated with ISKP without a formal pledge of allegiance, e.g. the Jundullah faction of TTP or Lashkar-e Islam.²⁵⁴ AAN noted in 2017 that a pledge to ISKP offered an alternative to disgruntled Taliban leaders, though it remained unclear how deep the cooperation between the 'official' Nangarhar-based ISKP branch and self-proclaimed IS groups (e.g. in Jawzjan, Ghor and Herat) has been.²⁵⁵ Thomas Ruttig labelled these former Taliban factions in northern Afghanistan 'opportunistic pro-IS groups.'²⁵⁶ Casualty numbers attributed to ISKP might vary depending on whether ISKP activities are counted separately from 'self-proclaimed IS group' activities. Without further elaborating on definitions, UNAMA differentiates between casualties from ISKP and 'self-proclaimed ISKP'.²⁵⁷ Accounts on self-proclaimed IS or ISKP presence might however also be inflated, as warnings about ISKP or self-proclaimed IS are 'a useful fund-raising tool': according to Ruttig, ISKP '[...] presence is hyped up by the Afghan government in order to keep Afghanistan in the minds of the West before all foreign aid dries up.'²⁵⁸

ISKP and self-proclaimed IS groups have been under attack from the Taliban, as well as government and international forces.²⁵⁹ According to the magazine Politico, ISKP insurgents became a main target of US drone strikes in 2016.²⁶⁰

ISKP-internal sources claimed the strength of ISKP between 2015 and 2017 at 4 500 to 20 000 members. While Giustozzi stated that the numbers varying between 4 500 and 9 500 correspond with

²⁴⁸ LWJ, US military kills Islamic State Khorasan province leader in Kunar, 13 August 2017, [url](#); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6-7

²⁴⁹ 1TV News, Five killed in Taliban-Daesh clash in Laghman, 23 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ UN Secretary-General, Twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 27 July 2018, [url](#), p. 16

²⁵¹ IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁵² Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. IV

²⁵³ Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 34

²⁵⁴ Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 39-42

²⁵⁵ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#); Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#); Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in Khorasan, 2018, p. 142

²⁵⁶ Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵⁸ National (The), Did ISIL, the Taliban or the Haqqani Network carry out the Kandahar attack?, 12 January 2017, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in Khorasan, 2018, pp. 175-182; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Guardian (The), US 'mother of all bombs' killed 92 Isis militants, say Afghan officials, 15 April 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., Still under the IS's Black Flag: Qari Hekmat's ISKP island in Jawzjan after his death by drone, AAN, 15 May 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁰ Politico, Whatever happened to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan?, 15 August 2018, [url](#)

intelligence information, he stated that '[...] the claim of 20 000 members [...] appears to be quite propagandistic and out of line with previous IS-K claims.'²⁶¹ USDOS estimated the ISKP strength in 2017 at 1 500 to 3 000 fighters,²⁶² while another source stated that ISKP had approximately 4 000 to 6 000 members in 2018.²⁶³ Anatol Lieven, a regional expert at Georgetown University's Qatar campus, claimed in June 2017 that Central Asian fighters form 'a key pillar of support' for the ISKP.²⁶⁴

ISKP claimed several deadly attacks in Kabul²⁶⁵ and to a lesser extent Herat²⁶⁶ aimed at Shias²⁶⁷ and the Hazara minority,²⁶⁸ as well as other targets in 2016-2018.²⁶⁹ AAN noted in August 2017 that ISKP's relative lack of success in gaining ground might have fostered a change in strategy: ISKP '[...] which has recently suffered significant loss of territory and the killing of three consecutive amirs in coalition air strikes, and has failed to profit from the Taliban split in 2015, appears to increasingly use urban terrorism as a means to show its continued presence'.²⁷⁰ The majority of ISKP attacks on religious sites reportedly targeted Shia communities.²⁷¹ Please refer to the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#) for more information on the targeting of Hazara and other Shia by ISKP in Afghanistan.

According to a report published by CTC, ISKP attacks grew considerably in their lethality between 2015 and 2018: while the average number of killed persons per ISKP attack in Afghanistan was 3.9 in 2015, it increased to 13.4 in 2018.²⁷² UNAMA stated in 2018 that

'Daesh/ISKP increased the frequency and intensity of its attacks throughout 2018, particularly in the eastern region. From 1 January to 31 December 2018, UNAMA attributed 138 incidents countrywide resulting in 2,181 civilian casualties (681 deaths and 1,500 injured) to Daesh/ISKP, which represents a 118 per cent increase from 2017. The vast majority of these incidents – 102 – occurred across numerous districts in Nangarhar province, causing 991 civilian casualties, while 20 incidents took place in Kabul province (all in Kabul city) resulting in 1,027 civilian casualties, and reflecting a high level of civilian harm caused by each attack in the densely populated city.'²⁷³

AAN co-director Kate Clark already commented in 2017 that the number of casualties caused by '[...] ISKP is huge, considering their limited territorial footprint, but is a consequence of their willingness to

²⁶¹ Giustozzi, A., *The Islamic State in Khorasan*, 2018, pp. 141-142

²⁶² USDOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2018*, September 2018, [url](#), p. 305

²⁶³ IPP Review, *The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan*, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ IBT, *Isis letter reveals tribal rifts in Afghanistan faction amid war with Taliban and US*, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ Jadoon, A., *Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, December 2018, [url](#), p. 11; UN Secretary-General, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²⁶⁶ taz, *29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat]*, 3 August 2017, [url](#); Reuters, *At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat*, 25 March 2018, [url](#); Jadoon, A., *Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, December 2018, [url](#), p. 11; UN Secretary-General, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, 7 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6

²⁶⁷ taz, *29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat]*, 3 August 2017, [url](#); Reuters, *At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat*, 25 March 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Reuters, *At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat*, 25 March 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ taz, *29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat]*, 3 August 2017, [url](#); Reuters, *At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat*, 25 March 2018, [url](#); UN Secretary-General, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security*, 7 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6

²⁷⁰ AAN, *Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan*, 1 August 2017, [url](#)

²⁷¹ Jadoon, A., *Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, December 2018, [url](#), p. V; UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report: Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices*, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²⁷² Jadoon, A., *Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, December 2018, [url](#), p. 22

²⁷³ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018*, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 20-21

attack unprotected gatherings of civilians for sectarian reasons'.²⁷⁴ In early 2019, she stated that 'meanwhile, ISKP's transformation into a sectarian, terrorist outfit bent on carrying out large-scale, deliberate attacks on civilians in cities has meant calamitous casualties in horrific single attacks.'²⁷⁵

1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

Several sources consider the situation in Afghanistan to be a non-international armed conflict.²⁷⁶

The UN noted in December 2018 that

'The security situation remained volatile, with incidents continuing at consistently high levels. While the number of security incidents in some categories decreased slightly, the overall number of casualties rose owing to an increase in the severity of certain attacks. [...] The southern region saw the highest number of incidents followed by the eastern and south-eastern regions.'²⁷⁷

According to the US Department of Defense, writing in December 2018,

'[t]he Afghan government maintained control of Kabul, main population centers, most key transit routes, provincial capitals, and a majority of district centers. In this reporting period, the Taliban capitalized on the freedom of manoeuvre they maintain in rural areas to mass combat power against poorly defended district centers and checkpoints. Despite the Taliban's proclaimed intent to adopt a more asymmetric approach, the group continued to mass and conduct raids on checkpoints, district centers, and threaten population centers. These types of attacks did not result in significant expansion of Taliban-controlled territory; however, it did test the ability of the ANDSF to respond, resulting in over-extension of the ANA in certain areas.'²⁷⁸

On 7 June 2018, 'President Ghani called a unilateral halt to all offensive government actions' over the Muslim holiday of Eid ul-Fitr which the Taliban also joined, even if they did not refer to the government's announcement.²⁷⁹ This three-day ceasefire from 15 to 17 June 2018 marked 'the first real cessation of hostilities' in the last 17 years and allowed Afghans to go into areas that they had not been able to reach due to the Taliban's control for years.²⁸⁰ According to UNAMA, only one pressure-plate IED incident attributed to the Taliban was documented during the ceasefire and the device was believed to have been planted before. While no civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces were registered during the ceasefire, two major attacks were conducted by ISKP in Nangarhar against Taliban and civilian gatherings that resulted in 181 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 133 injured).²⁸¹

Strategic posts along main roads were temporarily captured by the Taliban in several regions, like in Daymirdad and Sayyidabad districts in Wardak Province, allowing them to successfully restrict movement between provinces. In the northern region, on the Mazar-Shirbingham and Maimana-

²⁷⁴ Clark, K., UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war, AAN, 12 October 2017, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ Gross, R., ICRC, Expert Meeting: The Use of Force in Armed Conflicts, 15 November 2013, [url](#), p. 85; Geiß, R. and Siegrist, M., Has the armed conflict in Afghanistan affected the rules on the conduct of hostilities?, March 2011, [url](#), pp. 13-16; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2017, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2017, [url](#), p. 62; UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, [url](#), p. 10

²⁷⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 5

²⁷⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 24-25

²⁷⁹ Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to imagine their country at peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 50

²⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 9

Andkhoy main roads and in the west, along the Herat-Qala-e Naw road, the Taliban also carried out frequent attacks that resulted in complicating government access and limited the movement of residents.²⁸²

Following the takeover of Kunduz in 2015 and 2016, the Taliban conducted two major assaults on provincial centres in 2018: a one-day attack against Farah City and a five-day assault on Ghazni City.²⁸³

The Taliban indicated their intention to disrupt the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2018 through public statements issued in the weeks before election day. Similar to the trend seen during the 2014 presidential poll, UNAMA verified reports of the Taliban warning Afghans not to register to vote, imposing fines and/or confiscating the national identity cards of those who did register and threatening election-related staff if they continued to work, including with death.²⁸⁴ On 18 October 2018 Kandahar police chief General Abdul Raziq was killed along with the province's intelligence chief, when a bodyguard opened fire after a meeting. The Taliban-claimed attack was major setback for the Afghan government ahead of the elections.²⁸⁵

From the start of voter registration on 14 April 2018 through the end of the year, UNAMA verified 1 007 election related civilian casualties (226 deaths and 781 injured) along with 310 election-related abductions. The majority of election-related incidents and more than half of the civilian casualties were attributed to Taliban, while ISKP was responsible for seven election-related incidents of suicide and non-suicide IED attacks causing 338 civilian casualties (94 deaths and 244 injured).²⁸⁶

The ISKP presence remained significant in the eastern part of the country with reports of clashes between the group and Taliban fighters in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces.²⁸⁷ The group increased the frequency and intensity of its attacks in 2018, particularly in the eastern region. UNAMA found that the substantial increase in civilian casualties attributed to ISKP was mostly due to the increase in suicide and complex attacks, which were mostly carried out against civilians or in civilian-populated areas.²⁸⁸

According to UNAMA, in direct violation of international humanitarian law, Anti-Government Elements relied more on suicide and complex attacks and shifted their intended targets more and more towards the civilian population in 2018.²⁸⁹

1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults

Since the start of the withdrawal of foreign troops (2012), closure of IMF bases and transition of security responsibilities into the hands of the ANSF (2013), the dynamics in the conflict have changed. AGEs have increasingly attacked and challenged ANSF, operating in larger units (up to several hundreds of fighters, using small arms fire, rockets, mortars and grenades). They increasingly took control over larger territories outside the urban centres and became more successful in capturing district administrative centres. Mostly, the ANSF has been able to regain control quickly but certain district centres fell under the sustained control of Taliban forces.²⁹⁰ These developments triggered a

²⁸² UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 19

²⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, [url](#), p. 3

²⁸⁵ Al Jazeera, Top Afghan General Abdul Raziq killed in Kandahar attack, 18 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 27

²⁸⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6-7

²⁸⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 20-21

²⁸⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 22

²⁹⁰ Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency, 2014 [url](#), p. 28; LWJ, Taliban controls or contests scores of districts in Afghanistan, 5 October 2015, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Captures District Center In Afghan Opium Heartland, 26 August 2015, [url](#); Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, AAN, 3 September 2015, [url](#); ISW, Militant Attack and Support Zones in Afghanistan: April

number of ANSF counter-offensives and clearance operations in several provinces.²⁹¹ According to the UN Secretary General, more than half of the recorded security incidents in 2016 and 2017 were armed clashes.²⁹²

UNAMA found that ground engagements, mostly between PGF and AGEs, 'remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties' in 2018, accounting for 31 % (3 382 civilian casualties: 814 deaths and 2 568 injured). UNAMA documented a significant reduction in this cause of civilian casualties in 2017 which seemed to continue in 2018 with a 3 % decrease. The continuous drop in ground engagement casualties was driven by reductions in civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces, while casualties attributed to AGEs remained on par with 2017.²⁹³ Most of the civilian casualties from ground engagements in 2018 (1 394 civilian casualties: 291 deaths and 1 103 injured) were attributed to AGEs, accounting for 41 % of civilian casualties from ground fighting throughout the year.²⁹⁴

According to UNAMA,

'factors for sustained reductions in civilian casualties appeared to include relative decreases in attacks by Anti-Government Elements on densely-populated civilian areas, [...] warnings by parties prior to fighting and displacement of civilians from areas regularly impacted by heavy conflict, and actions taken by Afghan national security forces related to the implementation of the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Mitigation and Prevention'.²⁹⁵

However, Taliban fighters attacked Farah City in May 2018, overran several checkpoints and took control of the main square before Afghan special forces backed by US airpower could drive them out.²⁹⁶

Ghazni City was attacked on 10 August 2018 by Taliban fighters, closing in on the city from their positions in nearby districts, villages and the city's suburb 'that they had systematically occupied in the previous months'. The insurgents disabled the telecommunication network and blocked the main highway in Maidan Wardak and Zabul provinces, and also the main easterly road in Andar district, leading east to Paktika province. As a result, neither the Afghan government nor the public could follow what was happening in the city and the road closure prevented the government from sending in reinforcements.²⁹⁷ According to UNAMA, the fighting caused significant harm to the civilian population not only in terms of casualties (262 civilian casualties verified: 79 deaths, 183 injured) but also because of the infrastructural damage.²⁹⁸ After the attack concerns remained about the possibility of another large-scale assault in the south-east, including against Ghazni City. Although that

- September 2015, 18 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, MPs fear Kunduz-style attacks in other provinces, 5 October 2015, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014, [url](#), pp. I, 11-13, 19-21, 27-28, 36-37; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, [url](#), pp. 4-5; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url](#), p. 7.

²⁹¹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, [url](#), p. 5; RFE/RL, Kabul Says 88 Militants Killed Across Afghanistan, 9 October 2015, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, [url](#), p. 5; Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taliban are expanding territorial control, AAN, 3 September 2015, [url](#); Tolonews, 57 Taliban insurgents killed in nationwide ANSF operations, 2 May 2015, [url](#); Tolonews, 34 Taliban insurgents killed in ANSF operations, 11 May 2015, [url](#); Tolonews, 19 insurgents killed in Afghan forces operations, 3 February 2015, [url](#)

²⁹² UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 4.

²⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 46

²⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 46

²⁹⁶ Al Jazeera, Farah 'getting back to normal' but scars of heavy fighting remain, 20 May 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taliban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 20

did not occur, the Taliban continued to pressure Government forces in the outskirts of the city, surrounding districts and along the main Highway 1, and eventually captured Andar district on 14 October 2018.²⁹⁹

UNAMA found that the level of 'civilian casualties from ground engagements varied by region and province'. In 2018 Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan 'continued to drive the decrease in overall civilian casualties from ground engagements,' while UNAMA registered a significant increase in civilian casualties resulting from ground engagements in Ghazni province, mostly due to the attack in August 2018, and in Baghlan, Balkh, Kunar and Paktya provinces as well.³⁰⁰

1.3.2 Improvised Explosive Devices

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are unconventional explosive weapons that can take any form and can be activated in different ways, targeting soldiers and civilians alike.³⁰¹ IEDs can be operated by the victim (Victim Operated IEDs) or by the attacker (Command-Operated IEDs). Command-Operated IEDs are radio or remote controlled allowing operators to detonate a pre-placed device at a specific time. Victim-Operated IEDs on the other hand detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch (pressure plate or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device). Another category is Suicide IEDs where either the attacker wears an explosive vest or belt or a vehicle is rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside.³⁰²

Although pressure plate IEDs are typically used by AGEs to target security forces, they are planted on public roads routinely used by civilians. Accordingly, their use is inherently indiscriminate as the 'effects cannot be directed against a specific target'.³⁰³ In 2018, Anti-Government Elements' use of IEDs 'remained the leading cause of civilian casualties', accounting for 42 per cent of the total. Suicide and complex attacks resulted in 2 809 civilian casualties (886 deaths and 1 923 injured) in 2018, which is not only a 22 % increase compared to 2017 but also 'the highest number of civilian casualties from such attacks in a single year' since 2009 when UNAMA began the systematic documentation.³⁰⁴

AAN noted that this increase was largely driven by ISKP which was responsible for 87 % of the civilian casualties caused by these types of incidents.³⁰⁵ Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks carried out by AGEs in 2018, UNAMA attributed 21 attacks to the Taliban (642 civilian casualties: 216 deaths, 426 injured) and 36 attacks to ISKP (1 892 civilian casualties: 557 deaths, 1 335 injured).³⁰⁶ Despite being a significantly smaller fighting force than the Taliban and operating from a much smaller territorial base in Nangarhar province than before, ISKP was responsible for one fifth of all civilian casualties in the Afghan conflict.³⁰⁷ According to UNAMA, the number of suicide and complex attacks and the harm they caused radically increased in Nangarhar province due to the heightened activities of ISKP.³⁰⁸

Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks carried out by AGEs in 2018, 28 occurred in Kabul city resulting in 1 686 civilian casualties (554 deaths, 1 132 injuries) and marking a 5 % increase in the number of casualties compared to 2017. According to UNAMA, the attacks in Kabul mostly targeted civilians: the

²⁹⁹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 46-47

³⁰¹ NATO, Improvised explosive devices, 12 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

³⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 8

³⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 21-22

³⁰⁵ Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 22

³⁰⁷ Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 24

civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other 'soft' targets.³⁰⁹

UNAMA documented 1 818 civilian casualties (475 deaths and 1 343 injured) caused by non-suicide IED devices in 2018, accounting for 17 % of overall civilian casualties. Of those, 72 % of these attacks were attributed to the Taliban, 10 % to ISKP and 18 % to undetermined AGEs. Civilian casualties caused by victim-activated pressure-plate IEDs decreased by 26 % in 2018 (753 civilian casualties: 269 deaths, 484 injured), with half of them recorded in the Southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul.³¹⁰

1.3.3 High-profile attacks

According to the USDOD, the Taliban along with other militant groups continued to carry out high-profile attacks, mostly in the capital region, to attract media attention, undermine the legitimacy of the Afghan government and to create the perception of widespread insecurity. From 1 June 2018 to 30 November 2018, there were 59 high-profile attacks in Kabul, compared to 73 during the same period in 2017.³¹¹

UNAMA found that out of 65 suicide and complex attacks across the country in 2018, 28 occurred in Kabul city resulting in 1 686 civilian casualties (554 deaths and 1 132 injuries), representing a 5 % increase in compared to 2017. The attacks in Kabul mostly targeted civilians, including the civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other 'soft' targets.³¹²

In January 2018, attackers drove an explosive-laden ambulance into a crowded street in Kabul during 'one of the most violent stretches of the war',³¹³ killing 114 people and injuring 229. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.³¹⁴

Other high-profile attacks during the reporting period include:

- Taliban militants attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul City in January 2018, killing 24 and injuring 15 civilians. There were 15 foreign nationals among the victims.³¹⁵
- ISKP claimed responsibility for a bombing in Kabul in March 2018, close to a shrine where Shia Muslims gathered to celebrate Nowruz. The attack killed 35 and injured 65 civilians.³¹⁶
- A suicide bomber detonated a body-borne IED outside a voter registration centre in a Shia populated neighbourhood of Kabul, killing 60 and injuring 138 civilians. ISKP claimed responsibility for the incident.³¹⁷
- Another ISKP-claimed attack occurred in August 2018, in Kabul's Shia-dominated Dasht-i-Barchi area where a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a classroom of an educational centre, killing 40 and injuring 67 civilians.³¹⁸

³⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

³¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 24

³¹¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 25

³¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

³¹³ New York Times (The), 'It's a Massacre': Blast in Kabul Deepens Toll of a Long War, 27 January 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

³¹⁵ New York Times (The), Americans Were Among 22 Killed in Kabul Hotel Attack, U.S. Says, 23 January 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 27

³¹⁶ BBC News, Kabul Sakhi shrine: 'Dozens dead' in New Year attack, 21 March 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

³¹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 29; France24, Suicide blast at voter registration centre kills more than 50 in Kabul, 22 April 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 29; RFE/RL, UN Raises Death Toll From Kabul Suicide Attack To 40, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

- In September 2018, a double suicide attack killed at least 20 people and injured 70 at a wrestling club in Kabul. After the suicide bomber detonated the device in the club, a second bomber attacked first responders in a car.³¹⁹
- In October 2018 a member of the Kandahar Provincial Governor's security team opened fire during a meeting between Afghan representatives and US personnel in Kandahar at the governor's compound. General Raziq, Kandahar Chief of Police was killed and several others were injured.³²⁰

1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

Besides suicide attacks and using non-suicide IEDs to deliberately target civilians or civilian objects, AGEs also carried out 'targeted killings' of civilians, mostly by shooting. UNAMA documented 295 such incidents in 2018 that caused 589 civilian casualties (395 deaths and 194 injured), showing a 17 % decrease compared to 2017.³²¹ However, this decrease in civilian casualties resulting from targeted killings by AGEs was offset by the considerable rise in casualties from suicide IED attacks, particularly those attributed to ISKP, which more than doubled.³²²

According to UNAMA, the targeted civilians 'were individuals perceived as supporting or otherwise connected to the Government or pro-Government armed groups, whether through current or former employment or family ties'. Although the number of attacks against tribal elders decreased from 59 in 2017 to 30 in 2018, there was only a minor decrease in the number of civilians killed (34) and injured (31). UNAMA also documented 13 incidents of targeting religious scholars and leaders, resulting in 15 deaths and 20 injured.³²³

When Ghazni was attacked in August 2018 by the Taliban, UNAMA found that the insurgents allegedly had a list of names and addresses of government employees and ANSF members to target along with their families. An Afghan National Police commander's brother, a district prosecutor and a parliamentary candidate had been victims of targeted killings.³²⁴

In 2018, UNAMA recorded 271 incidents of conflict-related abductions affecting 1 857 civilians. 53 incidents resulted in death and 33 in injuries. AGEs were responsible for all incidents, except one involving a Pro-Government Armed Group and three abductions by the ALP. Although the number of civilian casualties from conflict-related abductions remained at similar levels to 2017, the number of abducted civilians increased by 85 % which was mostly driven by incidents related to the election process.³²⁵

For more information on the rationale and modus operandi of the Taliban targeting campaign, please refer to the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#).

1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings

In 2015, the number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes rose by 85 % reversing to the previous years' 2012-2014 declining trend.³²⁶ In September 2018, UNAMA voiced its concern about the increasing number of civilian casualties from airstrikes adding that in the first 6 months of 2018 353

³¹⁹ BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

³²⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 25

³²¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

³²² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³²³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

³²⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 20

³²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 30

³²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, 24 February 2016, [url](#), pp. 59-60

civilian casualties (149 deaths and 204 injured) were documented which, showing a 52 % increase compared to the same period in 2017.³²⁷

From 1 January to 31 December 2018 UNAMA documented 1 015 civilian casualties (536 deaths and 479 injured) from 173 aerial operations conducted by PGF, showing a 61 % increase in civilian casualties from this tactic compared to 2017. The fact civilian deaths caused by aerial operations increased by 82 % from the previous year is of particular concern according to UNAMA.³²⁸ AAN co-director Kate Clark noted that the US military realised the harm that civilian casualties were doing to its military mission and introduced new tactical measures in late 2011 on the use of air power in order to reduce civilian casualties.³²⁹ However, the rules of engagement for airstrikes by US Forces in Afghanistan were relaxed at the end of 2017.³³⁰ Instead of allowing US forces to strike the Taliban if they are threatening American or Afghan forces, US aircraft could seek out and attack militants based simply on their affiliation to the group.³³¹

In 2018, aerial operations accounted for 9 % of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan, compared to 6 % in 2017. Contrary to the trends in 2016-2017 when the Afghan Air Force was responsible for the majority of civilian casualties, victims in 2018 were mostly attributed to IMF.³³²

1.3.6 Search operations

In 2018, UNAMA documented a considerable rise in civilian casualties caused by Afghan National Security Forces and pro-Government armed groups, particularly by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force. The same source reports that there were 353 civilian casualties (284 deaths and 69 injured) were recorded from search operations, most of them caused by NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force. UNAMA recorded 64 search operations by ANSF, causing a total of 273 civilian casualties (222 deaths and 51 injured). This represents a sharp increase compared to 2017 when UNAMA verified 92 civilian casualties (63 deaths and 29 injured) resulting from 26 search operations by ANSF.³³³

The majority of casualties (240 civilian casualties: 203 deaths, 37 injured) were caused by the NDS Special Forces, either acting alone or in joint operations with IMF, mostly in central, eastern and southern regions.³³⁴ AAN co-director Kate Clark added that while Afghan army special forces also carry out search operations, they do that reportedly without causing any civilian harm. Afghan army special forces are generally supported by US Special Forces while the NDS and the Khost Protection Force gets support from the CIA.³³⁵

UNAMA attributed 51 civilian casualties (41 deaths, 10 injured) during 13 search operations to the Khost Protection Force which it considers as a Pro-Government Armed Group. UNAMA expressed its concern about the significant increase in harm to civilians caused by search operations, particularly by NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force, adding that the high number of fatalities compared to the number of injured suggests the indiscriminate use of force.³³⁶

³²⁷ UNAMA, Concern About Rising Number Of Civilian Casualties From Airstrikes, 25 September 2018, [url](#)

³²⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 38

³²⁹ Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

³³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 38

³³¹ New York Times (The), Mattis Discloses Part of Afghanistan Battle Plan, but It Hasn't Yet Been Carried Out, 6 October 2017, [url](#)

³³² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 38

³³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 41

³³⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 42

³³⁵ Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

³³⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 42

1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.4.1 Civilian casualties

In 2018 the number of civilian deaths has reached a record high level since UNAMA started to document conflict related civilian casualties in 2009.³³⁷

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

UNAMA recorded 10 993 civilian casualties (3 804 deaths, 7 189 injured) as a result of the armed conflict in 2018. This represents a 5 % increase in overall civilian casualties and also an 11 % increase in civilian deaths compared to the previous year.³³⁸

Anti-Government Elements, including the Taliban and the ISKP were responsible for 63 % of civilian casualties.³³⁹ IEDs used by AGEs in both suicide and non-suicide attacks remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2018 at 42 %.³⁴⁰ UNAMA recorded a considerable rise in civilian casualties from aerial operations by Pro-Government Forces with a 61 % increase compared to 2017 and the majority attributed to international military forces.³⁴¹

The appearance of ISKP in Afghanistan after 2014 presented a new threat to civilians.³⁴² As AAN highlighted, despite representing a smaller fighting force than the Taliban, ISKP was responsible for one fifth of all civilian casualties. The number of its civilian casualties more than doubled in 2018 compared to the previous year (from 843 to 1 871). According to AAN, on the pro-government side the rise in civilian casualties from aerial operations, especially by international forces and civilian casualties caused by the NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force were of particular concern.³⁴³

³³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 4

³⁴⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

³⁴² New York Times (The), Amid Afghan Peace Talks, U.N. Reports Record Civilian Deaths in 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁴³ Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order

The Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO) noted an annual rise in crime statistics from 6 768 in 2008 to 28 026 in 2015-2016,³⁴⁴ although the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated in 2012 that there are no reliable crime statistics in Afghanistan.³⁴⁵ According to the Asia Foundation's 2018 survey, 18.6 % of respondents reported having suffered from an act of violence or criminality.³⁴⁶ Similar to previous year's findings, the most reported violent or criminal acts were beatings and physical attacks (41.3 %).³⁴⁷

Kidnapping, robberies and drug-related crimes were reported in several provinces including Farah,³⁴⁸ Kabul,³⁴⁹ Kunduz³⁵⁰ and Balkh.³⁵¹ Law enforcers are themselves often the victim of attacks.³⁵²

According to UNODC, 'Afghanistan faces tremendous drugs and crime challenges [...]. While around 80 % of the world's opiates comes from Afghanistan, only around 2 % is seized in country'.³⁵³

The US Department of State noted in its report by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security that criminal activity is widespread in Afghanistan with transnational organised crime (related to the drug trade) remaining a serious concern. The report added that 'local law enforcement authorities are generally ineffective in deterring crime and responding to distress calls and alarms' and response time is considerably longer than Western norms. Bribery is present at all levels of local law enforcement and in some cases officers commit crimes themselves which lead to a lack of confidence in local law enforcement by the civilian population.³⁵⁴ According to the Asia Foundation, the confidence amongst Afghans in reporting crimes to the ANA or the ANP decreased in 2018. 45.7 % of respondents reported crimes to ANP marking a 5 percentage point decline and reporting crimes to ANA also decreased by 1.5 percentage point to 16.5 %.³⁵⁵

In its Eligibility Guidelines published in August 2018 UNHCR stated the following on the Afghan state's ability to protect civilians:

'Even where the legal framework provides for the protection of human rights, the implementation of Afghanistan's commitments under national and international law to promote and protect these rights in practice frequently remains a challenge. Afghan governance and the adherence to the rule of law are perceived as particularly weak.

The capability of the Government to protect human rights is undermined in many districts by insecurity and the high number of attacks by AGEs. Rural and unstable areas reportedly suffer from a generally weak formal justice system that is unable to effectively and reliably adjudicate civil and criminal disputes. Government-appointed judges and prosecutors are reportedly frequently unable to remain in such communities, due to insecurity. [...]

³⁴⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, Crimes, Public Libraries, Radios and TV Broadcast, 2008 -2015-2016, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, UNODC Country Programme for Afghanistan 2012-2014, 28 May 2012, [url](#), pp. 16-17.

³⁴⁶ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 52

³⁴⁷ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 53

³⁴⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Crimes on the increase in Farah, say residents, 3 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rise in drug-related crimes worries 'Powder Street' dwellers, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Increasing kidnap incidents worry Kunduzis, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 33 crime suspects detained in Balkh raids, [url](#)

³⁵² BBC News, Top Afghan commander Raziq killed in Kandahar gun attack, 19 October 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban attacks kill police in northern Afghanistan, 1 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 11 Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³ UNODC, Law Enforcement, n.d., [url](#)

³⁵⁴ USDOS, OSAC, Afghanistan 2018 Crime & Safety Report, 16 February 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 53-54

High levels of corruption, challenges to effective governance and a climate of impunity are all reported by observers as factors that weaken the rule of law and undermine the ability of the State to provide protection from human rights violations.³⁵⁶

In the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2019, Afghanistan ranked 123 on a list of 126 countries in the world on overall rule-of-law scores.³⁵⁷

For more information on the different segments of the Afghan security apparatus and their ability to act as an actor of protection, please refer to the April 2019 [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City](#). For more information on the Afghan state as a possible actor of persecution, please refer to the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#).

1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions

The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2016-17 found that 'the overall macro-economic and security context in the country since 2007 can be broken into two distinct phases, before and after the 2014 security transition'. While the phase before the transition showed 'higher economic growth and a relatively stable security situation', after 2014 the growth rate slowed and the security deteriorated.³⁵⁸ Although after 2015 the economy started to show signs of stabilization with a 2.3 % growth in 2016, followed by 2.7 % in 2017,³⁵⁹ the World Bank considered the recovery 'increasingly vulnerable'.³⁶⁰ Possible disruptions during the presidential and provincial council elections scheduled for 2019 could have negative impact on confidence, investment and growth.³⁶¹

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 54 % of the Afghan population is of legal working age (15-64 years), while 44 % is below the age of 15.³⁶² The World Bank stated that nearly three-quarters of the population are younger than 30 years and around 25 % is between 15-30 years.³⁶³ As a result, young Afghans enter the labour market in large numbers every year, but employment opportunities cannot keep up with the population growth because of inadequate development resources and poor security.³⁶⁴

According to ALCS 2016-17, 2 million Afghans – 23.9 % of the total labour force – can be classified as unemployed, meaning they do not work or seek employment or work less than eight hours per week.³⁶⁵ Access to productive or remunerative employment is limited, 80 % of employment is considered vulnerable and insecure in the form of self- or own-account employment, day labour or unpaid work.³⁶⁶ Poor job quality and insecure employment are widespread and the World Bank noted that 'neither education nor employment are a guarantee out of poverty'.³⁶⁷

As a reflection to the slowing growth, poverty increased considerably: 38.3 % of the population was living below the national poverty line in 2012-2013 and this increased to 54.5 % in 2016-2017.³⁶⁸ Afghanistan faced a sharp increase in poverty since 2011-12 with a rise in both urban and rural poverty

³⁵⁶ UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 29-30

³⁵⁷ World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2019, [url](#), p. 6

³⁵⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³⁵⁹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁰ World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁶¹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 15

³⁶² ILO, Afghanistan - Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2017, 2 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

³⁶³ World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 29

³⁶⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 59

³⁶⁶ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Overview, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁷ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, [url](#), p. 30

³⁶⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 100

rates. Even though the decline in welfare was widespread, urban poverty rates were lower than rural.³⁶⁹

Various education indicators such as attendance and literacy rates, school-life expectancy and gender-equity indicators, showed great progress in Afghanistan in the first decade after the fall of the Taliban but the improvements slowed down and even ‘come to a complete halt’ according to ALCS 2016-17.³⁷⁰

In a 2018 report the World Bank concluded that over 2004-2010 healthcare services showed major improvements in Afghanistan, while in the period of 2011-2016 improvements continued at a slower pace.³⁷¹ Despite these improvements, Afghanistan’s public health care system, neglected during the years of conflict, continues to face challenges, such as damaged infrastructure, a lack of trained healthcare providers and under-resourced healthcare facilities. The situation is ‘further complicated by a lack of security and pervasive poverty’.³⁷² According to ALCS 2016-17, 93 % of the population lived within a range of two hours from a public clinic, 82.4 % lived less than two hours from a district or provincial hospital and 94.8 % were less than two hours away from a pharmacy.³⁷³ Many people in Afghanistan lack access to health care due to the conflict, and trauma-care is regarded as one of the most critical gaps remaining in Afghanistan’s public health care.³⁷⁴

According to ALCS data from 2007-08 until 2016-17, access to clean water and adequate sanitation and hygiene has improved significantly.³⁷⁵ However, sanitation still continues to be poor compared to other countries in the region,³⁷⁶ and access to drinking water still remains a problem for many Afghans.³⁷⁷

For a more extensive assessment of key socio-economic issues at stake in Afghanistan, such as economic growth, employment, poverty and food security, please refer to the April 2019 [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City](#).

1.4.4 Refugees, IDPs, returnees

Asia Foundation’s 2018 survey found mobility was a coping mechanism for Afghan households responding to ‘insecurity, uncertainty, and external shocks’.³⁷⁸

Afghanistan has a long history of protracted international displacement. Reportedly a third of the population were displaced in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of 1979. Of the millions that fled to Iran and Pakistan, some returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Afghanistan’s civil war and the advent of the Taliban reignited a new exodus to neighbouring countries.³⁷⁹ The toppling of the Taliban regime in 2001 marked the beginning of a massive wave of returning Afghans. Between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted the return of 4.8 million Afghans, and many more returned without official assistance.³⁸⁰

Afghanistan is the source country of the second largest group of refugees in the world, around 2.6 million, the vast majority of whom are hosted by neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. In addition to the

³⁶⁹ World Bank (The), Afghanistan, Poverty in Afghanistan, Results based on ALCS 2016-17, July 2018, [url](#), p. 8

³⁷⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 139

³⁷¹ World Bank (The), Progress in the face of insecurity: Improving health outcomes in Afghanistan, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 18

³⁷² WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

³⁷³ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 169

³⁷⁴ WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207

³⁷⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 207

³⁷⁷ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2017, November 2017, [url](#), p. 29

³⁷⁸ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan people 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 201

³⁷⁹ Middle East Research and Information Project, Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis, 24 September 2001, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ World Bank (The), Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, [url](#), p. 1.

registered Afghan refugees, there were 1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans in Iran and 350 000-550 000 in Pakistan.³⁸¹

Globally, Afghan nationals filed the highest number of asylum claims in 2017 (124 900 claims in 80 different countries), although there was a considerable decrease compared to 2016 (237 800) or 2015 (271 100).³⁸² In 2016, more than 190 250 Afghans applied for asylum in EU+ states, while 2017 showed a significant decrease with only 49 135 applications.³⁸³ In 2018 45 300 asylum applications were in lodged in the EU+ by Afghan nationals.³⁸⁴

According to UNHCR, over six million Afghans returned since 2002, including over 5.2 million registered refugees assisted by UNHCR. In 2016, over 600 000 Afghans returned from the neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, including more than 370 000 refugees, marking a 'renewed surge in repatriation'. In 2017, Afghan refugee returns decreased to nearly 60 000 and in 2018 the number of refugees returning to Afghanistan dropped below 16 000.³⁸⁵ Throughout 2018, IOM responded to the return of 805 850 undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan.³⁸⁶

Internal displacements

According to UNHCR, Afghanistan has seen significant internal displacement caused by conflict and natural disasters. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported over 600 000 new conflict induced IDPs in 2017 and more than 200 000 Afghans have been displaced by drought, mainly in the western part of the country in 2018. Based on estimations by UNHCR there were two million conflict induced and drought affected IDPs across Afghanistan in 2018.³⁸⁷ In 2018, 343 341 individuals have been newly displaced by the conflict and profiled by UNOCHA as IDPs in need of protection and assistance.³⁸⁸

UNOCHA found that greater levels of violence did not necessarily mean greater levels of displacement in 2018. With insurgents mostly engaging in a 'war of attrition' and focusing more on surprise assaults instead of efforts to seize and hold population centres, displacement was 'confined to relatively small-scale and temporal movement in 2018'. With the exception of the assaults against Farah and Ghazni, displacement was limited in duration and less likely reported. In 2017 Nangarhar, Kunduz and Badghis recorded the highest rates of conflict-related displacement, while in 2018 Ghazni, Faryab and Kunduz documented the highest numbers.³⁸⁹

Afghanistan experienced an extended period of dryness in the winter planting season during December 2017 – February 2018. There was a precipitation deficit of more than 70 % in most parts of the country, which had a devastating impact on crops and livestock with the winter wet season being considered critical for successful agricultural production.³⁹⁰

UNOCHA noted in October 2018 that the drought displaced more than 260 000 people in Badghis, Daykundi, Herat and Ghor provinces in the previous six months. Most displaced families stayed in displacement sites either in Herat City, Herat or in displacement sites in and around Qala-e-Naw, the provincial capital of Badghis.³⁹¹

³⁸¹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 4

³⁸² UNHCR, Global Trends, Forced displacement in 2017, 19 June 2018, [url](#), p. 42

³⁸³ EASO, Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2017, 18 June 2018, [url](#), p. 37

³⁸⁴ EASO, EU+ Asylum Trends, 2018 Overview, 13 February 2019, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸⁵ UNHCR, Afghanistan Multi-Year Protection and Solutions Strategy 2019-2021, 31 January 2019, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸⁶ IOM, Return of undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸⁷ UNHCR, Afghanistan Multi-Year Protection and Solutions Strategy 2019-2021, 31 January 2019, [url](#), p. 4

³⁸⁸ UNHCR, Afghanistan – Operational Fact Sheet, 31 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

³⁹⁰ FAO, Afghanistan – Drought response, 23 November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

³⁹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin – Afghanistan, Issue 78 (1 July – 30 September 2018), 20 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

For more information on the socio-economic status of IDPs and returnees in Afghanistan's major cities, please refer to the April 2019 [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City](#).

Deportations and voluntary returns

Pakistan hosted around 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees³⁹² and remained the world's second largest refugee hosting country after Turkey.³⁹³ The majority of these refugees live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (58 %) and Balochistan (23 %) provinces bordering Afghanistan. Furthermore, 68 % of Afghan refugees live in urban or rural areas, while 32 % reside in 54 refugee villages across the country.³⁹⁴

Proof of Registration (PoR) cards are issued by the Government of Pakistan for the registered Afghan refugees, providing temporary legal stay and freedom of movement for them.³⁹⁵ According to AAN, the extension policy for PoR cards became 'more ad-hoc and erratic in 2016' when the Pakistani government began to extend the cards for shorter periods of time.³⁹⁶ In October 2018 the PoR cards have been extended by the government until 30 June 2019.³⁹⁷

Between August 2017 and February 2018, the Pakistani government, in close collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan and with the support of IOM and UNHCR, carried out a country-wide exercise to identify undocumented Afghans. Some 880 000 previously undocumented Afghan nationals were identified during the exercise and 380 000 of them have already received their Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs).³⁹⁸ The goal of the documentation exercise was to provide undocumented Afghans with identification credentials that will allow legalise and regularise their stay in Pakistan for a limited period of time.³⁹⁹

In response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch stated that the Pakistani authorities mounted a concerted campaign in 2016 to drive Afghans out of the country.⁴⁰⁰ In the second half of 2016, a combination of deportation threats and police abuses, including detention, forced evictions, police raids and harassment⁴⁰¹ pushed out nearly 365 000 of the country's 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, as well as just over 200 000 undocumented Afghans.⁴⁰² In total, in 2016, 620 000 Afghans had returned from Pakistan.⁴⁰³

Throughout 2018 a total of 15 699 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR. There were 13 584 returns from Pakistan followed by 1 964 from Iran. Due to the improved protection environment for Afghan refugees and also to the deteriorating security in Afghanistan, the return trend from Pakistan significantly decreased.⁴⁰⁴

According to IOM, a total of 805 850 returns were registered from Iran and Pakistan between 1 January and 31 December 2018, while the total number of returns from Iran was 773 125. IOM

³⁹² UNHCR, Registered Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁹³ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁹⁴ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁹⁵ UNHCR, Pakistan: Afghan Refugees Registration Update, 31 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ Bjelica, J. and Sabawoon, M.A., Still Caught in Regional Tensions? The uncertain destiny of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, AAN, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ UNHCR, UNHCR welcomes Pakistan's decision to extend stay of Afghan refugees, 5 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 13

³⁹⁹ IOM, UN Migration Agency Supports Pakistan's Documented of Undocumented Afghans, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity 13 February 2017. [url](#), p. 1.

⁴⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Flash Appeal: One Million People on the Move (Covering Sep-Dec 2016), 7 September 2016, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁰² HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity 13 February 2017, [url](#), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of 31 Dec 2016), 22 March 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](#), p. 2

reported in January 2019 that compared to 2017, there has been a massive increase of returns from Iran that is mostly driven by the recent political and economic issues of the country.⁴⁰⁵ In May 2018 President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers and to reimpose sanctions on Tehran. As a result, Iran's currency is weakened and unemployment rose.⁴⁰⁶ Since Afghans mostly work in Iran's informal economy, the demand for their work declined drastically.⁴⁰⁷

1.4.5 Children

With 48 % of its population being younger than 15 years, Afghanistan is one of the four countries in the world with the highest proportion of persons under the age of 15.⁴⁰⁸

In February 2019, Save The Children listed Afghanistan as one of the ten worst conflict-affected countries to be a child.⁴⁰⁹

The armed conflict in Afghanistan has had a serious impact on children who accounted for 28 % of all civilian casualties in 2018. UNAMA documented 3 062 child casualties in 2018 (927 deaths and 2 135 injured), representing a slight decrease compared to 2017.⁴¹⁰ Although AGEs were responsible for the majority of child casualties in 2018 (44 % of all child casualties, 3 % decrease compared to 2017), child casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces showed an increase as well (34 % of all child casualties, 15 % increase compared to 2017).⁴¹¹ UNAMA identified ground engagements between AGEs and PGF as the leading cause for child casualties which resulted in 1 192 child casualties in 2018, representing a 17 % decrease compared to 2017.⁴¹²

Nevertheless, the increase in child casualties caused by aerial operations and suicide and complex attacks was particularly concerning. Aerial operations by Pro-Government Forces were responsible for 492 child casualties showing a 85 % increase compared to 2017.⁴¹³ UNAMA verified 275 child casualties (67 deaths and 208 injured) from suicide and complex attacks throughout 2018. This represents a 33 % increase compared to 2017 and a 116 % surge in the number of children killed. UNAMA attributed 152 such child casualties (40 deaths and 112 injured) to ISKP, marking a 158 % increase compared to the previous year. The Taliban were responsible for 83 such casualties (24 killed and 59 injured), a decline of 35 % compared to 2017.⁴¹⁴

According to the UN Secretary General's report covering the period January-December 2017, children were recruited to assist in intelligence gathering, to plant IEDs, carry out suicide attacks or were used for combat.⁴¹⁵ In 2018, the recruitment and use of 38 children (37 boys and one girl) was documented, the majority in the eastern region. UNAMA attributed the recruitment and use of 17 children to Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, five to the Taliban, two to ISKP, one to undetermined AGEs, five to ANSF (four to ALP and one to ANP) and eight to pro-Government armed groups.⁴¹⁶

According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), Afghanistan was one of the countries 'heavily affected' by attacks on education and military use of schools from 2013 to

⁴⁰⁵ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁰⁶ RFE/RL, Things Are So Bad In Iran That Afghan Migrants Are Going Home, 1 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁰⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁰⁹ Save The Children, Stop the War on Children: Protecting Children in 21st Century Conflict, 14 February 2019, [url](#), p. 10

⁴¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 11

⁴¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 12

⁴¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 12

⁴¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 12

⁴¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 12

⁴¹⁵ UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 16 May 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁴¹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

2017.⁴¹⁷ GCPEA's November 2018 briefing paper on Afghanistan added that attacks on education accelerated again in 2018.⁴¹⁸

Throughout 2018 UNAMA recorded 191 incidents, almost three times the number of incidents in 2017, affecting education, including attacks against schools; the killing, injury and abduction of education personnel; and threats against education facilities and personnel. The increase is attributed mostly to attacks by AGEs on schools that had been used as voter registration centres and polling centres for the parliamentary elections in October 2018.⁴¹⁹

Approximately 50 % of the 5 000 polling centres, which also served as voter-registration sites, were located in schools. During the voter registration period, AGEs targeted schools and IEC staff registering voters through IED and suicide attacks, with one incident where the Taliban set fire to a school building. These attacks, combined with threats against teachers, resulted in the closure of schools in some areas. Even the open schools experienced attendance rates decreasing due to the heightened risk of attack.⁴²⁰

For more information on the Taliban's attitude towards education and in particular girls' education, please refer to the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#).

According to USDOS, there were reports about members of the security forces sexually abusing and exploiting children along with multiple reports of 'bacha bazi'.⁴²¹

In 2018, UNAMA recorded four incidents of sexual violence against children, three by the ANP and one by the ALP. UNAMA added that since these cases are considered extremely sensitive and are widely underreported, these figures do not reflect the problem in its entirety. Although in February 2018 the revised Penal Code, which explicitly criminalises the practice of bacha bazi, entered into force, accountability for these crimes remains a challenge.⁴²²

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

1.5 Geographical Overview

1.5.1 Urban-rural divide

Afghanistan's history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide. Urban centres have been hubs for administration, market-driven methods of production, taxation, education, judiciary and reforms. This led to resentment among the rural population, which did not benefit from these developments.⁴²³

On the other hand, AAN's expert Thomas Ruttig stated in 2011 that the rural-urban divide was not 'so hermetic' anymore due to a wave of reforms which date back to the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, migration from the provinces towards bigger cities, the constant exchange between villages and towns and the distribution of modern means of communications around the country have

⁴¹⁷ GCPEA, Education under Attack 2018, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 32-33

⁴¹⁸ GCPEA, Attacks on Education in Afghanistan, Briefing Paper, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 15

⁴²⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴²¹ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Afghanistan, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴²² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁴²³ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, [url](#), pp. 7-8

contributed to the mitigation of this still existing gap.⁴²⁴ According to the Asia Foundation's Survey of 2018, rural respondents cited foreign intervention almost twice as often as urban respondents as a reason for pessimism. Insecurity in general was mentioned as a reason for pessimism by 76 % of the urban interviewees and by 71 % of the rural population.⁴²⁵ Furthermore, urban respondents were more likely to fear for their personal safety than interviewees living in rural areas.⁴²⁶ Respondents from rural areas, on the other hand, more frequently mentioned 'some groups' as being responsible for posing security threats:⁴²⁷ 74.2 % of rural respondents named the Taliban as a security threat, while 39.5 % of urban respondents worried more about criminals and thieves.⁴²⁸

In 2015 the Taliban set as an objective to 'capture and hold towns and provincial capitals'.⁴²⁹ Following attempts of capturing provincial centres like Kunduz city, Lashkar-Gah in Helmand, Pul-i-Khumri in Baghlan, Farah city, Tarinkot in Uruzgan and Maimana in Faryab in 2015, 2016 and 2017,⁴³⁰ in August 2018 Taliban insurgents carried out a large-scale attack on Ghazni city, spreading concerns about the possibility of another major attack in the south-east.⁴³¹ According to the Afghan news-agency Tolonews in late August 2018, residents of Gardez in Paktya, Kunduz city, Ghazni city, Farah city and Maimana expressed their concerns over the possible collapse of these areas due to Taliban threat.⁴³² Moreover, in November 2018 security deteriorated in Hazara dominated areas of western Ghazni and eastern Uruzgan provinces, causing the displacement of Hazara families.⁴³³ Still, according to US military sources quoted by SIGAR, the provincial centres of all of Afghanistan's provinces were under Afghan government control or influence, as of December 2018.⁴³⁴ As reported by the UN Secretary-General in his February 2019 report, '[t]he Taliban succeeded in temporarily capturing 21 district administrative centres throughout the year, the second highest level since the security transition to the Afghan forces at the end of 2014'.⁴³⁵

According to the UN Secretary-General's report of February 2019, suicide attacks decreased by 61 % between mid-November 2018 and early February 2019 compared with the same period in 2017, probably because of effective interdiction efforts in Kabul city and Jalalabad.⁴³⁶ On the other hand '[a]nti-Government Elements increased their reliance on suicide and complex attacks and shifted their intended targets more and more towards the civilian population [throughout 2018]', and 'suicide and complex attacks remained the leading cause of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements'.⁴³⁷ Between mid-November 2018 and February 2019 the city of Kabul witnessed several high-profile attacks despite 'an overall lower tempo of suicide and complex attacks nationwide'.⁴³⁸ Further, in Kabul province suicide and complex attacks caused 95 % of all civilian casualties, with more

⁴²⁴ Ruttig, T., Afghanistan's not so-hermetic rural-urban divide, AAN, 26 May 2011, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 26

⁴²⁶ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁴²⁷ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴²⁸ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁴²⁹ BBC News, Why are the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan?, 5 January 2016, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban threatens another provincial capital in the Afghan north, 21 October 2016, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban Assaults Provincial Capital in southeastern Afghanistan, 22 May 2017, [url](#)

⁴³¹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴³² Tolonews, Residents Of Numerous Cities Concerned About Security, 30 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴³³ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴³⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 71

⁴³⁵ UN Secretary General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁴³⁶ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁴³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 22

⁴³⁸ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

than half of them caused by incidents claimed by ISKP. According to the Landinfo [informal translation] in September 2018, a significant amount of reported incidents in Kabul city related to the use of IEDs.⁴³⁹ During parliamentary elections in October 2018, the cities of Kunduz and Kabul recorded the highest numbers of incidents, claimed by Taliban insurgents and ISKP. Moreover, even though the Taliban prevented voters from participating in the election process in regions under their influence or control, the election could not be significantly disrupted in urban areas - despite the high number of security incidents.⁴⁴⁰

Displacement patterns due to conflict shifted in 2018: whilst in 2017 the provinces with the highest displacement rates were Nangarhar, Kunduz and Badghis, in 2018 Ghazni, Faryab and Kunduz witnessed the highest numbers.⁴⁴¹ In 2018 around 550 000 Afghans left their homes either due to conflict or drought and moved into district centres, seeking for better basic services and income-generating opportunities.⁴⁴² As of September 2018, more than 250 000 people were displaced due to drought in the western region⁴⁴³, alone between June and August 2018 263 000 people were displaced within Badghis and Herat.⁴⁴⁴ Qala-e-Naw in Badghis, for instance, hosted around 120 000 newly displaced IDPs, as of mid-September 2018.⁴⁴⁵ Furthermore, in 2018 Afghanistan witnessed the return of more than 800 000 undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan. While returns from Pakistan decreased by 70 % compared to 2017, the number of returnees from Iran rose from 462 000 in 2017 to 760 000 in 2018. Returnees from Iran entered Afghanistan through the border crossings of Milak in Nimroz and Islam Qala in Herat provinces; whereas Afghans returning from Pakistan passed through Torkham in Nangarhar and Spin Boldak in Kandahar provinces.⁴⁴⁶ Moreover, in Farah province, one out of four residents was either a returnee or an IDP as of September 2018.⁴⁴⁷

Included below is the conflict severity map produced by UNOCHA. The conflict severity is derived from three indicators: armed clashes and airstrikes; civilian casualties, and conflict induced displacement. The shading on the map is based on an average ranking of all districts on these indicators.⁴⁴⁸

⁴³⁹ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁴⁰ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 5, 13; UN Secretary General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 16 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

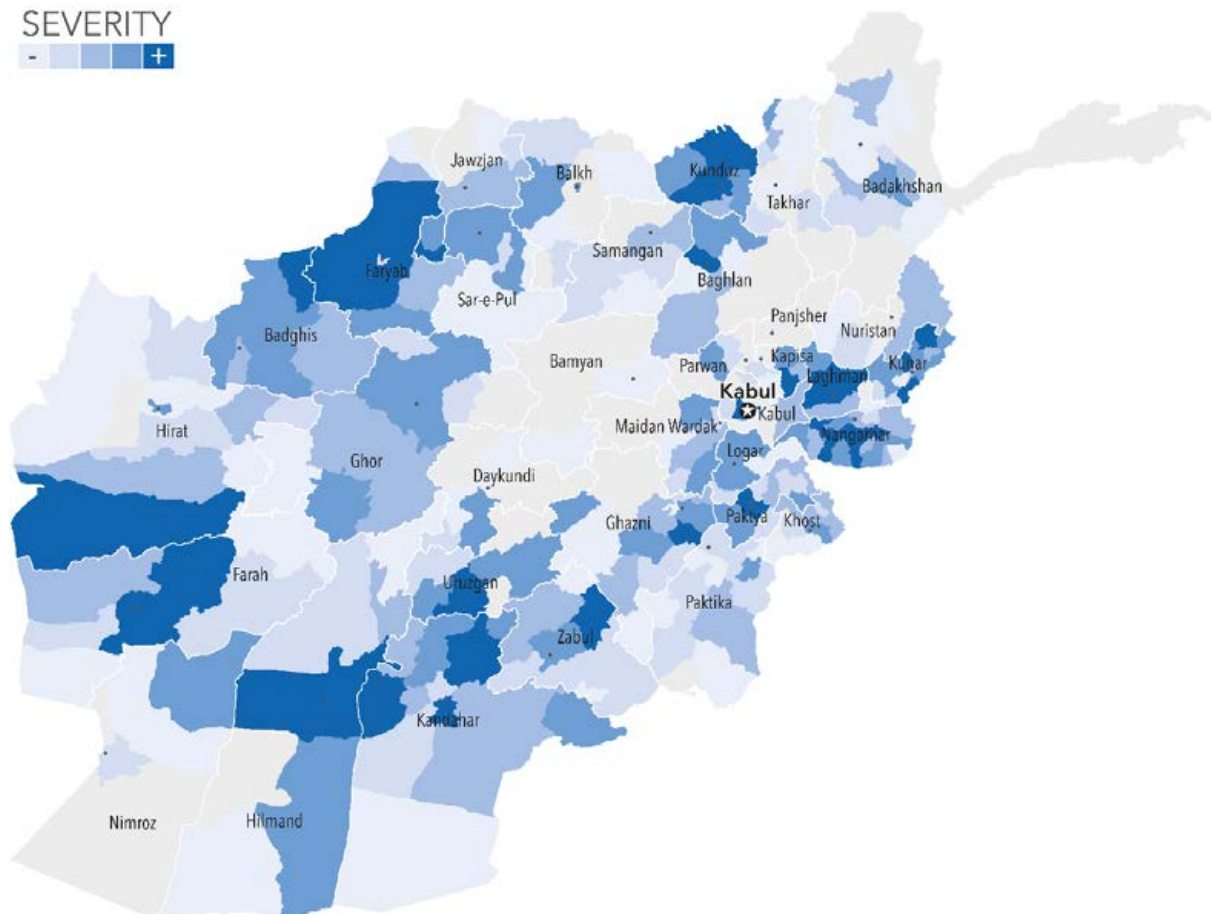
⁴⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 16 September 2018, [url](#); BBC News, Afghan drought 'displacing more people than Taliban conflict', 17 October 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 16 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, 27 Jan – 02 Feb 2019, 2 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁴⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2



Map 2: Conflict severity, Afghanistan⁴⁴⁹

1.5.2 Regional differences

According to the February 2019 report by the UN Secretary General, the southern region saw the highest number of incidents between November 2018 and February 2019, followed by the eastern and northern regions, which accounted for 67 % of all incidents. Even if the amount of suicide attacks decreased, the number of airstrikes by the Afghan Air Force and international military forces increased by 51 % compared to 2017.⁴⁵⁰ Security concerns increased in Kandahar after the provincial police chief and the provincial head NDS were killed in Kandahar city in October 2018.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, as reported by US military sources, most of the security incidents initiated by anti-government groups recorded in the first ten months of 2018, occurred in the provinces of Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Herat; Herat and Badghis witnessed the greatest increase in these types of attacks since August 2018. From October to December 2018 however, the province with the highest rate of AGE offensives was Farah, followed by Helmand and Faryab.⁴⁵² According to a dataset from August 2018 quoted by UNOCHA, 70 % of men did not feel safe when travelling to work, the mosque, health and education facilities or the market, with this figures reaching a peak of 95 % in Uruzgan and 92 % in Helmand provinces.⁴⁵³ As reported by a military analyst specialised on issues relating to

⁴⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁵⁰ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁵¹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁵² SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 73-74

⁴⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

Afghanistan, throughout 2018 battles took also place in provinces that were previously considered relatively calm.⁴⁵⁴

ISKP remained present in the eastern region, notably in Nangarhar province, where its fighters claimed responsibility for suicide and complex attacks throughout 2018. Also, ISKP claimed attacks in Kabul city, 'reflecting a high level of civilian harm caused by each attack in the densely populated city'.⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, clashes between ISKP and the Taliban were reported in Nangarhar and in Kunar provinces.⁴⁵⁶

According to a military analyst specialized on issues relating to Afghanistan, there are differences between the strategies of ISKP and the Taliban: whilst the latter focus their attacks mostly against security forces or Afghan government employees, trying to avoid 'collateral damage' among the civilian population, ISKP also targets Shias as well as non-cooperating civilians, aiming to reach high numbers of civilian casualties. It thus allows for a high number of 'collateral damage'.⁴⁵⁷

Map 3 was created by the Austrian COI Department and provides an overview of the security incidents from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019 per province based on Global Incident Map (GIM) data. In total, 5 232 security incidents were found in open media sources by the GIM website.⁴⁵⁸

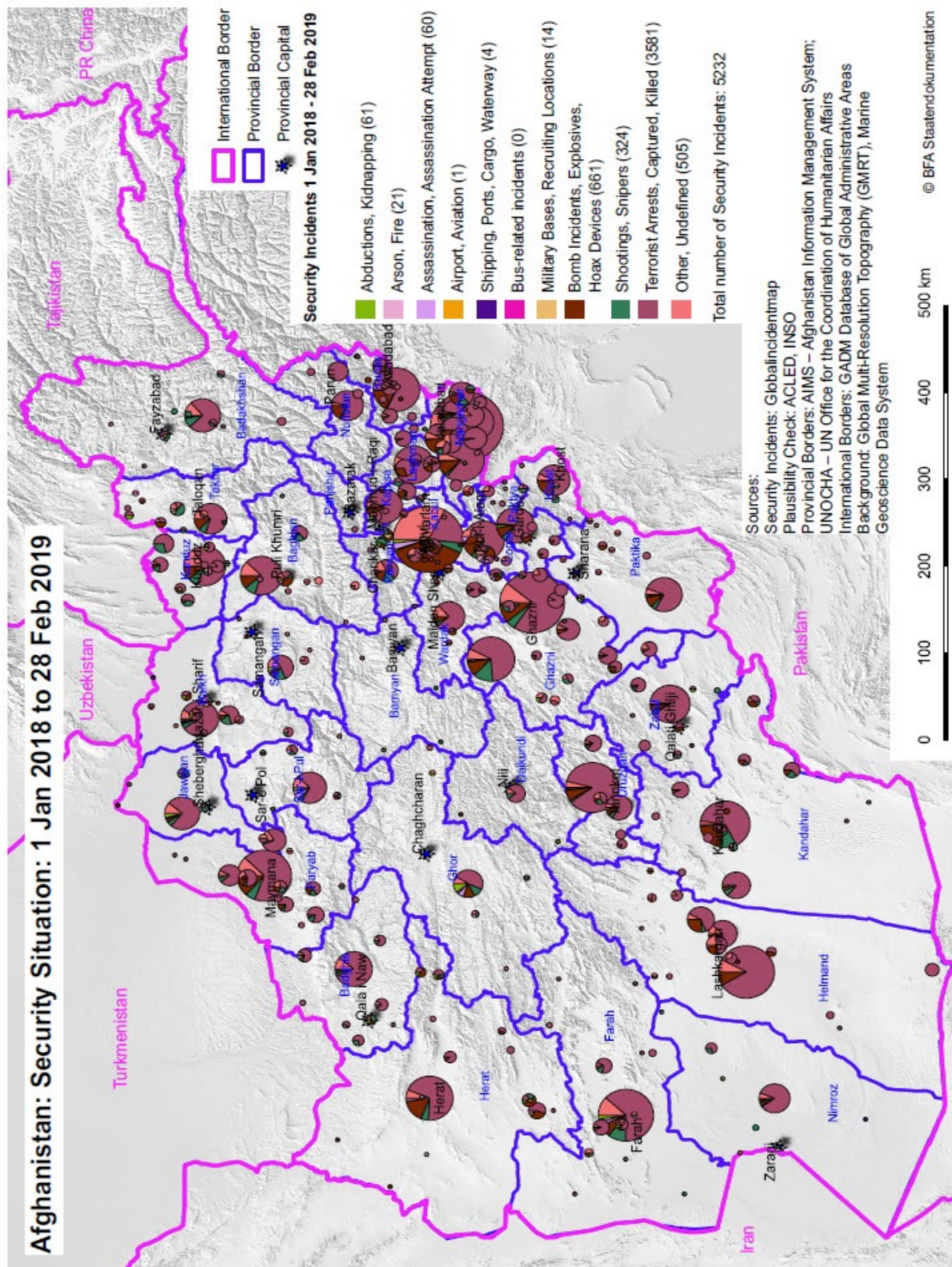
⁴⁵⁴ Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019

⁴⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 21

⁴⁵⁶ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵⁷ Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019

⁴⁵⁸ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Security Incidents [Map], 25 March 2019



Map 3: Overview of security incidents per province (1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019)⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁹ Global Incident Map collects data on security-related incidents connected to terrorism worldwide on the basis of global online news media reports and provides a geo-referenced display of such incidents, broken down by types, in an online map. See [Methodology](#).

1.5.3 Government versus Taliban control

As stated by AAN's co-director Kate Clark in May 2017, many assessments of territorial control in Afghanistan have been made in recent years. There have been debates over figures and also over the definition of the word 'control'; moreover, assertions have been made about the meaning of 'loss of government control', partly linked to deliberate withdrawals to areas deemed to be of more strategical importance.⁴⁶⁰

This security report provides information from territorial assessments by both the US military and the Taliban. As both subjects are actors in the conflict, a certain degree of propaganda and 'information operations' must be taken into account.⁴⁶¹ Therefore, assessments by the US war and terrorism blog Long War Journal (LWJ) and a military analyst specialized on issues relating to Afghanistan were also included. Furthermore, according to AAN's expert Thomas Ruttig, there are differing counts of the number of districts, ranging from 379 to 407;⁴⁶² this has to be considered when analysing assessments by different sources.

According to US military sources quoted by SIGAR, in October 2018 control over Afghanistan's districts, population, and territory became more contested, Afghan government control or influence continued to decline, and insurgent control or influence increased slightly since July 2018.⁴⁶³ The Afghan government's control or influence over its districts decreased by nearly two percentage points since July to 53.8 % and the number of contested districts rose to 33.9 %.⁴⁶⁴ The percentage of the population living in districts under Afghan government control or influence, which from May 2017 until July 2018 was largely stagnant at around 65 %, decreased to 63.5 % in October.⁴⁶⁵ The number of inhabitants of contested areas increased to 8.5 million people (25.6 % of the population), an increase by nearly two percentage-points compared to the same period in 2017.⁴⁶⁶ Sources quoted by SIGAR identified the provinces with the most insurgent-controlled or influenced districts as Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Helmand.⁴⁶⁷

SIGAR receives its data over territorial control from Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, which has the tasks of training, advising and assisting Afghan security forces.⁴⁶⁸ Whilst the indicators used by RS to assess territorial control are 'government control', 'government influence', 'insurgent activity' and 'contested', the Long War Journal does not assess 'government influence', as they consider it no more than a measure of 'control'.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁰ Clark, K., Looking at the 'Nicholson plan': A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government's favour, AAN, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ Munoz, A. and Dick, E., Information Operations: The Imperative of Doctrine Harmonization and Measures of Effectiveness, RAND Corporation, 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁶² Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁶³ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁴⁶⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 69

⁴⁶⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 65

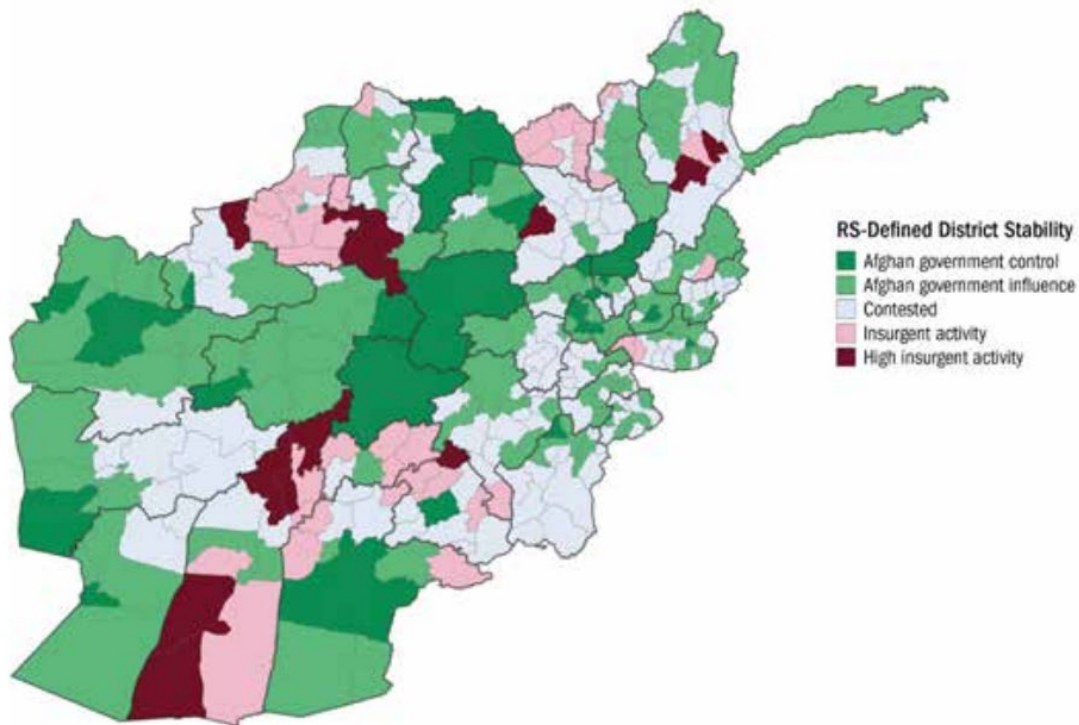
⁴⁶⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 69

⁴⁶⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 71

⁴⁶⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 76

⁴⁶⁹ LWJ, Analysis: US military downplays district control as Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

STABILITY LEVEL OF AFGHANISTAN'S 407 DISTRICTS AS OF OCTOBER 22, 2018



Note: A district is assigned its district-stability level based on the overall trend of land-area/population control of each district as a whole.

Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call, 12/20/2018.

Map 4: Stability level of Afghanistan's 407 districts as of 22 October 2018⁴⁷⁰

The Taliban's 2018 reporting claims that about 61 of Afghanistan's districts along with their administrative centres were under complete control of insurgents. In the remaining districts, government control is purportedly limited to district administrative centres and a few are under the complete control of Afghan government.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 71

⁴⁷¹ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

As of 31 December 2018, the Taliban published the following territorial control map:



Map 5: Taliban territorial control map; source: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan⁴⁷² - Note: The acronym IEA in the legend means Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [The Taliban].

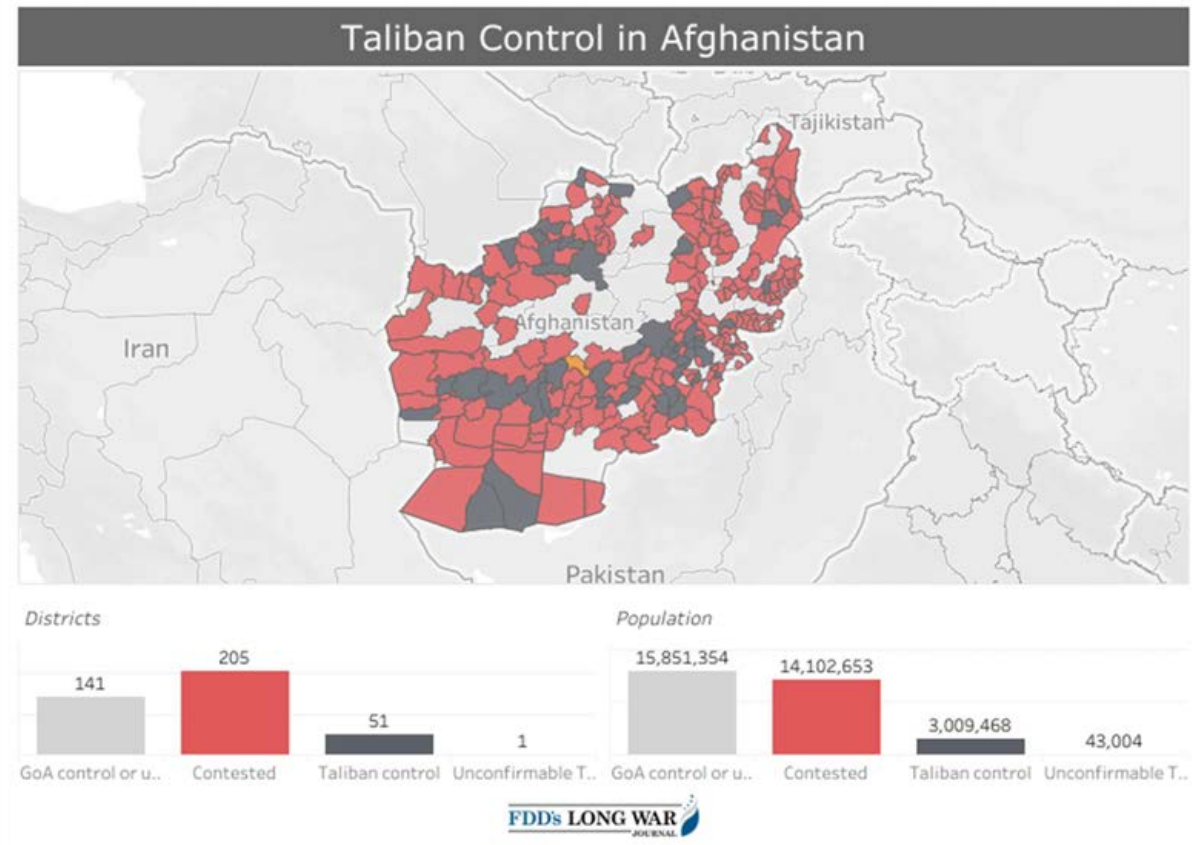
LWJ reported in late January 2019 that the Afghan government controlled 35.1 % of Afghanistan's 407 districts, and the Taliban ruled over another 13 % in 2018. The remaining 49.6 % were contested, while seven districts (or 1.7 %) could not be accurately assessed.⁴⁷³ The methodology of LWJ is described as follows:

'The primary data and research behind this are based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. This is a living map that LWJ frequently updates as verifiable research is conducted to support control changes. Any "Unconfirmed" district colored orange has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or can not be— independently verified by LWJ research. A "Contested" district may mean that the government may be in control of the district center, but little else, and the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center. A "Controlled" district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.'⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ LWJ, Analysis: US military downplays district control as Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, as of 23 April 2019, [url](#)

Map 6: Taliban control in Afghanistan⁴⁷⁵

A military analyst specialized in Afghanistan issues reported in January 2019 that around 39 % of Afghan districts were under control of the Afghan government and 37 % were controlled by Taliban; these areas were relatively calm and clashes were reported occasionally. Around 20 % were highly contested and ISKP controlled around 4 % of the districts.⁴⁷⁶

AAN expert Kate Clark stated in May 2017 that '[r]egardless of all this [the various assessments of territorial control], the trend is clear – and not good: the government has been steadily losing territory since the end of 2014'.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, as of 23 April 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019

⁴⁷⁷ Clark, K., Looking at the 'Nicholson plan': A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government's favour, AAN, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

1.6 Mobility

Afghanistan's most important road is Highway 1, often referred to as the 'Ring Road'. Encircling the central parts of the country, Highway 1 connects Afghanistan's main urban centres Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Kandahar.⁴⁷⁸ While President Ashraf Ghani reportedly pledged to complete the missing sections of the Ring Road within nine months in 2015,⁴⁷⁹ some parts allegedly still remain unpaved, e.g. about 200 kilometres between Badghis and Faryab.⁴⁸⁰ Additionally, the notoriously overcrowded and desolate Salang Tunnel at the Salang Pass between Parwan and Baghlan remains a bottleneck between Kabul and the northern parts of the country.⁴⁸¹

Besides bad road conditions, which reportedly did not improve substantially despite considerable funding of construction projects by foreign donors from 2001 onwards,⁴⁸² the volatile security situation impedes safe passage in many parts of the country. Clashes between government forces and insurgents,⁴⁸³ as well as checkpoints established by insurgents,⁴⁸⁴ improvised explosive devices (IEDs),⁴⁸⁵ kidnappings⁴⁸⁶ and armed robberies by various groups⁴⁸⁷ reportedly caused casualties on many roads in Afghanistan in 2018 and early 2019.

Most notably, the Taliban were threatening strategic parts of the Ring Road in Ghazni, Baghlan, and on the highway linking Herat to Kandahar in the western province of Faryab in 2018.⁴⁸⁸ Already in 2013 AAN reported an upsurge in insurgent attacks on Highway 1 in Ghazni. This part of the Ring Road is pivotal for civilian and military transport, as it connects Kabul to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.⁴⁸⁹ In August 2018, a major Taliban attack on Ghazni City destroyed parts of the road and contaminated it with IEDs.⁴⁹⁰ While the highway was cleared subsequently, UNOCHA warned that '[...] travel from Kabul to Ghazni via Highway 1 is possible but remains risky, notably due to sporadic fighting between Saidabad, Wardak, and Ghazni.'⁴⁹¹ In December 2018, AAN reported that the Taliban continued to put pressure on the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Ghazni.⁴⁹² Similarly, the Taliban began to make strategic inroads into Baghlan in 2014. A pivotal section of the Ring Road runs through this province, as it connects Kabul with the north of the country. According to AAN, the Taliban strategically blocked parts of the Baghlan-Balkh highway during large-scale attacks on Kunduz in

⁴⁷⁸ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#); AAN, Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan's unfinished Ring Road, 16 January 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ Suroush, Q., Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan's unfinished Ring Road, AAN, 16 January 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ SIGAR, Afghanistan's Ring Road from Qaysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over \$249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁸² SIGAR, Afghanistan's Ring Road from Qaysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over \$249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, [url](#), p. 4; Suroush, Q., Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan's unfinished Ring Road, AAN, 16 January 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commuters say insecurity worsens on Balkh-Jawzjan road, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban's 'customs tax' extortion, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ Tolonews, Seven Police Killed In Kabul-Kandahar Highway Attack, 15 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion on Kandahar-Zabul highway leaves 3 civilians dead, 7 July 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ CBS News, Taliban kidnaps more than 100 bus passengers in northern Afghanistan, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat truck drivers say intimidated for extortion by police, 5 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#); Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting Intensifies on one of Afghanistan's Major Frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ Osman, B., The Road to Ghazni: Bombs, battles and blockades, AAN, 13 July 2013, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ UNO, 'No safe way' into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict Update No. 4, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

Afghanistan's north in 2015 and 2018 in order to disrupt troop movements by the government forces. AAN links the success of the Taliban in holding Kunduz for two weeks in 2015 to this strategy.⁴⁹³

According to the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, the Taliban set up checkpoints at strategic points on the Ring Road, in order to conduct identity checks and arrest or execute persons. According to *Foreign Affairs* this is a strategy that is much less costly and more sustainable for them than capturing urban centres.⁴⁹⁴ AAN noted in 2016 that this is a viable method to '[...] undermine the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), both psychologically and physically,' as it renders travelling for government-affiliated persons very dangerous and blocks troop movements.⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, collecting 'customs duties' along main roads is a source of revenue for the Taliban.⁴⁹⁶

Afghanistan's major population centres can be reached either by road or by plane. According to the airport map produced by the Austrian Country of Origin Information unit, scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exist from Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif.⁴⁹⁷ Hamid Karzai International Airport (KBL) is located at a distance of 16 kilometres from Kabul's city centre.⁴⁹⁸ In July 2018, at least 14 persons reportedly died in a suicide attack near the airport's main entrance.⁴⁹⁹ Herat International Airport (HEA) is situated at the Kandahar-Herat highway, approximately 20 kilometres south of the city centre of Herat.⁵⁰⁰ Mazar-e-Sharif International Airport (MZR) is located to the east of Mazar-e-Sharif's city centre, next to the German army base Camp Marmal.⁵⁰¹

Domestic airports with scheduled passenger services also exist in the provinces of Farah, Helmand, Nimroz, and Uruzgan,⁵⁰² while scheduled flights to the provincial capitals of Badakhshan, Bamyan, and Ghor have been suspended since January 2018 after a considerable number of Kam Air staff members died in an attack in Kabul. This allegedly poses a problem to the local population as road travel to the provinces is reportedly unsafe due to insurgent activity, a lack of law enforcement and bad road conditions.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹³ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015 [url](#); Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ *Foreign Affairs*, The Taliban's Battle Plan, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ *Salaam Times*, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban's 'customs tax' extortion, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

⁴⁹⁸ Hamid Karzai International Airport, Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d. [url](#)

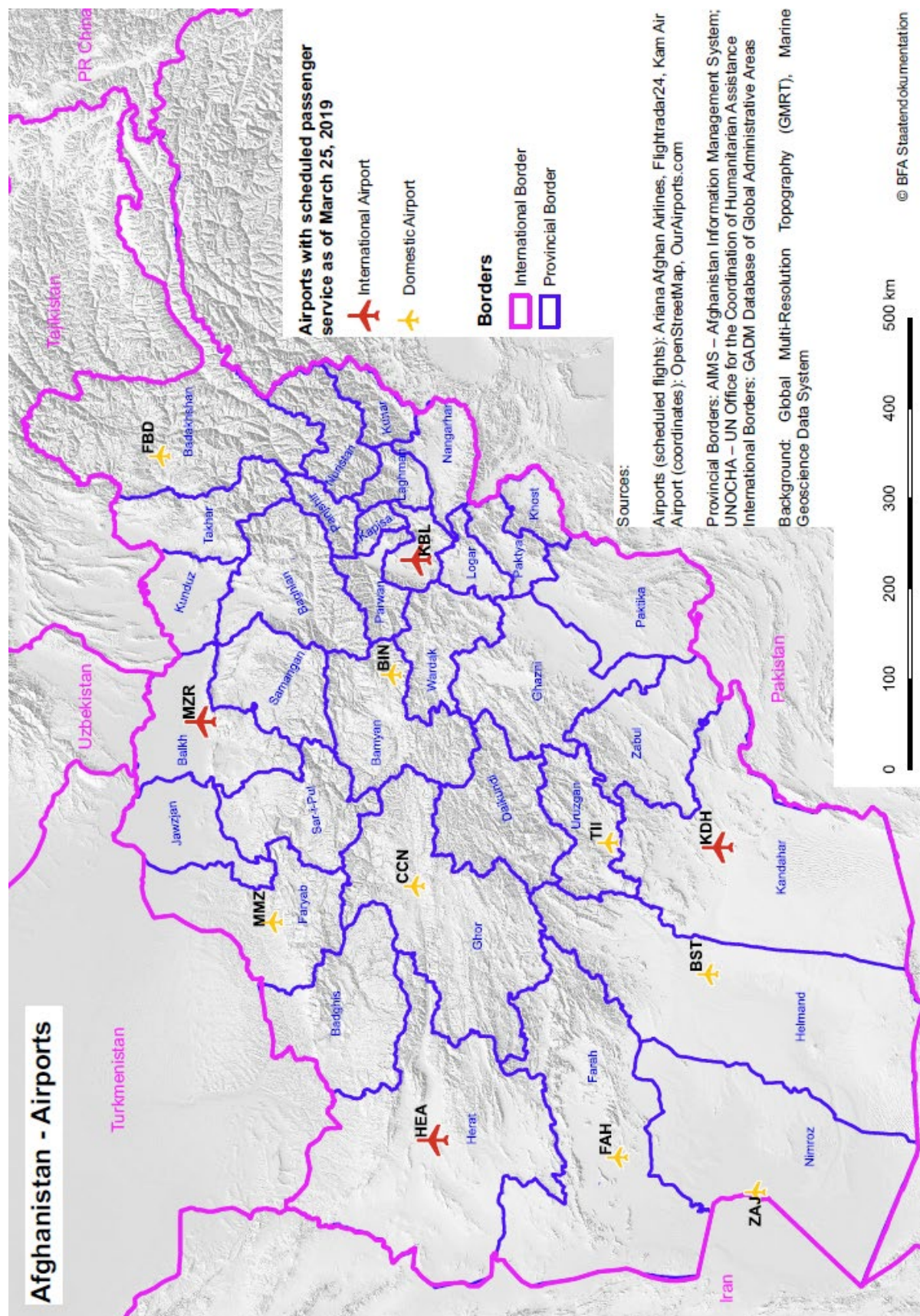
⁴⁹⁹ Al Jazeera, Several dead in Kabul suicide blast as exiled VP Dostum returns, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 3 January 2019, [url](#), p. 98

⁵⁰¹ Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 3 January 2019, [url](#), p. 238; Airportia, Mazar-e-Sharif International Airport MZR, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁰² Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

⁵⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

Map 7: Afghanistan – Airports⁵⁰⁴⁵⁰⁴ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

In the following sections, security trends are explained in greater detail, per geographic subdivision (Kabul City and 34 provinces). In each provincial section a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population, on the conflict background, including the actors in the conflict and the Taliban presence in the province. A second part describes recent trends in the security situation, including the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims within a timeframe from 1 January 2018 until 28 February 2019. Finally, a separate part is dedicated to displacements. Under the sub-sections several incidents are described. These should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents.

2.1 Kabul city

2.1.1 General description of the city

Kabul is the capital of Afghanistan, and also a district in Kabul province. It is the most populous city in Afghanistan, with an estimated population of 4 117 414 inhabitants for 2018/19.⁵⁰⁵ However, the population figure is disputed, with some sources claiming that it amounts to almost 6 million.⁵⁰⁶ According to a 2017 report by AAN expert Fabrizio Foschini for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the city, which before 2001 counted 12 wards (also referred to as Police Districts,⁵⁰⁷ PDs, or *nahia*⁵⁰⁸), expanded to 22 PDs as a result of its significant demographic growth and horizontal expansion.⁵⁰⁹ Kabul city hosts an airport, which is served by international and domestic passenger flights as of March 2019.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 5

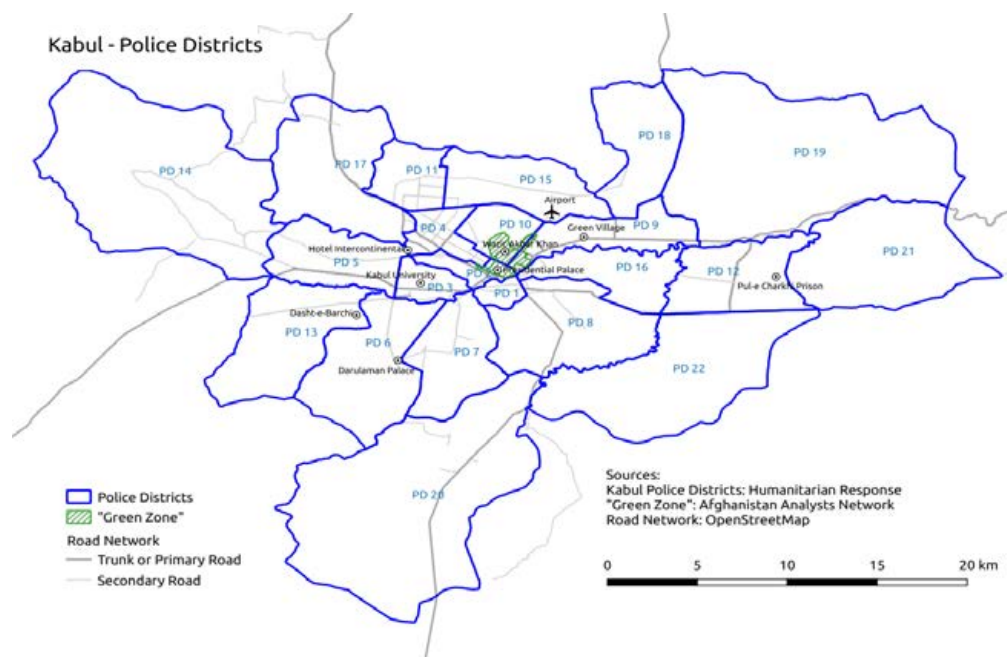
⁵⁰⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁰⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁵⁰⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁰⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁵¹⁰ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019



Map 8: Kabul Police Districts, source: BFA-Staatendokumentation⁵¹¹

The city is composed of three concentric rings: the first one includes Shahr-e Kohna, the old city, Shahr-e Naw, the new city, as well as Shash Darak and Wazir Akbar Khan, where many foreign embassies, foreign organisations and offices are located. The second ring consists of neighbourhoods developed in the 1950s-1980s to host the growing urban population like Taimani, Qala-e Fatullah, Karte Se, Karte Chahar, Karte Naw and the *microraisons* (Soviet-style residential districts). Finally, the third ring, which sprouted after 2001, is mainly populated by 'recent immigrants'⁵¹² (Afghan immigrants from the provinces),⁵¹³ except for some high-profile residential compounds for VIPs.⁵¹⁴

As for the ethnic distribution of the city's population, Kabul is a melting pot for various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, and each one of them settled in specific places, according to the geographical position of their home provinces: this applies to the ancient city, as well as to neighbourhoods further out, and it becomes more prominent in the unplanned areas.⁵¹⁵ In the most recently settled areas residents depend mostly on *qawmi* (a social unit based on kinship, residence and occupation) networks in order to find shelter, jobs and collectively advance their settlement conditions.⁵¹⁶ On the other hand, in the central areas of the city, the movement of residents and their change of residence are more common. This 'has a disruptive effect on social networks, exemplified by the often-heard complaint "one does not know one's neighbours anymore"'.⁵¹⁷

Some examples of the ethnic distribution of the Kabul population are the following: Hazaras have settled mainly in the western neighbourhood of Chandawal in downtown Kabul and in Dasht-e-Barchi, as well as Karte Se in the outskirts; Tajiks populate Payan Chawk, Bala Chawk and Ali Mordan in the old city, and northern parts of the periphery like Khairkhana; Pashtuns are mostly present in the eastern part of down-town Kabul, Bala Hisar, and, further, east and south of the periphery like in Karte Naw and Binihisar,⁵¹⁸ but also in the western neighbourhoods of Kota-e-Sangi and Bazaar-e-Company

⁵¹¹ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Kabul Police Districts [Map], 13 February 2019

⁵¹² Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6

⁵¹³ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁵¹⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6

⁵¹⁵ Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, [url](#), pp. 35-36

⁵¹⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8

⁵¹⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁵¹⁸ Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, [url](#), pp. 35-36; Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6

(also Company);⁵¹⁹ Hindus and Sikhs settled in the heart of the city in Hindu Gozar Street.⁵²⁰ In the neighbourhoods which are densely populated by recent immigrants sharing the same regional or ethnic background, a sort of ‘village society’ has emerged; whose dwellers know each other and have more direct connections with their province of origin than with central Kabul.⁵²¹ Moreover, transportation in each area was monopolised by the ethnic group which had the majority there, as of 2009.⁵²²

Because of frequent high-profile attacks on the city throughout 2017, the Afghan government announced in August 2017 the development of a new security plan for Kabul, called ‘the Green Belt’ (also Zarghun Belt, in Pashtu), aimed at the implementation of new or improved security measures within the city, like setting up more checkpoints, installing vehicle barriers and metal gates, establishing scanners at the four gates to Kabul city in Pul-e Charkhi, Company, Tank-e Logar and Sar-e Kotal, deploying K9 units detecting explosives and illegal materials, and other measures. The plan was supposed to first cover the ‘diplomatic area’, also referred to as the Green Zone, and then be expanded to the north of Wazir Akbar Khan, Sherpur and an area along the road leading to the airport.⁵²³ Moreover, a special unit within the Afghan police called the Crisis Response Unit was created, in order to prevent and respond to attacks, as reported by Landinfo [informal translation].⁵²⁴

2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul city

As reported by Landinfo [informal translation] in September 2018, there is reason to believe that a significant proportion of recorded incidents involving the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have taken place in Kabul city. At the same time, IEDs are also frequently used in attacks on the road network in the province as a whole. In Kabul, there is rarely direct fighting, and even when exchanges of fire take place between conflict parties, they are not fighting over territorial control. The picture of conflict in Kabul city is characterised by asymmetric tactical warfare with suicide bombers and IEDs as weapons of attack.⁵²⁵

The ISKP plays a relevant role in Kabul city, where it has perpetrated a significant amount of attacks.⁵²⁶ Moreover, according to AAN’s expert Thomas Ruttig, the capital city offers infrastructure, logistics and possible personnel that could be used by the Haqqani network, Taliban groups, splinter groups claiming its affiliation to the IS and Pakistani anti-Shia groups.⁵²⁷

2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.1.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 1 686 civilian casualties (554 deaths and 1 132 injured) in Kabul city from suicide and complex attacks. ‘Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks across the country in 2018, 28 incidents occurred in Kabul city’. This represents an increase of 5 % compared to 2017. UNAMA

⁵¹⁹ Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, [url](#), pp. 38-39

⁵²⁰ Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, [url](#), pp. 35-36; Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6

⁵²¹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 7

⁵²² Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, [url](#), p. 39

⁵²³ Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., The New Kabul ‘Green Belt’ Security Plan: More Security for Whom?, AAN, 25 September 2017, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁵²⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁵²⁶ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁵²⁷ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

reported that '[t]he attacks perpetrated in Kabul mainly targeted civilians, including the civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other "soft" targets.'⁵²⁸ Though, between 16 November 2018 and 7 February 2019, suicide attacks decreased by 61 %, compared with the same period the year before: '[...] possibly reflecting successful interdiction efforts by Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the cities of Kabul and Jalalabad [...]'.⁵²⁹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 288 incidents related to insurgents in Kabul city.⁵³⁰

Throughout 2018, attacks targeting government offices,⁵³¹ Afghan security forces,⁵³² journalists,⁵³³ a ceremony in front of the airport,⁵³⁴ Muslim clerics,⁵³⁵ Shia worshippers,⁵³⁶ an educational centre,⁵³⁷ protesters,⁵³⁸ a sports' club⁵³⁹ and a voter registration centre⁵⁴⁰ were claimed by⁵⁴¹ or attributed to ISKP.⁵⁴² Many of these attacks significantly affected the Hazara population, as the participants of the protest were mainly Hazara and the educational centre, the sports clubs as well as the registration centre are all located in the Hazara dominated Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood (located in Police District, PD, 6).⁵⁴³ For instance, in April 2018, a suicide bomber attacked a voter registration centre in Dasht-e-Barchi, killing 57 people and injuring an additional 119.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, in early March 2019 a mortar attack killed at least eleven people and injured 95 near a gathering in Dasht-e-Barchi to mark the anniversary of the death of Abdul Ali Mazari, a prominent former leader of the Hazara community.⁵⁴⁵

Further attacks affecting the Shia community occurred during Nowruz celebrations in another area of Kabul city: in March 2018, at least 31 people were killed and 65 were wounded in a suicide attack near the Karte Sakhi shrine, where hundreds – many of them Shia - had gathered to celebrate the start of

⁵²⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

⁵²⁹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#)

⁵³⁰ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

⁵³¹ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: At least twelve killed in Kabul suicide blast, 11 June 2018, [url](#); CNN, ISIS claims attack on Afghan Interior Ministry, 30 May 2018, [url](#)

⁵³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Police among 4 dead as blasts, clashes rock Kabul, 9 May 2018, [url](#)

⁵³³ Die Zeit, Mindestens 25 Tote nach Doppelanschlag in Kabul, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁴ DW, Afghanistan: Deadly suicide attack at Kabul airport as exiled VP Dostum returns, 22 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁵ Reuters, Afghan president backs suicide bomb fatwa after 14 killed, 5 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁶ BBC News, Kabul Sakhi shrine: 'Dozens dead' in New Year attack, 21 March 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁷ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: ISIL Suicide bomber targets school in Kabul, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ Die Zeit, Mehrere Tote bei Anschlag nahe Anti-Taliban-Demo, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two journalists among 20 killed in Kabul blasts, 6 September 2018, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁵⁴¹ CNN, ISIS claims attack on Afghan Interior Ministry, 30 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Police among 4 dead as blasts, clashes rock Kabul, 9 May 2018, [url](#); Die Zeit, Mindestens 25 Tote nach Doppelanschlag in Kabul, 30 April 2018, [url](#); DW, Afghanistan: Deadly suicide attack at Kabul airport as exiled VP Dostum returns, 22 July 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan president backs suicide bomb fatwa after 14 killed, 5 June 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3

⁵⁴² Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two journalists among 20 killed in Kabul blasts, 6 September 2018, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴³ Die Zeit, Mehrere Tote bei Anschlag nahe Anti-Taliban-Demo, 12 November 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two journalists among 20 killed in Kabul blasts, 6 September 2018, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: ISIL Suicide bomber targets school in Kabul, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁴ BBC News, Afghanistan: Kabul voter centre suicide attack kills 57, 22 April 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Death toll rises to 11 in attack on Shia gathering in Kabul, 8 March 2019, [url](#)

Nowruz, the New Year festivity. The attack was claimed by ISKP.⁵⁴⁶ The same group carried out an attack through remote-controlled bombs during Nowruz celebrations in March 2019, killing at least six persons; this attack too, like the one of 2018, targeted an area close to the Karte Sakhi shrine.⁵⁴⁷

Moreover, further representative ISKP-related security incidents were recorded in Kabul city throughout 2018: at least 13 people were killed and 31 wounded in a suicide bombing at the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in June 2018.⁵⁴⁸ Dual suicide bombings occurred in Kabul in the Shash Darak area in April 2018, close to NATO headquarters, several embassies, foreign offices and the Afghan intelligence service. The attack killed 25 and wounded 45 people.⁵⁴⁹

The deadliest attack during parliamentary elections in October 2018 was carried out by ISKP outside a polling station in Kabul city killing 13 persons and injuring 40. IEC staff members and Afghan National Police officers performing civilian functions were among the fatalities.⁵⁵⁰

The Taliban also claimed attacks throughout 2018: The most prominent security incident occurred in late January, when a 'van painted to look like an ambulance' exploded outside of a government compound in Kabul city, killing 114 and wounding 229 civilians.⁵⁵¹ In early January, Taliban fighters stormed the Intercontinental Hotel (PD 4), killing at least 24 civilians and injuring 15.⁵⁵² Moreover, Taliban members carried out an attack against a foreign security contractors' compound in Pul-e-Charkhi (PD 9) in November, killing and wounding employees and other civilians.⁵⁵³ Furthermore, the insurgents claimed responsibility for a car bomb in mid January 2019 in front of the 'heavily fortified' Green Village compound⁵⁵⁴ (PD 9), that killed security guards and wounded more than 100 people.⁵⁵⁵ The Taliban publicly announced its opposition to parliamentary elections,⁵⁵⁶ and they threatened voters and volunteers, attacked polling centres, fired mortar shells and detonated bombs all over the country.⁵⁵⁷ Although security in Kabul city was tight,⁵⁵⁸ more than a dozen explosions were reported.⁵⁵⁹

In January 2018, AAN expert Thomas Ruttig described the difficulties of attributing security incidents to different anti-government groups. ISKP often claims attacks not carried out by its fighters, whereas the Taliban often deny their involvement in assaults causing high numbers of civilian casualties.⁵⁶⁰ For instance, when a suicide attack targeting a gathering of clerics at the Uranus wedding hall caused the

⁵⁴⁶ BBC News, Kabul Sakhi shrine: 'Dozens dead' in New Year attack, 21 March 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ BBC News, Kabul bombings: Nowruz celebrations hit by deadly blasts, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁸ BBC News, Kabul blast: At least 13 killed in Afghan ministry attack, 11 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ RFE/RL, RFE/RL Journalists Among 25 Killed In Kabul Suicide Bombings, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Special Report: 2018 elections violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁵⁵² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 27

⁵⁵³ Tolonews, Truck Bomb Attack In Kabul Leaves 10 Dead, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), Taliban carry out deadly attack on G4S compound in Kabul, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ Reuters, Afghan Taliban claim lethal car bomb attack in Kabul, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁵ Reuters, Afghan Taliban claim lethal car bomb attack in Kabul, 15 January 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Truck bombing against Green Village camp killed 4, injured 113 in east of Kabul city, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ VoA, Taliban Vows to Attack and Disrupt Afghan Elections, 8 October 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict: Special Report: 2018 elections violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁵⁷ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Special Report: 2018 elections violence, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2; New York Times (The), Afghanistan Votes for Parliament Under Shadow of Taliban Violence, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ News, Afghan election day plunges into chaos with multiple Taliban attacks on polling stations, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ New York Times (The), Afghanistan Votes for Parliament Under Shadow of Taliban Violence, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

death of at least 50 people in November 2018,⁵⁶¹ the Taliban denied their involvement in the incident and condemned it.⁵⁶² Furthermore, there was no claim of responsibility by ISKP.⁵⁶³

2.1.3.2 Displacement

As many as two-thirds of all Afghans displaced outside their province are moving towards the five regional capitals,⁵⁶⁴ and Kabul's growth has been particularly significant.⁵⁶⁵ The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known. Movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods.⁵⁶⁶ In September 2018, the Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation estimated the total number of IDPs in Kabul to be from 70 000 to 80 000 people.⁵⁶⁷ Research carried out by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on displacement in Kabul found that there are different categories of IDPs in the city: (1) those fleeing armed conflict and insecurity, (2) returnees who could not return to their area of origin and live in secondary displacement, (3) those displaced from rural areas because of natural disasters, localised conflicts or a shortage of work, essential services and food and (4) migratory groups/nomads such as Kuchis and Jogis residing in the city because conflict disrupted their migration patterns and livelihood or because of increasing impoverishment.⁵⁶⁸

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the capital, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21.⁵⁶⁹ They do not necessarily live separated from the other urban dwellers and often mingle with other vulnerable groups such as the urban poor, returnees and economic migrants. The lack of adequate land and affordable housing in the urban area forces most new and protracted IDPs in Kabul to reside in one of the sixty to seventy informal and illegal settlements around the city. These are often referred to as '(Kabul) Informal Settlements', ISETs or KIS (most of them not in accordance with the Kabul City Master Plan) and include some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city.⁵⁷⁰

In December 2017, the Afghanistan Protection Cluster reported on worrying indications of rising poverty in Kabul's KIS-sites, contributing to street begging, over-crowded accommodation, and heightened risks of gender-based violence.⁵⁷¹ A study by the NGO IMPACT Initiatives, published in December 2017, indicated a low percentage of exchange between people residing within and outside ISET's, revealing two distinct sub-communities within the broader community and a perceived isolation of the IDP families from surrounding host communities.⁵⁷² The IDPs arriving and residing in Kabul add pressure on the community, basic services and social infrastructure, strongly affecting the

⁵⁶¹ BBC News, Kabul suicide bomber kills dozens at gathering of clerics, 20 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁶² Defense Post (The), Afghanistan: Dozens killed in explosion at religious gathering in Kabul, 20 November 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, 'Brutal and barbaric': Victims recount horror of Kabul attack, 21 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁶³ BBC News, Kabul suicide bomber kills dozens at gathering of clerics, 20 November 2018, [url](#); Defense Post (The), Afghanistan: Dozens killed in explosion at religious gathering in Kabul, 20 November 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ NRC, Displaced: If You're a Thirteen Year Old Living in Afghanistan, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 17

⁵⁶⁶ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 8; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3 8

⁵⁶⁷ Tolonews, Insecurity, Drought Displace 300,000 Afghans, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁸ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁶⁹ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, May 2017, 17 June 2017, [url](#), p. 1; ERM, Household Assessment Report, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁷⁰ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Bjelica, J., Afghanistan's Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#); NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 53; Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#); UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs for Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), p. 35; Action Against Hunger, No Afghans Left Behind. Calling for a Collective People Centered Approach to Hunger, November 2018, [url](#), p. 12

⁵⁷¹ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, November 2017, December 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁷² IMPACT Initiatives, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul Afghanistan, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 4-5

absorption capacity of the city.⁵⁷³ More than 80 % of the Kabul IDP respondents of a Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) study published in January 2018 listed access to food and water as a major challenge in their daily lives.⁵⁷⁴ Afghanistan's capital is facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people.⁵⁷⁵

With limited job opportunities, few or no social protection nets, poor shelter/housing conditions, impeded access to education and healthcare and the continuous fear of eviction displaced families in the KIS-sites face increased protection risks in their daily life and are often forced into secondary displacement and negative coping strategies like child labour, early marriage and reducing quantity and quality of food.⁵⁷⁶ Child labour appears particularly prevalent among the urban displaced in Kabul, due to the greater economic vulnerability of IDPs in the capital and the fact that the city's relatively vibrant economy creates more demand for child labour.⁵⁷⁷ IDPs in Kabul are more likely than their counterparts in the general population to be underemployed. Their lack of marketable skills for urban markets restricts them to unstable work. They mostly work as unskilled day labourers, competing for low paid and precarious jobs in the construction sector and to a lesser extent in agriculture.⁵⁷⁸

Apart from internal displacement due to the conflict in Afghanistan, Kabul city sees large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighboring countries (Pakistan and Iran), putting further strain on the city's services and its capacity to reintegrate these displaced people.⁵⁷⁹ A study by Oxfam among returnee populations in Kabul city found that most returnees depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support. Those who have been in Kabul for several years reported a deterioration of the situation for returnees in the city. According to Oxfam the same general situation applies to both forced and voluntary returnees in Kabul: 'few tensions but increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fears among both returnees and host communities'.⁵⁸⁰

According to the World Bank around 80 % of Kabul's population, a mix of recent and long term IDPs, returnees, economic migrants and original inhabitants, lives in informal settlements. Not only newly displaced people or returnees, but also some older-generation IDPs and returnees still find it hard to integrate in the city and find stable employment, while they are often cut off from humanitarian help destined for recent arrivals. Within this context of massive and prolonged population movements, analyst Nassim Majidi, co-director of the research organisation Samuel Hall, quoted by the Guardian,

⁵⁷³ UNHCR, UNHCR's Support Towards the Implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence Through Greater Responsibility Sharing 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5, 21-22; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁵⁷⁴ NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁵⁷⁵ Al, 'My Children Will Die This Winter' - Afghanistan's Broken Promise to the Displaced, 2016, [url](#), pp. 33-34; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results June 2017, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 25-26; Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#); Kazemi, S. R., Blue Gold: The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#); DW, Can Religious Leaders Help Keep Kabul's Water Flowing?, 23 October 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), To Survive in Kabul Boys Scavenge for Treasure in the City's Trash, 11 February 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁶ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, November 2017, December 2017, [url](#); NRC et al., Going Home to Displacement: Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan May 2018, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Haymon B. S., The Cycle of Struggle: A Human Security Perspective on Afghanistan's IDP Women, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁵⁷⁷ NRC et al., Going Home to Displacement: Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-7; NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 32-33

⁵⁷⁸ NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁵⁷⁹ ACAPS, Anticipatory Briefing Note - Afghanistan: Forced returnees: Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul, 17 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, 17 June 2017, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 15

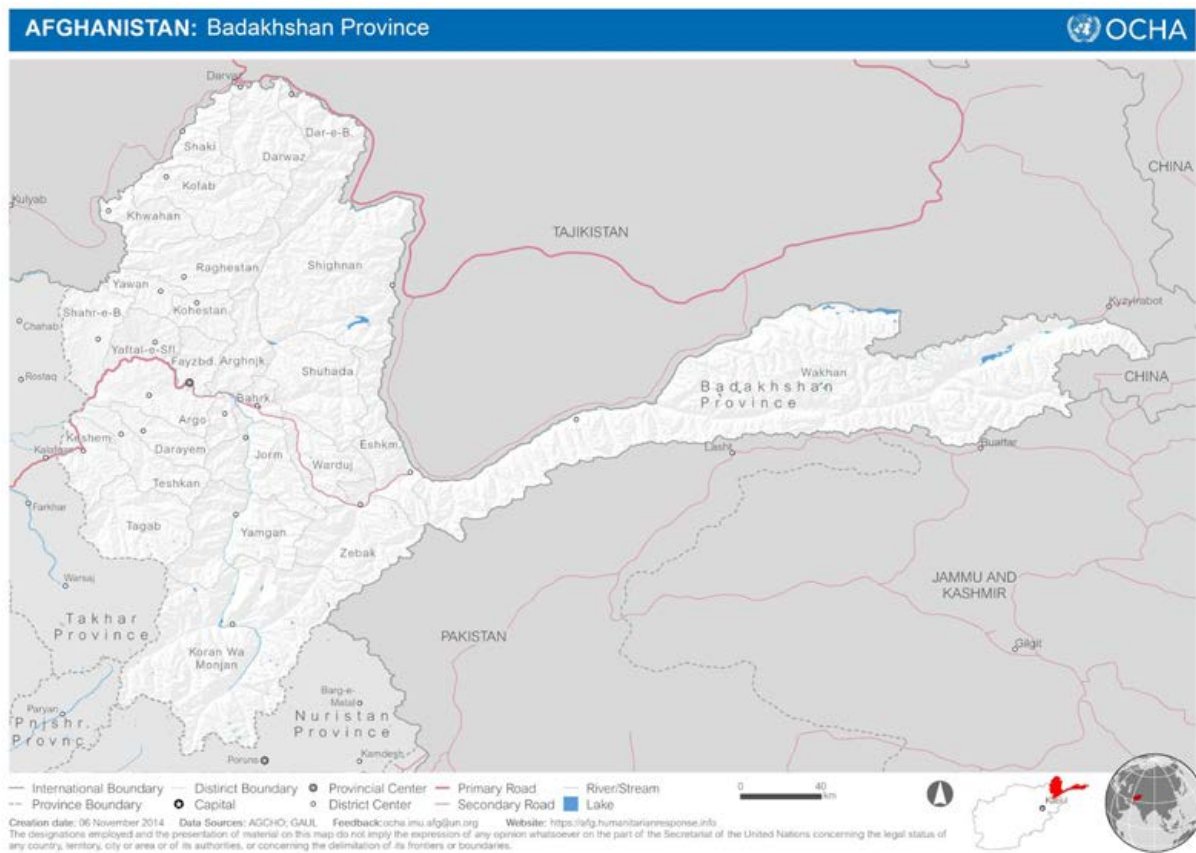
⁵⁸⁰ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24

refers to the humanitarian situation in Kabul as a 'powder keg, with poverty, greater risks of natural disasters, disease and social instability'.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

2.2 Badakhshan

2.2.1 General description of the province



The province of Badakhshan is located in the north-eastern region of Afghanistan and shares international borders with Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. Within Afghanistan, Badakhshan borders the provinces of Takhar, Panjshir, and Nuristan.⁵⁸² Badakhshan is divided into the following districts: Arghanjkhwah, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz (Marmay), Darwaz-e-Balla (Nesay), Eshkshmesh, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, Koran wa Munjan, Raghestan, Shar-e-Buzorg, Shighnan, Shaki, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, Yaftal-e-Sufla, Yamgan (Girwan), Yawan, and Zebak.⁵⁸³ Most of the province is mountainous. The provincial capital of Badakhshan is Fayzabad.⁵⁸⁴

According to estimates by the Afghan CSO, the population of Badakhshan is 1 017 499 in 2018/19.⁵⁸⁵ The province is composed of Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Hazara, Baloch and Kyrgyz.⁵⁸⁶

Scheduled passenger service to Badakhshan's regional airport was reportedly suspended in January 2018 after the death of several Kam Air staff members in a suicide attack.⁵⁸⁷ As of February 2019, scheduled passenger services between Fayzabad and Kabul are provided.⁵⁸⁸ A new road connecting

⁵⁸² UNOCHA, Reference Map Badakhshan Province, 19 February 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸³ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Badakhshan, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 22

⁵⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Badakhshan province, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸⁶ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badakhshan, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁸ Sweden, Lifos, Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan, 7 February 2019, [url](#)

Badakhshan with neighbouring Takhar province is under construction; its extension to the Tajik-Afghan border in the east of the province is planned.⁵⁸⁹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Badakhshan is a region for poppy cultivation in northern Afghanistan.⁵⁹⁰ The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) reported in 2014 stated that it is also a transit zone for drug trafficking.⁵⁹¹ The province is rich in mineral resources.⁵⁹² Badakhshan's mines are allegedly exploited illegally by armed men and insurgents.⁵⁹³ Contracts to legally extract gold and copper in the province have reportedly been signed in October 2018.⁵⁹⁴

2.2.2 Conflict background and actors in Badakhshan

Between 1996 and 2001, Badakhshan was among the few areas in Afghanistan remaining beyond Taliban control. Nevertheless, sources in 2017 and 2018 reported that Taliban presence is on the rise in several districts of the province.⁵⁹⁵ According to an article published by the Afghan news portal Khaama Press in December 2018, Badakhshan is one of the relatively volatile provinces in north-eastern Afghanistan.⁵⁹⁶

An AAN report published in 2017 highlights that the Taliban have become increasingly successful in Badakhshan since 2015, partly because of a changed recruitment policy which is – contrary to the Taliban strategy of the 1990s – more affirmative towards local non-Pashtuns, in particular Tajiks. Another reason for the insurgents' recent successes in Badakhshan are political dynamics which have long been dominated by struggles between local powerbrokers.⁵⁹⁷

Besides local Taliban insurgents, Tajik, Uzbek, Uyghur,⁵⁹⁸ and to a lesser extent Russian and Turkmen nationals are reportedly fighting in several districts of the province.⁵⁹⁹ According to a working paper of by the NGO The Liaison Office and the Bonn International Center for Conversion, published in June 2017, foreign fighters and their families settled in Badakhshan as a result of a Pakistan Army operation in North Waziristan, Pakistan, in 2014.⁶⁰⁰ Reportedly, they are likely to belong to smaller insurgent groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al Qaeda. Furthermore, foreign fighters such as the above mentioned Uyghurs are embedded within local Taliban structures, fighting alongside Afghan insurgents.⁶⁰¹ The same source indicates that the Badakhshan Taliban are a comparatively heterogeneous movement, facilitating '[...] a hybridization of the local insurgency in the name of the Taliban.'⁶⁰² Afghanistan Analysts Network however also stated that '[...] reliably identifying and tracking foreign fighters is virtually impossible [...]. And 'determining those fighters' actual origins is equally difficult.'⁶⁰³

⁵⁸⁹ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁹¹ AREU, Evolving Terrain: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2013, February 2014, [url](#), p. 24

⁵⁹² Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy Badakhshan and Takhar, October 2010, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal extraction of Badakhshan mines goes on, 7 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan gold, copper mines contracts signed, 6 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁵ Gandhara, Taliban Increasing Presence In Remote Afghan Region Bordering China, 12 February 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ Khaama Press, Militants suffer casualties in Badakhshan airstrike, 1 December 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ Gandhara, Taliban Increasing Presence In Remote Afghan Region Bordering China, 12 February 2018, [url](#); Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁵⁹⁹ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁰⁰ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁰¹ Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#); Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁰² Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁰³ Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

According to Afghan intelligence documents, IS is present in Badakhshan province.⁶⁰⁴ Afghan officials however dismissed Russian claims in 2018 about unknown helicopters landing in Afghanistan's northern provinces – Badakhshan among them – in order to support IS fighters on the ground.⁶⁰⁵ A 2017 analysis of IS in Afghanistan indicates that IS presence is less intense in Badakhshan than in nearby Kunduz and Takhar provinces.⁶⁰⁶

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Badakhshan is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.⁶⁰⁷

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Badakhshan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.⁶⁰⁸ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

BADAKHSHAN	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁶⁰⁹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Arghanjkwaha	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Argo	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Baharak	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Darayem	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Darwaz	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	remote - not under anyone's control
Darwaz-e- Balla	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	remote - not under anyone's control
Eshkmesh	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	remote - not under anyone's control
Fayzabad (capital)	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Jorm	Gov control	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

⁶⁰⁴ Press TV, Daesh leader in Afghanistan killed in airstrikes in Nangarhar: Government, 26 August 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁵ Afghanistan Times, Afghanistan dismisses Russia's claims over unknown helicopters landing, 21 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 26

⁶⁰⁷ Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁹ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Keshem	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Khash	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	remote - not under anyone's control
Khwahan	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	remote - not under anyone's control
Kofab	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Kohestan	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%
Koran Wa Monjan	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	remote - not under anyone's control
Raghestan	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Shahr-e-Buzorg	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 68%; TB control: 32%
Shaki	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	remote - not under anyone's control
Shighnan	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	remote - not under anyone's control
Shuhada	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Tagab	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Teshkan	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Wakhan	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	remote - not under anyone's control
Warduj	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Yaftal-e-Sufla	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Yawan	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	remote - not under anyone's control
Yamgan	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Zebak	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Nasai⁶¹⁰	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%

⁶¹⁰ According to Pajhwok Afghan News' division of Badakhshan in administrative divisions Nasai is an area/mini district within the district of Darwaz. (Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2018 - Badakhshan Administrative Units, n.d., [url](#))

2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.2.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 63 civilian casualties (18 deaths and 45 injured) in Badakhshan. This represents a decrease of 3 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by kidnapping/abduction and targeted killings.⁶¹¹

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Jorm in the second highest category and Kohistan, Raghestan, Teshkan and Warduj districts in the category below. Baharak, Tagab and Yamgan are in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.⁶¹²

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 89 incidents related to insurgents in Badakhshan province.⁶¹³

Fighting between government forces and insurgents took place in several districts in 2018 (i.e. in Arghanjkhwa,⁶¹⁴ Jorm,⁶¹⁵ Kohestan,⁶¹⁶ Koran wa Monjan,⁶¹⁷ Darwaz-e-Balla,⁶¹⁸ and Zebak districts⁶¹⁹).

In January and February 2018, US⁶²⁰ and Afghan forces⁶²¹ launched airstrikes targeted insurgents' infrastructure in Badakhshan in order to curb terrorist activities near Chinese and Tajik borders. The air campaign reportedly targeted the Taliban stronghold Warduj for the first time in two years.⁶²² In May 2018, the US air-force conducted an airstrike in the regional capital, which, according to residents, failed to hit militants.⁶²³ Further airstrikes were carried out by Afghan and US air forces in April, October, and November 2018.⁶²⁴

While airstrikes have been conducted in Badakhshan province before, AAN experts termed the intensity of the February 2018 airstrikes unusual and '[...] USFOR-A touted them as a demonstration of the stepped-up US air campaign in Afghanistan and its expansion to the northern parts of the country.'⁶²⁵ The airstrikes purportedly targeted Taliban camps providing support to militant Turkic Muslim Uyghurs of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) seeking independence from China. Experts cited by AAN doubted that a large Uyghur extremist presence in Badakhshan, or that ETIM or other militant Uyghur groups such as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) pose a credible cross-border

⁶¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁶¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁶¹³ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

⁶¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Conflict displaces around 300 Badakhshan families, 27 August 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹⁵ Pasbanan, Taliban insurgents were heavily defeated in Jurm district of Badakhshan, 11 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 ANA soldiers killed in attack on Badakhshan post, 13 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ Afghanistan Times, Commandos battle to regain Kohistan district, 4 May 2018, [url](#); Gandhara, Suicide Bombers Attack Home Of Kandahar Police Chief, 6 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹⁷ Xinhua News Agency, Over 2 dozen killed in 24 hours in Afghanistan, 25 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹⁸ Tolonews, Badakhshan's Nusay District Cleared Of Taliban, 5 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Badakhshan's Nusay district on the verge of collapse', 29 August 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan: 8 security personnel among 23 killed, 16 July 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁰ Afghanistan Times, New US forces air campaign expands to the north of Afghanistan, 6 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶²¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 foreign rebels killed in Badakhshan airstrike, 16 January 2018, [url](#)

⁶²² Xinhua News Agency, Afghan airstrikes against Taliban kill 8 in Badakhshan province, 4 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶²³ Tolonews, Foreign forces conduct airstrike in Faizabad city, 25 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁴ Khaama Press, 8 militants killed in AAF airstrike in Badakhshan province: Gen. Radmanish, 8 April 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Militants suffer casualties in separate clashes, airstrikes in Balkh and Badakhshan, 26 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Militants suffer casualties in Badakhshan airstrike, 1 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁵ Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

threat.⁶²⁶ However, a government official of Badakhshan claimed that Uyghur extremists plan to increase their force in Badakhshan in order to move into China through the Wakhan Corridor.⁶²⁷ According to a statement by the Afghan National Army, ETIM's deputy leader was killed by Afghan security forces in April 2018 in Jorm district.⁶²⁸ Rumours about the establishment of a Chinese military base in Badakhshan have been refuted by the Afghan government, as well as by Chinese officials in February 2018.⁶²⁹

2.2.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 16 940 persons displaced from Badakhshan province, mainly finding refuge within the province itself or in neighbouring provinces of Panjsher and Nuristan, and in Kabul province.⁶³⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 330 persons displaced from Badakhshan province, all moving to Fayzabad district within the province itself.⁶³¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 16 856 persons displaced to Badakhshan province, all displaced from within the province itself.⁶³²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 330 persons displaced to Badakhshan province, all displaced from within the province itself.⁶³³

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Arghanjkhwa	987	/	714	/
Argo	462	/	616	/
Darayem	1 386	2 618	/	/
Eshkmesh	35	308	/	/
Jorm	3 843	3 213	/	/
Kohestan	2 261	105	/	/
Koran Wa Monjan	14	/	/	/
Raghestan	581	581	/	/
Tagab	42	/	/	/
Teshkan	5 943	3 269	/	/
Warduj	1 050	/	/	/
Yamgan	287	/	/	/
Zebak	49	49	/	/
Baharak	/	1 764	/	/

⁶²⁶ Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁷ Gandhara, Taliban Increasing Presence In Remote Afghan Region Bordering China, 12 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ 1TV News, Afghan forces kill No. 2 of anti-China militant group, 1 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶²⁹ Afghanistan Times, Afghanistan denies China is building military base in Badakhshan, 17 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, No deliberation on Chinese military base: NSC, 17 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

⁶³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

Fayzabad	/	2 765	/	1 330
Keshem	/	1 484	/	/
Shighnan	/	700	/	/

In January 2018, UNOCHA registered 3 200 people displaced due to conflict from four districts in Badakhshan to the provincial capital Fayzabad City.⁶³⁴

A military operation at the end of March 2018 reportedly displaced 4 200 people in Baharak and Jorm districts.⁶³⁵ Due to continued military operations in the area UNOCHA registered another 2 800 displaced people in April 2018 from remote villages of Jorm district to the district centre and to Fayzabad City.⁶³⁶ An offensive by an armed group in Baharak district in April 2018 reportedly displaced 1 400 people to the district centre.⁶³⁷

At end of April and in May 2018, UNOCHA reported 4 000 people displaced from Teshkan district to the center of the district, to Fayzabad city and to Darayem and Keshem districts, due to military operations and conflict.⁶³⁸

Due to ongoing conflict, armed clashes and a Taliban invasion in several villages in the Shiva area of Arghanjkhwa district and in Argo district, from January to September 2018, 300 - 600 families (numbering more than 1 600 people) were reportedly displaced to Shighnan and Baharak districts and to Fayzabad city.⁶³⁹

In the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018 - 2021 and the Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2019 UNOCHA classifies Badakhshan as one of the eight/nine main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities.⁶⁴⁰ The Afghanistan Protection Cluster mentioned Badakhshan as one of the six top hosting provinces for IDPs in May, June and August 2018.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 22 - 28 January, 28 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 March - 1 April, 9 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 - 8 April 2018, 8 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 - 29 April 2018, 30 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 - 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badakhshan Province - Meeting Summary, 21 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

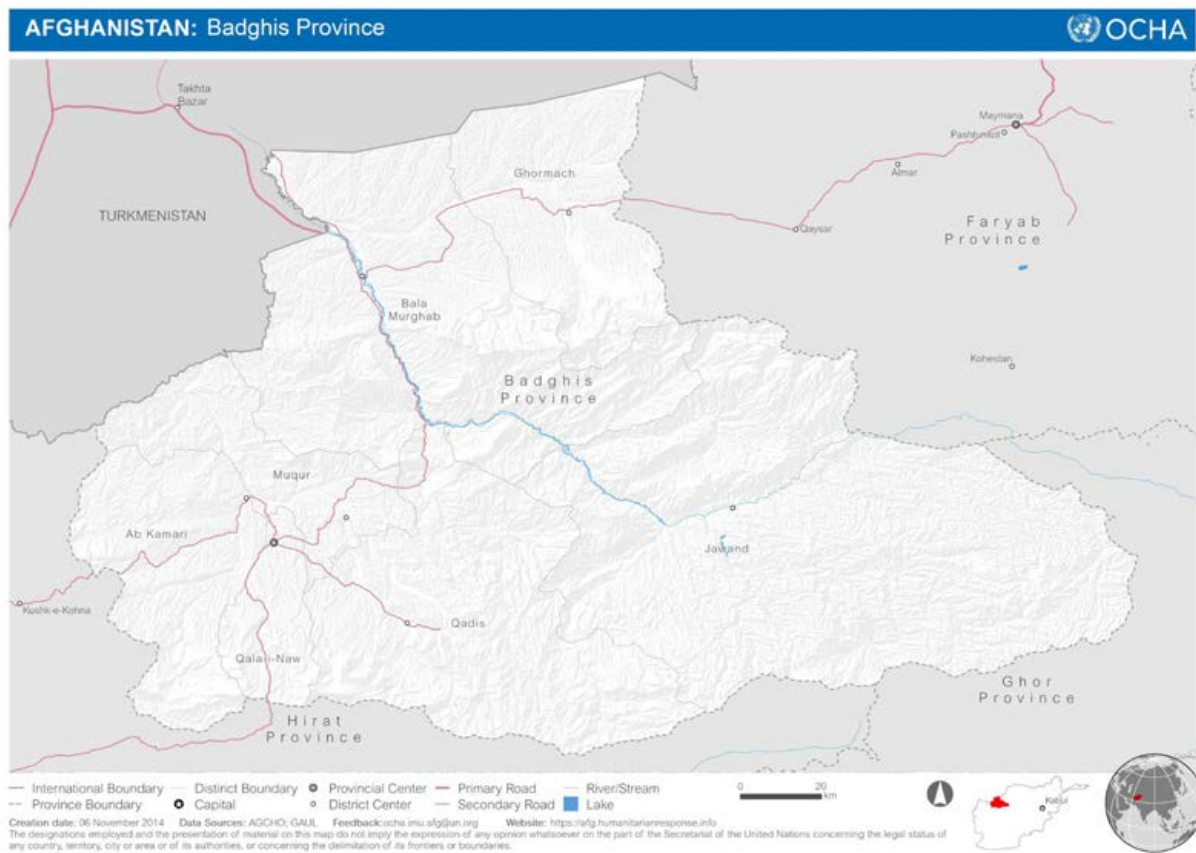
⁶³⁹ Xinhua News Agency, Taliban Outfit Forces 600 Families to Leave Their Houses in N. Afghanistan, 26 August 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Conflict Displaces Around 300 Badakhshan Families, 27 August 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badakhshan Province - Meeting Summary, 18 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 17 - 23 September 2018, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 42; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan - January 2018 - December 2021, December 2018, [url](#), p. 51

⁶⁴¹ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan May 2018, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan June 2018, 23 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan August 2018, 3 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

2.3 Badghis

2.3.1 General description of the province



The province of Badghis is situated in western Afghanistan.⁶⁴² The provincial capital is Qala-e-Naw. Badghis borders the provinces of Herat to the west, Faryab to the east, and Ghor to the south. Furthermore, it shares an international border with Turkmenistan to the north. Badghis comprises the following districts: Ab Kamari, Bala Murghab, Ghormach, Jawand, Muqur, Qadis, and Qala-i-Naw.⁶⁴³ The district of Ghormach reportedly became part of Faryab in 2017.⁶⁴⁴ In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, the Frontier Post reported that Ghormach's administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons.⁶⁴⁵ The administrative status of the district seems to be disputed. AAN cited sources claiming that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.⁶⁴⁶

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Badghis for 2018/19 at 530 574.⁶⁴⁷ According to the Office of the President of Afghanistan, Badghis is inhabited mainly by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Turkmens.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁴³ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Badghis, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 37

⁶⁴⁴ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁶⁴⁵ Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁶ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁷ Afghanistan CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁴⁸ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badghis, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

The UNODC Opium Survey of 2018 identified Badghis as one of the main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan.⁶⁴⁹ In 2018, opium poppy cultivation in Badghis Province decreased by more than two thirds compared to 2017, mainly driven by drought,⁶⁵⁰ but also because UNODC counted the district Ghormach, which is a major poppy cultivating district, as part of Faryab in 2018.⁶⁵¹

Badghis is reportedly rich in natural resources.⁶⁵² Extraction is however impeded by a lack of security. According to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), precious and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli are mined illegally in some districts of Badghis Province. Furthermore, Badghis has Afghanistan's highest concentration of pistachio forests.⁶⁵³ While this used to be a source of income for all in former times, the spread of pistachio forests has been significantly reduced during the past four decades and residents now claim that insurgents increasingly profit from the sale of pistachio nuts.⁶⁵⁴

The roads of Badghis have been reported to be of poor quality and mostly unsafe because of insurgent and criminal activity.⁶⁵⁵ According to a report by AAN, parts of the paved highway between Badghis and Faryab have been under Taliban control.⁶⁵⁶ An assessment by SIGAR found that only 15 % of a projected 233-kilometre section of the Afghan Ring Road between the district of Qeysar in Faryab and the site of Laman in Badghis have been built as of September 2017 despite considerable funding since 2005.⁶⁵⁷ SIGAR linked the project's failure mainly to security issues and estimated that the prospects for a timely completion are bleak due to increasing insecurity in the region.⁶⁵⁸

2.3.2 Conflict background and actors in Badghis

According to the provincial profile of Badghis by the Naval Postgraduate School, Badghis was the first province of northern Afghanistan to be seized by the Taliban in late 1996.⁶⁵⁹ After the fall of the Taliban, several influential warlords ruled Badghis, among them Abdul Malik, Rashid Dostum, Juma Khan, and Ismail Khan.⁶⁶⁰

Khaama Press stated in April 2018 that Badghis is one of the relatively calm provinces in north-western Afghanistan, noting however that anti-government forces are active in several of its districts and 'often carry out insurgency activities'.⁶⁶¹ According to the US Congress-financed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Badghis Province has been a hotbed of fighting by Taliban and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants since 2014, and Afghan security forces have launched several offensives since then in an attempt to drive militants out of the province.'⁶⁶² According to the website Strategy Page, different Taliban factions (i.e. Taliban led by Mullah Mansour and Taliban led by Mullah Rasool) have also been fighting against each other in the western provinces of Afghanistan (i.e. in Badghis,

⁶⁴⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁶⁵⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁶⁵¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁶⁵² IWPR, Riches Lie Below the Surface in Afghan Province, 12 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ IWPR, Insurgents Profit from Afghan Pistachio, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ IWPR, Insurgents Profit from Afghan Pistachio, 26 March 2018, [url](#); Salaam Times, Taliban's control of pistachio trade in western Afghanistan 'alarming', 6 September 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), p. 44-46; Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁶ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁷ SIGAR, Afghanistan's Ring Road from Qeysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over \$249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁵⁸ SIGAR, Afghanistan's Ring Road from Qeysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over \$249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁶⁵⁹ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Badghis Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶¹ Khaama Press, 16 army and police soldiers martyred in Badghis attacks: official, 23 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶² RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

Farah, and Herat) since 2016, leaving hundreds of Taliban fighters dead and providing government forces with an opportunity to gain influence in formerly Taliban-controlled districts.⁶⁶³ An EU-funded Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) household assessment report of November 2018 indicated that the security situation has worsened in Badghis in 2018 due to fighting between insurgents and government forces in Jawand and Qadis.⁶⁶⁴

In autumn 2017, the Taliban leadership in western Afghanistan reportedly called on its commanders to fight against IS and eliminate its supporters. According to the same source, the Taliban announced that any collaboration, compromise or interaction between Taliban and IS insurgents will be punished severely – among other provinces especially in Badghis.⁶⁶⁵ Referring to NATO sources, the Spanish newspaper El Mundo stated in August 2017 that a small group of IS fighters emerged in Murghab district in Badghis⁶⁶⁶ and an International Public Policy (IPP) Review stated in January 2019, that '[...] the Islamic State of Khorasan has cultivated its presence [...]' among other provinces of northern Afghanistan also in Badghis.⁶⁶⁷ However, there were reportedly no IS-related attacks in Badghis between 2014 and 2018.⁶⁶⁸

The 207 Zafar Corps is in charge of the Afghan National Army operations in the province of Badghis.⁶⁶⁹

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Badghis province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.⁶⁷⁰ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

BADGHIS	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁶⁷¹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Qala-e-Naw (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA control	GIRoA control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Ab Kamari	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Bala Murghab	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%

⁶⁶³ Strategy Page, Afghanistan: Perpetual Pressure On Pakistan, 13 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁴ ERM, Household Assessment Report, 1 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶⁵ IFP, Taliban Calls ISIS "Crusader", Affiliate of United States, 8 October 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ El Mundo, Guerra civil talibán en la 'provincia española' de Afganistán, 29 August 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. 11

⁶⁶⁹ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁷⁰ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷¹ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Jawand	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 96%; Gov control: 4%
Muqur	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control: 94 %; Gov control: 8 %
Qadis	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 94 %; Gov control: 8 %
Ghormach	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Tagab Alam	/	/	/	/	TB control
Sang Atesh⁶⁷²	/	/	/	/	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Daraboom	/	/	/	/	TB control

2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.3.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 79 civilian casualties (21 deaths and 58 injured) in Badghis. This represents a decrease of 40 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by unexploded ordnance (UXO)/landmines and (non-suicide) IEDs.⁶⁷³

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts Bala Murghab, Muqur, Ab Kamari and Qadis in the second highest category and Qala-e-Naw and Jawand districts in the third highest category. Ghormach district is placed in the highest category.⁶⁷⁴

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 119 incidents related to insurgents in Badghis province.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷² ACCORD added during the review that Sang Atesh is the capital of Ab Kamari district. ACCORD, email, 15 March 2019

⁶⁷³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁶⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁵ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

The Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) conducted several clearing operations in 2018, e.g. in March,⁶⁷⁶ April,⁶⁷⁷ June,⁶⁷⁸ July,⁶⁷⁹ September,⁶⁸⁰ and December.⁶⁸¹ Taliban attacks on pro-government forces took place throughout the year, e.g. in the districts of Qadis,⁶⁸² Maqur,⁶⁸³ Ab-i-Kamari,⁶⁸⁴ Qala-i-Naw,⁶⁸⁵ including an attack on a check-post in the provincial capital, which left 16 members of the government forces dead.⁶⁸⁶ In May 2018, the Taliban overran an area in Maqur district after the security forces retreated from the area.⁶⁸⁷ Regarding the scope of casualties, the climax was reached on 20 June 2018 (a day after the end of the Eid ceasefire), when 20 to 30 ANA soldiers died after militants ambushed a check-point in Bala Murghab district.⁶⁸⁸ Afghan newsportal Tolonews reports that 24 Taliban fighters died in a clash with security forces in Ab Kamari district on the same day.⁶⁸⁹ In September 2018, the Maqur district police chief was killed in a roadside bombing.⁶⁹⁰

In March 2018, 5 civilians were kidnapped when the Taliban stopped a passenger vehicle traveling from Herat to Badghis in Qala-i-Naw.⁶⁹¹

A bomb blast in Qala-i-Naw injured eleven people, including two children in July 2018. According to the governor's spokesman, the explosives were attached to a motorcycle.⁶⁹²

2.3.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 11 967 persons displaced from Badghis province, most of whom (9 667) were displaced within the province, mainly in the provincial capital district, Qala-e Naw.⁶⁹³

⁶⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly 100 militants killed in past 24 hours: MoD, 9 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 45 rebels killed in fresh operation: MoD, 16 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 71 militants killed in round-the-clock operations: MoD, 23 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 rebels killed, 20 injured in fresh operations: MoD, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Above 100 rebels slain in past 24 hours, says MoD, 13 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁸ Khaama Press, Heavy airstrikes target militant compounds in Badghis after last week's major attack, 24 June 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Suffers Heavy Losses In Afghan Air Strike, 30 June 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 63 Insurgents Killed In ANSF Operations: MoD, 1 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 72 Taliban killed in round-the-clock raids, 6 July 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 67 Insurgents Killed In ANDSF, AAF Operations, 14 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 62 insurgents killed, 17 injured in fresh raids: MoD, 20 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ Tolonews, 63 Insurgents Killed In ANSF Operations: MoD, 1 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 72 Taliban killed in round-the-clock raids, 6 July 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 67 Insurgents Killed In ANDSF, AAF Operations, 14 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 62 insurgents killed, 17 injured in fresh raids: MoD, 20 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁰ Tolonews, 67 Insurgents Killed In ANDSF, AAF Operations, 14 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 62 insurgents killed, 17 injured in fresh raids: MoD, 20 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Badghis areas; police in denial, 24 April 2018, [url](#); News Services Division, Afghan official: Taliban target police checkpoint, killing 5, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 dead, many wounded in Farah, Badghis clashes, 10 July 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 members of uprising force killed in Taliban attacks, 22 June 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Red Unit commander among 12 killed in Badghis, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 policemen, as many militants killed in Badghis clash, 4 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 policemen, 8 militants killed in Badghis clash, 17 September 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ Khaama Press, 16 army and police soldiers martyred in Badghis attacks: official, 23 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis: Taliban capture Maqur's village, 16 May 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁸ El Mundo, Mueren 30 soldados afganos en el peor ataque talibán desde el fin de la tregua, 20 June 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 ANA soldiers, 5 rebels killed in Badghis clashes, 20 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁹ Tolonews, 24 Taliban Killed In Badghis Clash, 20 June 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, District police chief killed in Badghis roadside bombing, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 5 passengers in Badghis, 30 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 5 passengers in Badghis, 14 July 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 1 921 persons displaced from Badghis province, more than the half of them displaced into Herat province and the rest were displaced within Badghis province itself.⁶⁹⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 9 918 persons displaced to Badghis province.⁶⁹⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 651 persons displaced to Badghis province, all coming from Badghis province's districts.⁶⁹⁶

Districts	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Abkamari	2 902	/	1 329	/
Balamurghab	1 817	/	38	/
Ghormach	176	/	/	/
Jawand	1 738	/	60	/
Muqur	1 498	207	/	/
Qadis	3 333	1 002	298	/
Qala-e Naw	503	8 709	196	651

In 2018, Badghis was considered as one of 'the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities'.⁶⁹⁷ UNOCHA reported in February,⁶⁹⁸ May,⁶⁹⁹ June,⁷⁰⁰ July 2018⁷⁰¹ and January 2019⁷⁰² displacements within or from Abkamari district to the provincial capital Qala-e naw or Herat province because of the conflict and the fightings. These have also caused displacements from Balamurghab, Jawand, Muqur, Qadis districts to the provincial capital in February 2018⁷⁰³ and from Jawand district in October 2018.⁷⁰⁴

The drought is another important cause of displacements within Abkamari district to the district centre and from other districts to distant provinces like Kandahar⁷⁰⁵ or to the provincial capital.⁷⁰⁶ In June, July and August 2018, 263 000 people were displaced within Badghis and Herat provinces because of the drought.⁷⁰⁷

Another natural cause of displacements are flash floods which affected 2 667 families in Muqur district and 496 families in Abkamari district in May 2018.⁷⁰⁸

⁶⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 42

⁶⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 February – 4 March 2018, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 – 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badghis Province - Meeting Summary, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 9 – 15 July 2018, 16 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 January 2019, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 February – 4 March 2018, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 February – 4 March 2018, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 27 August – 2 September 2018, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badghis Province - Meeting Summary, 1 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

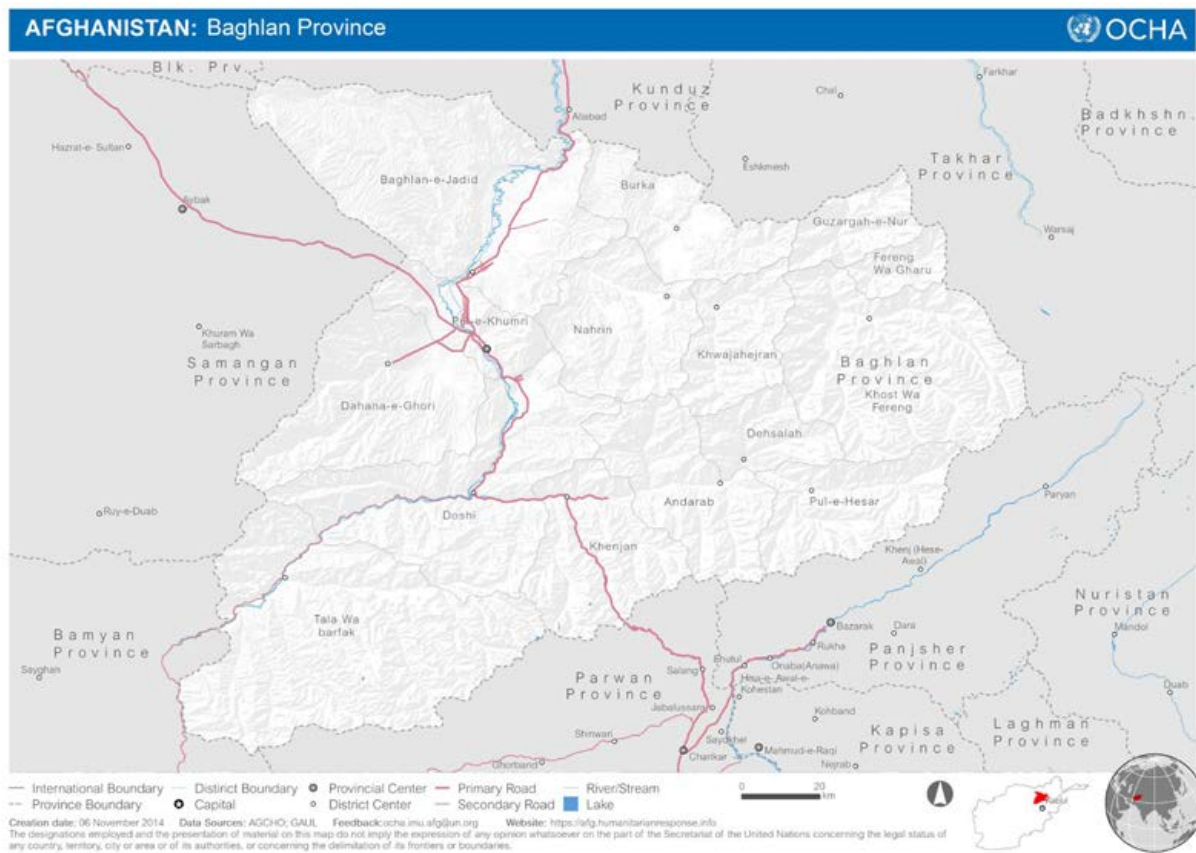
⁷⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badghis Province - Meeting Summary, 30 May 2018, [url](#)

In July 2018, UNOCHA mentioned displacements within Muqur district because of 'inter-tribal disputes over agricultural land'.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 July 2018, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

2.4 Baghlan

2.4.1 General description of the province



Baghlan, which is located in north-eastern Afghanistan, borders the provinces of Bamiyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Panjshir, Parwan,⁷¹⁰ and Balkh.⁷¹¹ Baghlan is divided into the following 15 districts: Andarab, Baghlan-e-Jadid (also known as Baghlan-e Markazi), Burka, Dahana-e-Ghuri, Deh Salah, Doshi, Fereng wa Gharu, Guzargah-e-Nur, Khenjan, Khost wa Fereng, Khwajahejran (Jalga), Nahrin, Pul-e-Hesar, Pul-e-Khumri, and Tala wa Barfak. The capital of the province is Pul-e-Khumri.⁷¹²

The Afghan CSO estimates the population of Baghlan at 977 297 in 2018/19.⁷¹³ According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, a slight majority of Baghlan's residents are Tajiks, followed by Pashtuns and Hazaras as second and third largest ethnic groups respectively. Furthermore, ethnic Uzbeks and Tatars live in Baghlan.⁷¹⁴

Baghlan is known to be an economic hub connected to eight other provinces by the Kabul-North highway.⁷¹⁵ This is the only trans-Hindukush highway in Afghanistan and the main transit route between Kabul and the north of the country.⁷¹⁶ At the border between Baghlan and Parwan, the highway leads through the notoriously overcrowded and desolate Salang Tunnel.⁷¹⁷ Besides the Kabul-

⁷¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: North Eastern Region – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁷¹¹ AIMS, AIMS Political Divisions Map, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹² Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Baghlan, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁷¹³ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁷¹⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Baghlan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹⁶ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

⁷¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

North highway Baghlan should be connected to Bamyan by 2022 via the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road, according to plans by the World Bank.⁷¹⁸

According to AAN, the Kabul-North highway is pivotal for military success of government forces, as insurgents are able to hinder the movement of ammunition and troops by blocking the highway. AAN links the Taliban's success in conquering and holding Kunduz city for two weeks in 2015 to the fact that they were able to stop Kunduz-bound military convoys in Baghlan for days with a combination of road blocks and ambushes.⁷¹⁹ In 2018 the Taliban again attacked checkpoints on the highway connecting Baghlan with Kunduz before launching an attack in Kunduz.⁷²⁰ Furthermore, the Kabul-North highway has also been blocked repeatedly by protesters in 2018.⁷²¹

The security along the highway is pivotal for Kabul's energy supply, as electricity transmission lines originating in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan run along the highway. In 2018, the Taliban caused several blackouts in the capital by cutting the energy supply to Kabul in the provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan in order to blackmail the government.⁷²²

Insurgents reportedly draw revenue from Baghlan's coal mines by extorting money from trucks carrying coal.⁷²³ According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Baghlan does not belong to the ten main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan.⁷²⁴ Opium poppy cultivation in Baghlan remained approximately the same in 2018 compared to 2017.⁷²⁵

2.4.2 Conflict background and actors in Baghlan

According to Khaama Press, writing in September 2018, 'Baghlan has been among the relatively calm provinces in northern parts of the country but the security situation of the province has deteriorated during the recent years.'⁷²⁶ The security situation reportedly worsened in 2016 after the Taliban launched concerted actions against key districts near the provincial centre of Pul-e-Khumri.⁷²⁷ In spring 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD) admitted that the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri was threatened by the Taliban,⁷²⁸ and by December 2018 the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) stated that Baghlan was among the provinces with a high Taliban presence and that Afghan forces have been engaged in deadly battles in parts of the province.⁷²⁹

The transport routes leading through Baghlan are decisive for the security situation of the province. According to AAN, the Taliban started intimidating people travelling along the Baghlan-Balkh highway in late 2015.⁷³⁰ Having understood the strategic importance of the main transport routes in the province, the Taliban established mobile checkpoints on the Baghlan-Balkh highway in order to search for ANSF members of the and attempted to establish a permanent presence in the area. In response,

⁷¹⁸ World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹⁹ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷²¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Protestors block road over civilian casualties, 17 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Salang highway's bad condition triggers protest, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Supporters of Disqualified Candidate Block Kabul-Balkh Highway, 14 August 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Protesting Baghlan candidates conditionally reopen north highway, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

⁷²² Khaama Press, Taliban sets condition to reconnect Kabul electricity, 19 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban threaten to cut off power supply to Kabul, 24 March 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Major Power Outage Hits Kabul After Pylon Destroyed, 26 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul in darkness as Taliban blow up power pylon, 26 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban again blow up power pylon in Baghlan, 14 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷²³ Diplomat (The), Why the Americans Shouldn't Dig for Coal in Afghanistan, 28 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷²⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁷²⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁷²⁶ Khaama Press, Local Taliban leaders, militants suffer heavy casualties in Baghlan, 13 September 2018, [url](#)

⁷²⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban's deputy military chief surrenders in Baghlan province, 12 August 2017, [url](#)

⁷²⁸ Tolonews, 7 Provincial Centers Face 'Serious Security Threats', 16 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷²⁹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces To Focus On Insecure Regions In Winter, 26 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷³⁰ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

ANSF have conducted several clearance operations, which, according to AAN, were ‘inconsequential’ and hence unsuccessful in creating a coherent government presence in the area.⁷³¹

Besides Taliban insurgents, local pro-government militias supported by the National Directorate of Security used to be active in the province, e.g. in the Surkh Kotal area eight kilometres north-west of Pul-e-Khumri.⁷³²

According to an AAN report from July 2016, Afghan ethnic Uzbeks have set up an insurgent group called Jundullah in 2009 by splitting away from IMU.⁷³³ While Jundullah has been affiliated with the Taliban in the past, it established itself as an independent, IS-allied group by taking advantage of the turmoil created by the Taliban conquest of Kunduz in September 2015. Unsympathetic towards IS-groups, the Taliban have contained Jundullah’s activities in Baghlan by 2016. According to the same report, as of July 2016, ‘[...] the threat of Daesh in the north-east – through Jundullah affiliating itself to IS – is neither widespread, nor immediate.’⁷³⁴ A December 2018 report by the US Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC) on IS-groups in Afghanistan, counted one ISKP attack in Baghlan between 2014 and 2018. The attack took place in 2017 causing the deaths of nine persons.⁷³⁵

In terms of government security force presence, Baghlan is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.⁷³⁶

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Baghlan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.⁷³⁷ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognized by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

BAGHLAN	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁷³⁸ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Andarab	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Baghlan-e-Jadid	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Burka	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%

⁷³¹ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁷³² Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁷³³ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

⁷³⁴ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

⁷³⁵ Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. 11-15

⁷³⁶ Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., [url](#)

⁷³⁷ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷³⁸ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Dahana-e-Ghori	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Dehsalah	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Doshi	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Fereng Wa Gharu	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 85%; TB control: 15%
Guzargah-e-Nur	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Khenjan	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Khost Wa Fereng	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control
Khwajahejran (Jalga)	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%/
Nahrin	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Pul-e-Hesar	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control
Pul-e-Khumri (capital)	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Tala Wa Barfak	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Banu	/	/	/	/	Gov control

2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.4.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 261 civilian casualties (68 deaths and 193 injured) in Baghlan. This represents an increase of 17 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.⁷³⁹

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Pul-e-Khumri in the highest category. Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts are placed in the second highest category, and Tala wa Barfak and Doshi in the third highest category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁷⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 131 incidents related to insurgents in Baghlan province.⁷⁴¹

As of reporting from March 2018, the district of Dahana-e-Ghori has reportedly been under Taliban control over the past two years.⁷⁴² In May 2018, the Taliban reportedly sent letters asking for the payment of taxes in contested Baghlan-e-Markazi district.⁷⁴³ In the past, the Taliban reportedly used to collect *zakat* and *ushr* taxes from Baghlan residents in districts under their control.⁷⁴⁴

Throughout 2018 and early 2019, the Taliban attacked army and police check-points or patrols.⁷⁴⁵ In May 2018, key district Tala wa Barfak, bordering Bamyan and Parwan provinces, reportedly fell to the Taliban for more than a week.⁷⁴⁶ Additionally, the insurgents also conducted kidnappings and targeted killings.⁷⁴⁷ Ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections, Taliban militants caused casualties at voter registration centres, leaving six persons dead in an explosion in Pul-e-Khumri in April,⁷⁴⁸ and killing one police officer in Baghlan-e-Markazi district in June.⁷⁴⁹ On election day, eight people were killed and 45 injured in election-related incidents, including twin blasts in the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri.⁷⁵⁰

In 2018, ANSF conducted several clearing operations in the province.⁷⁵¹ Because of the ongoing insurgent activity in Baghlan, reinforcement troops have been sent to Dahana-e-Ghori district in November 2018.⁷⁵² According to Pajhwok Afghan News, at the end of 2018 security personnel stationed in insecure areas of the province had been left without pay for three months.⁷⁵³

The fighting also caused fatalities among civilians, as well as damage of civilian property. In February 2018, residents of Pul-e-Khumri protested and sought compensation over homes destroyed by Afghan Air Force (AAF) airstrikes.⁷⁵⁴ In August 2018, a person was killed and six of her family members injured

⁷⁴¹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

⁷⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 ALP men killed, 3 wounded in Baghlan attack, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban ask Baghlan traders to pay them taxes, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁴ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 ALP men killed, 3 wounded in Baghlan attack, 14 March 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Security Forces, Taliban Locked In Heavy Clash In Baghlan, 14 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 18 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Baghlan Clashes, 29 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban, 8 Daesh killed in Ghazni, Baghlan, 23 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 3 ANA soldiers, seize Humvee in Baghlan capital, 4 August 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 36 ANA soldiers, 8 ALP personnel killed in Baghlan battle, 15 August 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Afghan Local Police personnel killed in Baghlan assault, 18 August 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attack in Baghlan, 9 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 civilians freed from Taliban jail in Helmand raid, 8 December 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Security forces and Taliban suffer heavy casualties in Pul-e-Khumri city clash, 3 January 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁶ Tolonews, Key District In Baghlan Reportedly Falls To Taliban, 8 May 2018, [url](#); Khaama, Afghan armed forces retake control of Tala Barfak in Baghlan, 18 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Taliban killed, 3 wounded in Baghlan clash, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Lawmaker Qudratullah Zaki survives Taliban's attack in Baghlan, 16 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 6 Indian engineers in Baghlan, 6 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP commander killed by Taliban in Baghlan attack, 20 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ Tolonews, Six Killed In Baghlan Explosion At Voter Registration Center, 22 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁹ Tolonews, One Dead In Baghlan Voter Registration Center Explosion, 23 June 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 killed, 45 wounded in Baghlan election related incidents, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Operations underway to ensure polls security: MoD, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban killed, 16 wounded in Baghlan airstrikes, 11 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Anti-Taliban operation launched in Baghlan's Dand-i-Ghori, 5 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban leader's son, friends detained in Baghlan, 13 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵² Tolonews, MoD Sends In Extra Troops As Violence Grips Baghlan, Ghazni, 8 November 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Troops in Baghlan without salaries for 3 months, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dand-i-Shahabuddin residents seek compensation for destroyed homes, 3 February 2018, [url](#)

in a government mortar shell attack on a civilian house in the provincial capital carried out by security forces.⁷⁵⁵

In January 2019, four Taliban fighters and one civilian reportedly died in an explosion during a volleyball match in a Taliban-controlled area of Tala wa Barfak.⁷⁵⁶

2.4.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 13 421 persons displaced from Baghlan province, mainly within the province itself, in neighbouring provinces Parwan, Balkh, Panjsher and Bamyan, or in other provinces in the area such as Kabul, Kapisa and Khost.⁷⁵⁷

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 70 persons displaced from Baghlan province, all coming from Doshi district and displaced to Kabul district of Kabul province.⁷⁵⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 11 928 persons displaced to Baghlan province, all coming from within the province itself.⁷⁵⁹

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Baghlan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.⁷⁶⁰

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Baghlan-e-Jadid	6 769	4 571	/	/
Dahana-e-Ghori	210	/	/	/
Doshi	287	/	70	/
Pul-e-Khumri	5 474	7 357	/	/
Tala Wa Barfak	681	/	/	/

From January to March 2018 more than 300 IDP families were registered in Pul-e-Khumri city, displaced from Dand-e-Dhahabuddin area due to armed conflict.⁷⁶¹

In May 2018, UNOCHA recorded 4 000 people displaced to Kabul, Bamyan and Kunduz provinces coming from Tala Wa Barfak and Doshi districts of Baghlan, after heavy fighting erupted in Tala Wa Barfak on 9 May.⁷⁶² On 19 June 2018, humanitarian partners reported to UNOCHA that 1 200 of the IDPs that had fled Tala Wa Barfak in early May had already returned to their homes.⁷⁶³ Additionally 2 000 people were reportedly displaced from Khalazai area of Pul-e-Khumri city to the center in May 2018.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Girl killed, 6 family members injured in mortar shell attack, 11 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁶ Tolonews, Five Killed In Baghlan Explosion, 26 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Baghlan Province - Meeting Summary, 14 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 - 20 May 2018, 22 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Tolonews, UN Chef Urges Governments to Protect Civilians from Violence, 23 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 11 - 17 June, 19 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 - 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1

In August 2018, Afghan NGO Bakhtar Development Network (BDN) reported on military operations in Mangalha Khogyani area of Baghlan-e-Jadid district, which led to temporary displacements within the district itself and to Pul-e-Khumri city.⁷⁶⁵

In September and October 2018, UNOCHA recorded thousands of IDPs within Baghlan-e-Jadid district and from Dand-e-Ghori, Cheshma-e-Sher and Omarkhil villages of Pul-e-Khumri district to Pul-e-Khumri city.⁷⁶⁶

In December 2018 UNOCHA classified Baghlan as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.⁷⁶⁷ According to IOM's Afghanistan's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Baseline Mobility Assessment, in 2018 one in six people is either a returnee or an IDP in Baghlan province.⁷⁶⁸ IOM ranked Baghlan-e-Jadid on the twelfth (January - March 2018) and fifteenth place (April - June 2018) of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs⁷⁶⁹ and on the nineteenth place of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Baghlan Province - Meeting Summary, 29 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 30 September, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 10 - 16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 October 2018, 14 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2019 Update to the 2018-2010 Humanitarian Response Plan, 21 December 2018, [url](#), p. 33

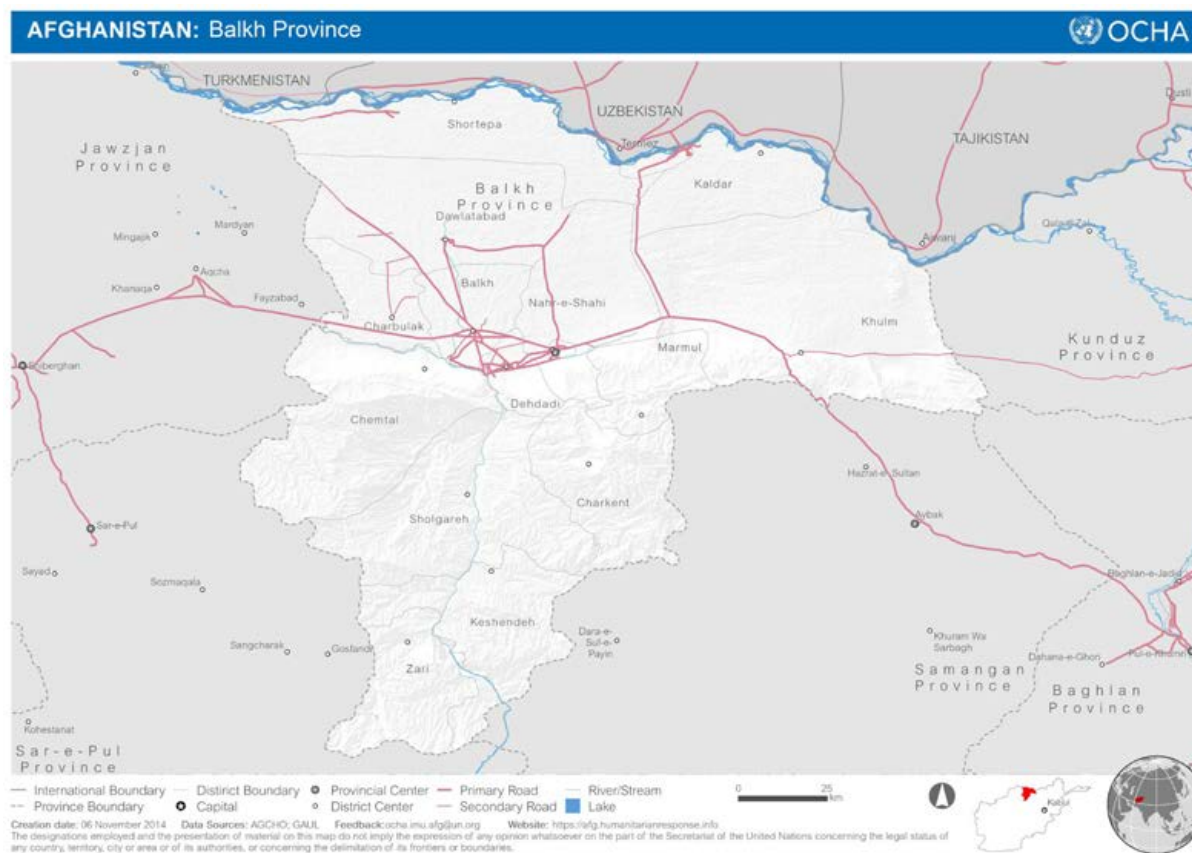
⁷⁶⁸ IOM, Displacement Survey Shows 3.5 Million Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad in 15 Afghan Provinces, 8 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁹ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁷⁰ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

2.5 Balkh

2.5.1 General description of the province



Balkh is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan, bordering Uzbekistan to the north, Tajikistan to the north-east, Kunduz and Baghlan to the east, Samangan to the south-east, Sar-e Pul to the south-west, Jawzjan to the west and Turkmenistan to the north-west.⁷⁷¹ The provincial capital is Mazar-e Sharif. The province consists of the following districts: Balkh, Charbulak, Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh, Shortepa and Zari.⁷⁷²

According to a CSO estimation, the population of Balkh Province was 1 442 847 in 2018/19,⁷⁷³ with 454 457 living in the provincial capital Mazar-e Sharif.⁷⁷⁴ Balkh is an ethnically diverse province. It is inhabited by Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baloch, Arab, and Sunni Hazara (Kawshi) communities.⁷⁷⁵

Balkh is an important crop growing area, as favourable climatic conditions allow for two harvests a year.⁷⁷⁶ Dubbed a 'Silk Route crossroad',⁷⁷⁷ Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an

⁷⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#); GADM, Afghanistan [Map], 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷² Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Balkh, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 27

⁷⁷³ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁷⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 27

⁷⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Balkh, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Balkh Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ Samuel Hall, Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City, 16 January 2017, [url](#), p. 43

⁷⁷⁷ Afghanistan, MRRD, Balkh provincial profile, n.d., [url](#)

import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre.⁷⁷⁸ The highway leading to the Uzbek border crossing point Hairatan-Termiz branches off the Ring Road approximately 40 km east of Mazar-e Sharif. Furthermore, a highway facilitating transport from Balkh to Bamyan in the centre of Afghanistan is reportedly under construction.⁷⁷⁹ An airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations exists in Mazar-e Sharif.⁷⁸⁰ In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.⁷⁸¹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey of 2018, Balkh ranks 7th among the ten main opium-poppo-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan.⁷⁸² Because of a drought, poppy cultivation decreased by 30 % in the province in 2018 compared to 2017.⁷⁸³

2.5.2 Conflict background and actors in Balkh

According to RFE/RL, Balkh used to be one of the relatively calm provinces of northern Afghanistan, largely due to a monopoly on power by the former warlord Atta Mohammed Noor, who later became governor of Balkh.⁷⁸⁴ In December 2017, Noor resigned after a stand-off with President Ashraf Ghani, sparking fears that this would impair the security situation in the province.⁷⁸⁵ According to Afghan news-portals Tolonews and Pajhwok Afghan News, the tensions between the president and Noor were followed by an increased presence of armed men in Mazar-e Sharif, which allegedly had links to political parties and members of parliament.⁷⁸⁶ Subsequently, criminal activities such as armed robberies, murder, clashes, and kidnapping increased in Balkh's capital.⁷⁸⁷

While Balkh is reportedly 'one of Afghanistan's most stable provinces',⁷⁸⁸ anti-government elements are active in the province and several security incidents have been reported in 2018 and early 2019. Taliban fighters attacked Afghan Local Police (ALP) personnel, members of pro-government militias, and security posts in the districts of Sholgareh,⁷⁸⁹ Chahrbulak,⁷⁹⁰ Chemtal,⁷⁹¹ and Dawlatabad⁷⁹² throughout 2018 and early 2019. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) conducted several

⁷⁷⁸ Samuel Hall, Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City, 16 January 2017, [url](#), p. 43

⁷⁷⁹ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁰ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

⁷⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁷⁸³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁸⁴ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#); RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 23 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ RFE/RL, Afghan Governor's Dismissal Highlights Rift In Party, Risks To Unity Government, 19 December 2017, [url](#); RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 23 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ Tolonews, Illegal Armed Men 'A Big Challenge For Balkh Residents', 12 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured as gunmen loyal to MPs clash in Balkh, 28 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men threaten Mazar-i-Sharif security, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ Tolonews, Illegal Armed Men 'A Big Challenge For Balkh Residents', 12 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal gunmen seen behind insecurity in Mazar-i-Sharif, 25 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured as gunmen loyal to MPs clash in Balkh, 28 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif garrison failing to bar illegal gunmen: Residents, 7 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men threaten Mazar-i-Sharif security, 22 May 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Mazar Man Killed For His Motorcycle, 22 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁸ RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 23 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ Tolonews, 17 Members Of Public Uprising Force Killed In Balkh, 21 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁰ Tolonews, Chahar Bolak Police Chief Dies After Taliban Attack, 22 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture 2 checkpoints in Balkh's Chahar Bolak district, 15 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 ALP personnel killed in attack on Balkh post, 18 September 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Six Security Force Members Killed In Balkh Clash, 9 January 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Key Taliban Commander Killed In Balkh, 10 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ Tolonews, Main District In Balkh Under Security Threat, 6 July 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Sources Claim Balkh Outposts Fallen To Taliban, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Part of Balkh's Dawlatabad district falls to Taliban, 3 September 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Security Forces Retake Northern District From Taliban, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

clearing operations in Balkh.⁷⁹³ Furthermore, the US air-force carried out an airstrike in Charbulak district in April 2018.⁷⁹⁴

The headquarters of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps, which is responsible for ensuring security in the provinces of Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e-Pul, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan, and Baghlan, are stationed in Dehdadi district of Balkh.⁷⁹⁵ German Federal Army soldiers are based in Camp Marmal in Mazar-e Sharif.⁷⁹⁶

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Balkh province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.⁷⁹⁷ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

BALKH	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁷⁹⁸ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Balkh	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	/
Charbulak	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Charkent	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Chemtal	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Dawlatabad	Open Taliban presence - Low	GIROA Control	GIROA Influence	Taliban control	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Dehdadi	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kaldar	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%

⁷⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban suffered heavy losses in joint operations: NATO, 6 March 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 25 Insurgents Killed In Afghan Operations, 4 April 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Army: Dozens Of Militants Killed In Operations, 21 April 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Commanders Killed In Afghan Forces Airstrikes, 5 May 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Suffers Heavy Casualty Toll in Balkh Operation, 8 July 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Security Forces Retake Northern District From Taliban, 4 September 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 67 Insurgents Killed In ANDSF, AAF Operations, 14 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁴ Tolonews, 35 Taliban Killed In US Airstrikes In Balkh, 28 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁵ Tolonews, 209 Shaheen Corps: The Base The Taliban Attacked, 22 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁶ Tagesspiegel, Afghanische Ex-Mitarbeiter der Bundeswehr demonstrieren vor Camp, 22 September 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁷ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁸ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Keshendeh	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Khulm	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	/
Marmul	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	/
Mazar-e-Sharif (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Nahr-e-Shahi	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%
Shahrak-e Hayratan	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	/
Sholgareh	Open Taliban presence - Low	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%
Shortepa	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Zari	Gov control	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	/
Alburz⁷⁹⁹	/	/	/	/	TB control
Chahi	/	/	/	/	TB control
Khas Balk	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Ragh	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%

2.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.5.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 227 civilian casualties (85 deaths and 142 injured) in Balkh. This represents an increase of 76 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.⁸⁰⁰ UNAMA recorded 99 civilian casualties caused by ground engagement in Balkh province which is a 296 % increase compared to 2017.⁸⁰¹

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Chemtal, Charbulak, Balkh and Mazar-e-Sharif in the second highest category and the districts Dawlatabad, Shortepa and Keshendeh in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁹ According to UNHCR Alburz is an area in Chemtal district. (UNHCR, National Profile of Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan, August 2008, [url](#), p. 49)

⁸⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁸⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 47

⁸⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 131 incidents related to insurgents in Balkh province.⁸⁰³

In August 2018, eight civilians died in a roadside bomb blast in Sholgareh district, which was attributed to the Taliban by a local official.⁸⁰⁴ In October 2018, four polling observers were abducted and killed in a Taliban-controlled area of the district Nahr-e Shahi. A Taliban spokesman denied any Taliban involvement in the incident.⁸⁰⁵ In Keshendeh, Taliban insurgents reportedly kidnapped 25 passengers travelling from Sar-e-Pul to Mazar-e Sharif in November 2018.⁸⁰⁶ Taliban militants torched a fuel tanker and seized another on the Mazar-Shebrghan highway in November 2018, injuring four civilians during a clash with ANA forces.⁸⁰⁷

In September 2018, security guards for two high ranking officials clashed at Hairatan port, killing one person and wounding two others.⁸⁰⁸ In December 2018, four persons died and nine were injured in an attack by unidentified gunmen allegedly targeting a pro-government commander at a funeral in Balkh.⁸⁰⁹

2.5.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 218 persons who were displaced from Balkh province and all of them were displaced within the province itself, in the districts of Nahr-e-Shahi and Keshendeh.⁸¹⁰

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Balkh province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.⁸¹¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 15 313 persons displaced to Balkh province, including 1 218 from the province itself, 10 749 from Faryab and 1 610 from Sar-e-Pul.⁸¹²

UNOCHA collected data, for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, on 2 226 persons displaced to Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh province, from Faryab.⁸¹³

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Charbulak	553	/	/	/
Keshendeh	665	665	/	/
Nahr-e-Shahi	/	13 766	/	/
Mazar-e-Sharif	/	882	/	2 226

⁸⁰³ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

⁸⁰⁴ Tolonews, Eight Civilians Killed in Balkh Roadside Mine Blast, 8 August 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Roadside Bomb Kills Eight Civilians In Afghanistan, Says Local Official, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 polling observers killed after being kidnapped in Balkh, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ Tolonews, Taliban Kidnaps 25 Passengers In Balkh, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians wounded in clash on Mazar-Shebrghan highway, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security guards of top officials clash at Hairatan port, 17 September 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 killed, 9 injured in attack on funeral prayers in Balkh, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

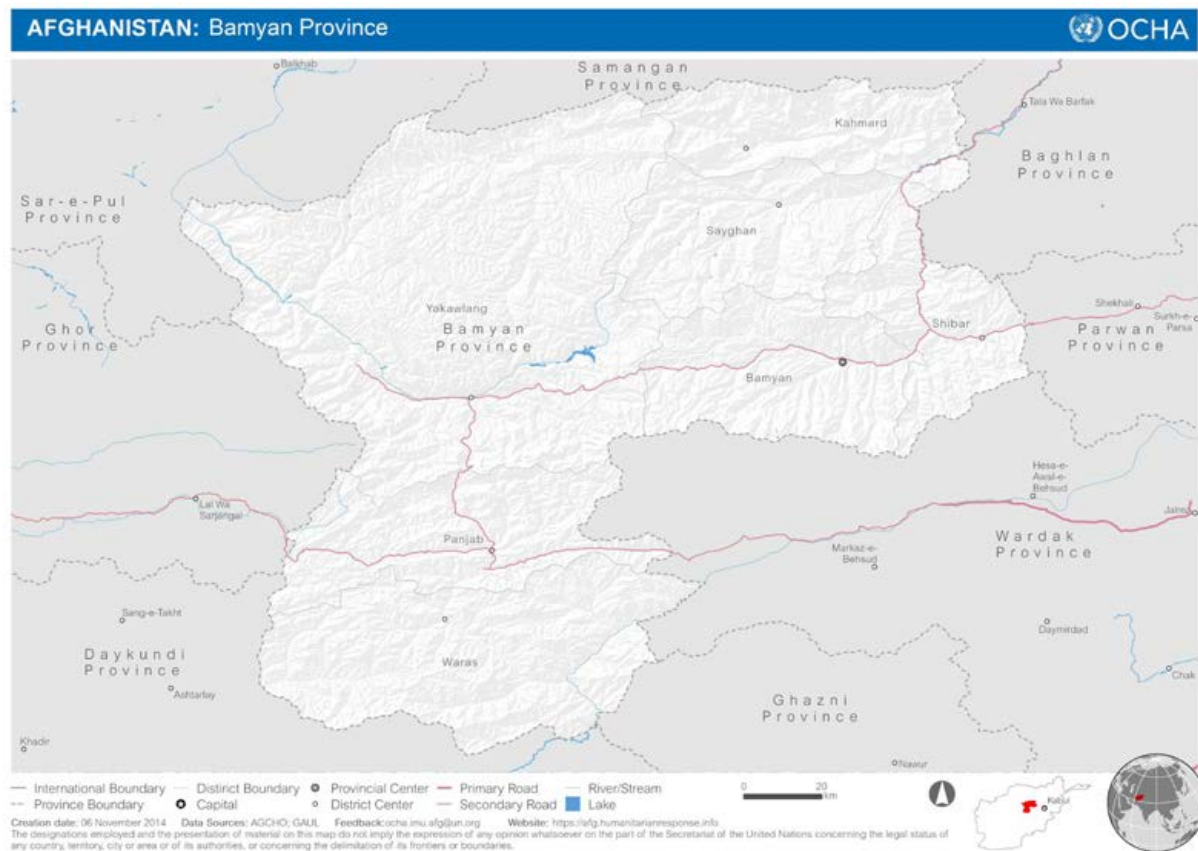
⁸¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

According to IOM, one in six people is a returnee or an IDP in Balkh province.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹⁴ IOM, Displacement Survey Shows 3.5 Million Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad in 15 Afghan Provinces, 8 May 2018, [url](#)

2.6 Bamyan

2.6.1 General description of the province



The province of Bamyan borders Samangan to the north, Baghlan, Parwan and Wardak to the east, Ghazni and Daykundi to the south, and Sar-e Pul and Ghor to the west.⁸¹⁵ It is divided into seven districts: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang. The provincial capital is Bamyan City.⁸¹⁶ Bamyan is situated south of Hindu Kush and north of Baba (Koh-i-Baba) mountain range.⁸¹⁷

The estimated population of Bamyan is 478 424,⁸¹⁸ with most of the people living in the main valleys.⁸¹⁹ The main ethnic groups of Bamyan, which is dubbed the 'unofficial Hazara capital'⁸²⁰ and part of the Hazarajat,⁸²¹ are the Hazara, followed by Tajiks and Pashtuns.⁸²² Additionally, people of the Sayed/Sadat group live in Bamyan.⁸²³ Sayeds, claiming to be descendants of Prophet Mohammed, do not constitute a distinct ethnic group. According to various resources quoted in a query response of ACCORD, Bamyan Sayeds are mostly Hazaras, though they distinguish themselves from other Hazaras,

⁸¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Bamyan Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁸¹⁶ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Bamyan, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁸¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Bamyan Province, n.d., [url](#)

⁸¹⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁸¹⁹ Bamyan Tourism, The Land, n.d., [url](#)

⁸²⁰ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, [url](#)

⁸²¹ Australia, DFAT, Hazaras in Afghanistan, 18 September 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁸²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Bamyan Province, n.d., [url](#)

ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Bamyan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

and are traditionally part of the religious and political elite of the Hazara.⁸²⁴ Approximately 90 % of Bamyan's residents are Shias.⁸²⁵

Scheduled passenger service to and from Bamyan's airport was suspended in January 2018 after the only airline flying this route lost several staff members in an attack on a hotel in Kabul.⁸²⁶ As of February 2019, service seemingly has been resumed.⁸²⁷ Bamyan can be reached from Kabul either by the Kabul-Bamyan highway, via the province of Wardak, or via Parwan.⁸²⁸ Bamyan is supposed to be connected to neighbouring Baghlan by the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road in 2022;⁸²⁹ and a Chinese company has signed a contract to build a road connecting Bamyan's Yakawlang district with Dare-e-Sof district in Samangan in 2017.⁸³⁰ This is part of the National North-South Corridor project, which should eventually connect Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh with Kandahar in the south. In November 2018 livestock owners and traders travelling on the Kabul-Bamyan highway claimed that Taliban insurgents collected *ushr* taxes from them in neighbouring Maidan Wardak.⁸³¹

Bamyan is reportedly one of Afghanistan's poorest provinces, '[...] often lacking basic facilities and electricity.'⁸³² Tourism is a source of revenue in the province,⁸³³ which has however been impeded by insecurity in neighbouring provinces, as '[...] key highways leading to its centre are no longer secure,' according to the Afghan newsportal Tolonews.⁸³⁴

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Bamyan remained the only opium-free province in the Northern region of Afghanistan in 2018.⁸³⁵

2.6.2 Conflict background and actors in Bamyan

Tolonews called Bamyan 'the safe haven of the country' in 2017.⁸³⁶ According to RFE/RL, the Taliban had no influence in Bamyan in November 2018.⁸³⁷ An Afghan military expert traced the relative stability of Bamyan to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic group.⁸³⁸ According to UNAMA, Bamyan's relative peacefulness can also be attributed to the involvement of religious leaders in peace processes in the province.⁸³⁹

BBC research on the Taliban presence, which was conducted between August and November 2017, concluded that the Taliban had a 'low' active presence in two of Bamyan's seven districts, i.e. Sayghan and Shibar, the latter bordering Baghlan, Parwan and Wardak provinces, both of which were each attacked once in three months.⁸⁴⁰ After Tala wa Barfak district in neighbouring Baghlan province was captured by the Taliban in May 2018, local officials warned that Bamyan's Kahmard and Sayghan districts might also collapse.⁸⁴¹ In July 2018, Taliban insurgents indeed attacked several police check

⁸²⁴ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Bamyan Province, n.d., [url](#)

⁸²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁸²⁷ Sweden, Lifos, Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan, 7 February 2019, [url](#), p. 11

⁸²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass reopens for traffic, 26 April 2015, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d., [url](#)

⁸³⁰ Xinhua News Agency, Chinese firm signs contract to build road in Afghanistan, 9 January 2017, [url](#)

⁸³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gunmen take taxes on Kabul-Bamyan highway, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸³² Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, [url](#)

⁸³³ Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 200,000 tourists visit Bamyan this year, 3 September 2017, [url](#); Wiener Zeitung, Skifahren bei den Buddhas, 4 January 2018, [url](#)

⁸³⁴ Tolonews, Bamyan Tourism Takes A Knock Due To Security Threats On Roads, 28 June 2017, [url](#)

⁸³⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁸³⁶ Tolonews, Bamyan Tourism Takes A Knock Due To Security Threats On Roads, 28 June 2017, [url](#)

⁸³⁷ RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 casualties: nearly 25,000 people killed, wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

⁸³⁹ UNAMA, Bamyan religious scholars gather to discuss peace-building in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁰ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, After Tala wa Barfak, Taliban eying Bamyan's Kahmard, 12 May 2018, [url](#)

points in Kahmard district, killing one tribal elder and abducting four persons according to Tolonews. Three of the four abducted persons were later released and the Taliban fled into Tala wa Barfak.⁸⁴²

In November 2018, Afghan president Ashraf Ghani announced the formation of a new security unit consisting of at least 443 security personnel in the province.⁸⁴³

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Bamyan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.⁸⁴⁴ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

BAMYAN	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁸⁴⁵ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Bamyan (capital)	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kahmard	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 95%; TB control: 5%
Panjab	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Sayghan	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 95%; TB control: 5%
Shibar	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 95%; TB control: 5%
Waras	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Yakawlang	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control

⁸⁴² Tolonews, Taliban Attack Police Check Posts in Bamiyan, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁴³ Khaama Press, Ghani orders formation of the new 443-strong security unit in Bamyan province, 10 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁴ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁵ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.6.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 7 civilian casualties (1 death and 6 injured) in Bamyan. This represents an increase of 75 % compared to 2016. Leading causes of casualties were unexploded ordnance (UXO)/landmines, followed by ground engagements and threat/intimidation/harassment.⁸⁴⁶

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Yakawlang, Panjab, Kharmand and Sayghan in the lowest category. The districts Waras, Shibar and Bamyan are in the second lowest category.⁸⁴⁷

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 4 incidents related to insurgents in Bamyan province.⁸⁴⁸

In late November 2018, Afghan authorities arrested Hazara militia leader Alipoor (also known as Commander Shamsheer) on charges of attacking security forces,⁸⁴⁹ as well as of extortion of passengers by his gunmen on the highways in Bamyan, Ghor, and Wardak provinces.⁸⁵⁰ The arrest caused protests in Kabul, Bamyan, and Mazar-e-Sharif; in Kabul the protests turned violent.⁸⁵¹ Alipoor's supporters claimed that Alipoor had not been fighting government forces, but rather the Taliban in parts of Wardak, Ghor, and Daykundi.⁸⁵² Alipoor's militia is based in the province of Wardak, but also operates in other parts of Afghanistan, claiming to help Hazara communities facing security threats.⁸⁵³

2.6.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 8 persons displaced from Bamyan province within the province itself. They were all displaced from the district of Waras to the district of Bamyan,⁸⁵⁴ in April 2018.⁸⁵⁵

No conflict-induced internal displacement to or from Bamyan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.⁸⁵⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 091

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Waras	8	/	/	/
Bamyan	/	2 634	/	/
Kahmard	/	368	/	/

⁸⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁸⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁴⁸ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

⁸⁴⁹ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready To Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁰ RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader After Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁵¹ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready To Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader After Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁵² Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest For The Second Day In Kabul, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁵³ RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader After Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

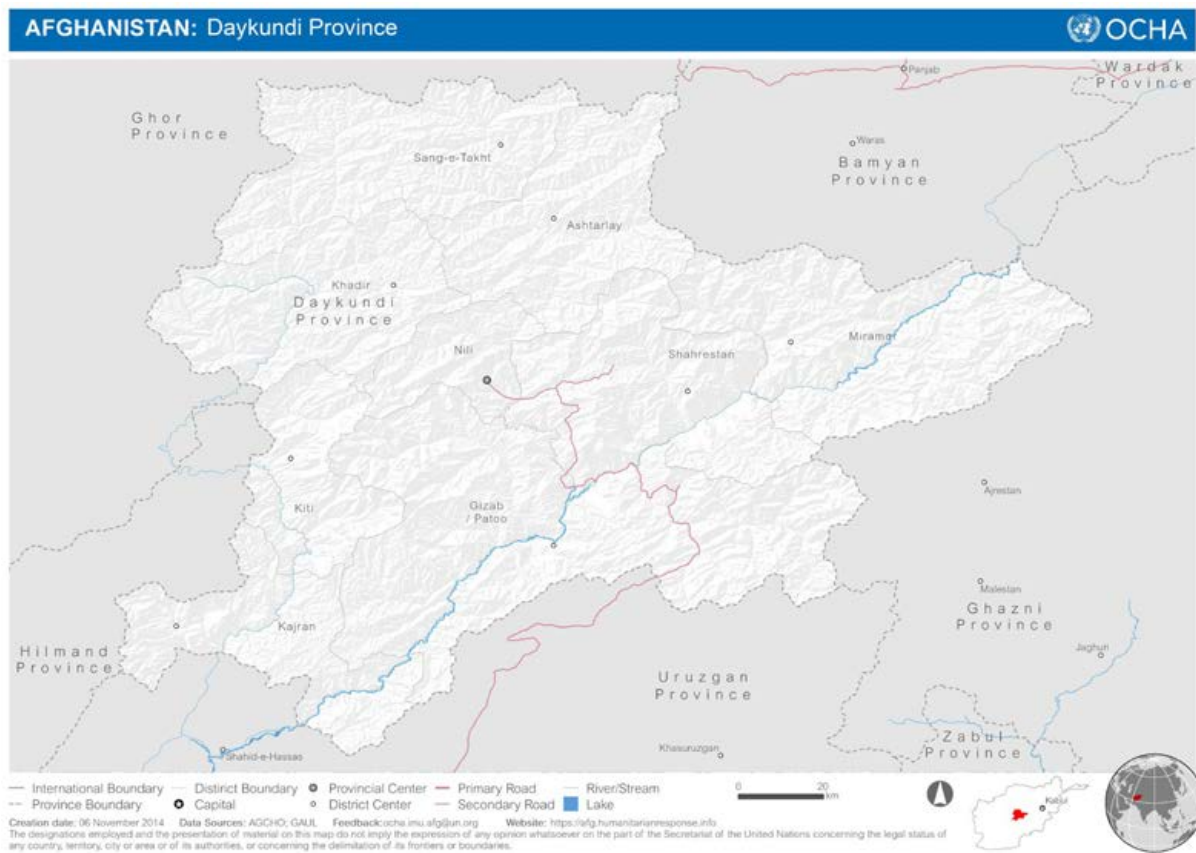
⁸⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Internal Displacement due to Conflict, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

Sayghan	/	89	/	/
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2.7 Daykundi

2.7.1 General description of the province



Located in the Central Region of Hazarajat, Daykundi is surrounded by Ghor to the north and west, Bamiyan to the east, Ghazni to the south-east, Uruzgan to the south and Helmand to the southwest.⁸⁵⁷ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Daykundi used to be part of Uruzgan and became a separate province in 2003,⁸⁵⁸ while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated that the province of Daykundi was established in 2014.⁸⁵⁹

Besides the provincial capital Nili, Daykundi consists of the following districts: Ashtarlay, Pato, Kajran, Khadir, Kiti, Miramor, Sang-e-Takht, and Shahrestan.⁸⁶⁰ Gizab/Pato district changed hands between Uruzgan and Daykundi in the past.⁸⁶¹ In May 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that Pato – formerly part of Gizab district in Uruzgan – had been declared an independent district and would soon become part of Daykundi.⁸⁶² The Afghan CSO counted Pato as a 'temporary' district of Daykundi in 2018.⁸⁶³ According to AAN, 'temporary' districts '[...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.'⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral resources of Daikundi province, 1 February 2014, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁹ UNDP, The Secret Behind Nili Market's Success in Daikundi, 5 February 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁰ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Daykundi, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁶¹ Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the fight everyone chose to ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011, [url](#)

⁸⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi: 80pc of Pato residents without Tazkira, 6 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁶³ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 30

⁸⁶⁴ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

According to estimations by the Afghan CSO, 498 840 people live in Daykundi as of 2018/19.⁸⁶⁵ Part of the Hazarajat,⁸⁶⁶ most of Daykundi's residents are Hazara, with a minority of Pashtuns, Balochs, and Sayeds/Sadats.⁸⁶⁷

Most of Daykundi's territory is mountainous, with heavy snowfall in winter blocking many roads for months.⁸⁶⁸ An assessment by the Afghanistan Food Security Cluster (FSC) described the condition of Daykundi's roads as 'very bad', with sparse infrastructure.⁸⁶⁹ According to Tolonews, only one paved road exists in the province.⁸⁷⁰ The same source reports that there is an airport in Daykundi, which is 'not standard' according to the governor of the province, as only small planes can land.⁸⁷¹ According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI unit, Daykundi is not served by scheduled passenger flights.⁸⁷²

Daykundi residents largely depend on agriculture.⁸⁷³ According to FSC, remittances sent from migrants are an important source of income for the population of Daykundi.⁸⁷⁴

According to the 2018 Opium Survey of UNODC, Daykundi was not among Afghanistan's ten main opium-poppy-cultivation provinces in 2018⁸⁷⁵ – cultivation amounted to less than 1000 hectares in 2018.⁸⁷⁶ Compared to 2017, poppy cultivation decreased by 50 % in 2018,⁸⁷⁷ placing Daykundi among the provinces with a 'strong decrease' according to UNODC.⁸⁷⁸

2.7.2 Conflict background and actors in Daykundi

Tolonews termed Daykundi a secure province, with the lack of infrastructure being a major problem to the population.⁸⁷⁹ An Afghan military expert traced the relative stability of Daykundi, as well as Bamyan and Panjshir, to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same tribal group.⁸⁸⁰

In 2015, armed groups of rival parties caused insecurity in the districts of Ashtarlay, Khadir, and Sang-e-Takht, according to residents.⁸⁸¹ As Daykundi borders on the unstable provinces of Helmand and Uruzgan, Pajhwok Afghan News reported in March 2015 and June 2018 that residents repeatedly voiced fears of Taliban attacks.⁸⁸² Throughout 2018, the Taliban launched attacks against security

⁸⁶⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁶⁶ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁷ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Dai Kundi Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi province background profile, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁶⁹ FSC, Daykundi Province Fact Findings (Qualitative Assessment) Report, 18 April 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁷⁰ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure But Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁷¹ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure But Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁷² Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

⁸⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi province background profile, n.d., [url](#); Tolonews, Daikundi Secure But Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁴ FSC, Daykundi Province Fact Findings (Qualitative Assessment) Report, 18 April 2018, [url](#), p. 6-7

⁸⁷⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p.17

⁸⁷⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

⁸⁷⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 10, p. 19

⁸⁷⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 10, p.11

⁸⁷⁹ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure But Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Daikundi Relatively Secure But Undeveloped: Residents, 15 November 2016, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 casualties: nearly 25,000 people killed, wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men's influence growing in Daikundi: PC member, 30 August 2015, [url](#); Tolonews, Daykundi Resident's Protest over Irresponsible Armed Men, 8 April 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi residents concerned about Daesh in neighborhood, 3 June 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015, [url](#)

checkpoints in several of Daykundi's districts.⁸⁸³ In November 2018, President Ashraf Ghani reportedly acknowledged the promotion of Daykundi to a second grade province in order to increase the allocation of funds to the province. According to a publication of 2004, the '[...] the grade is determined largely by population, but there are additional political factors that play into the assignation. [...] The grade of a province or district will affect the size of governor's office and district office, as well as the position grades of the staff.'⁸⁸⁴ Furthermore, Ghani ordered the Army Chief to create a military battalion in Daykundi.⁸⁸⁵

Daykundi is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps.⁸⁸⁶

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Daykundi province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.⁸⁸⁷ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

DAYKUNDI	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁸⁸⁸ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Ashtarlay	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Kajran	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Unconfirmed	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Khadir	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Kiti	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Miramor	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Nili (capital)	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%

⁸⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 pro-govt fighters, 2 policemen killed in Daikundi clash, 23 July 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Dozens Of Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 16 October 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture security posts near Daikundi's capital, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁴ IBRD/AREU, A Guide to Government in Afghanistan, 2004, [url](#), p. 95

⁸⁸⁵ MENA FN, Afghanistan - President acknowledges promotion of Daikundi to 2nd grade province, 10 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#), page last modified 6 September 2018

⁸⁸⁷ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

					(capital Nili under Gov control)
Sang-e-Takht	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Shahrestan	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Gizab (Pato)	Open Taliban presence – low	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
	/	/	/	/	

2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.7.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 41 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 22 injured) in Daykundi. This represents a decrease of 5 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by kidnapping/abduction and (non-suicide) IEDs.⁸⁹⁰

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Pato in the second highest category, the district of Kajran in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.⁸⁹¹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 21 incidents related to insurgents in Daykundi province.⁸⁹²

In July 2018, at least nine members of a pro-government militia, as well as two policemen were killed in a Taliban attack on the district centre of Pato.⁸⁹³ In October 2018, hundreds of Taliban fighters equipped with heavy weapons reportedly attacked checkpoints in Kajran district, killing eight Afghan soldiers and five policemen. While the attacks had no direct link to the parliamentary elections which took place a few days after, RFE/RL pointed out that they highlighted the strength of the Taliban in large parts of Afghanistan.⁸⁹⁴ One day after the attacks, an IED explosion killed one woman and injured three persons. AAN cited officials who interpreted the Taliban attacks and IED explosion in mid-October 2018 as an attempt to dissuade residents from voting. According to them, larger attacks probably failed to materialise after these incidents because the Taliban had also suffered considerable casualties in Kajran.⁸⁹⁵

⁸⁸⁹ According to UNOCHA and Pajhwok Afghan News Ajrestan district is located in Ghazni province. (UNOCHA Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 33 Security Personnel Flee Ajristan, Get Shelter in Daikundi, 14 August 2018, [url](#))

⁸⁹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁸⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁹² Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

⁸⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 pro-govt fighters, 2 policemen killed in Daikundi clash, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ RFE/RL, Dozens Of Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 16 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁵ Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The outstanding role of women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

In December 2018, Taliban insurgents captured security checkpoints in Pato, only a few kilometres away from the district border of Daykundi's capital Nili.⁸⁹⁶

Afghan security forces responded with clearing operations in the end of December 2018, killing at least 30 Taliban insurgents in Pato and reopening the Nili-Pato highway.⁸⁹⁷ Another offensive of the Afghan security forces took place in the beginning of January 2019.⁸⁹⁸

2.7.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 558 persons displaced from Daykundi province mainly within the province itself.⁸⁹⁹

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Daykundi province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.⁹⁰⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 756 persons displaced to Daykundi province, including 2 229 individuals from Ghazni.⁹⁰¹

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Daykundi province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.⁹⁰²

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Gizab / Pato	335	/	/	/
Kajran	10	/	/	/
Kiti	213	/	/	/
Nili	/	527	/	/
Miramor	/	2 229	/	/

and IED explosion killed one woman and injured and the leading role of women, ors that play into the assignation, g to the same et⁸⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture security posts near Daikundi's capital, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 militants eliminated in Daikundi operation, 27 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 46 militants killed, 33 injured in past 24 hours: MoD, 4 January 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

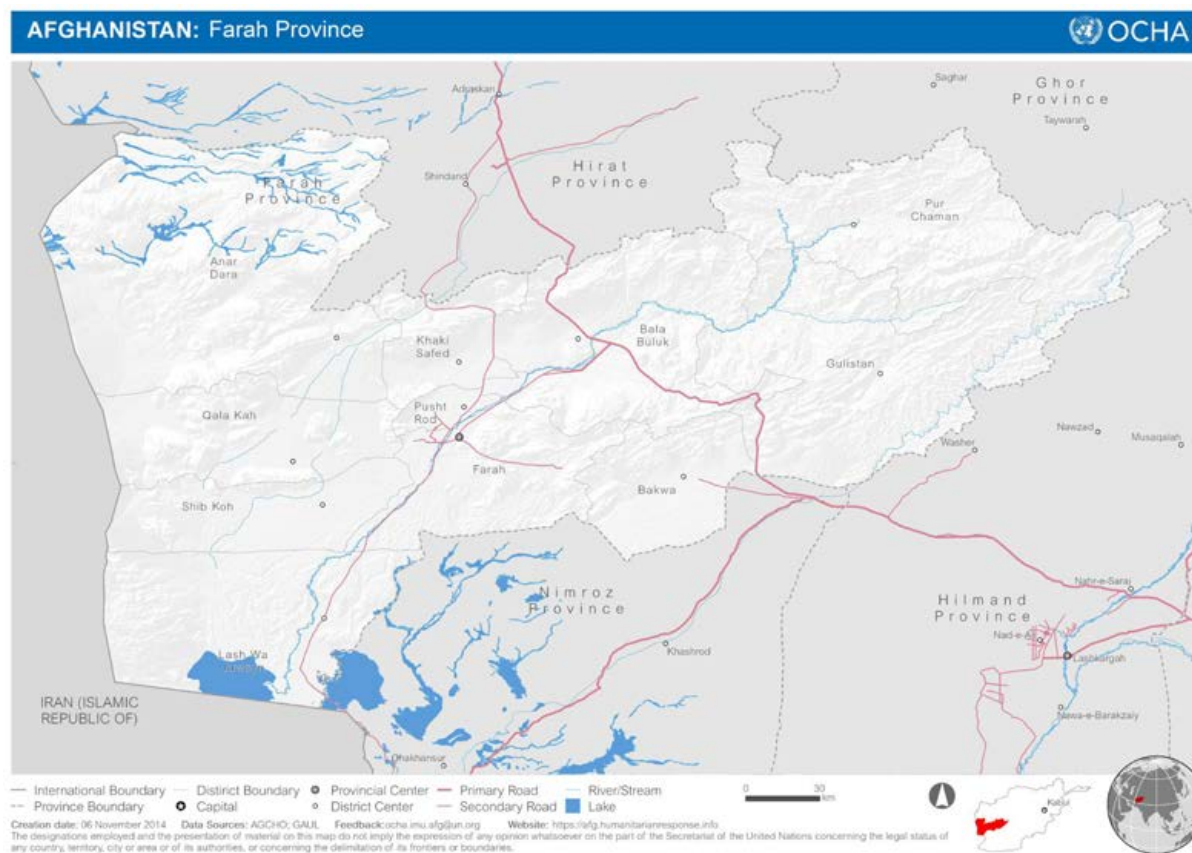
⁹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

2.8 Farah

2.8.1 General description of the province



The province of Farah is located in the western part of Afghanistan and borders Herat to the north, Ghor to the northeast, Helmand to the southeast and Nimroz to the south, as well as Iran to the west.⁹⁰³ The province is divided into eleven districts: Anar Dara, Bakwa, Bala Buluk, Farah, Gulistan, Khak-e-Safed, Lash-e-Juwayn, Pur Chaman, Pushtrod, Qala-e-Kah (formerly Pusht-Koh) and Shib Koh. The provincial capital of Farah is Farah.⁹⁰⁴

According to estimates by the Afghan CSO, the population of Farah was 543 237 in 2018/19.⁹⁰⁵ The majority of Farah's inhabitants are Pashtuns, with Tajik and smaller Hazara communities residing mainly in the countryside.⁹⁰⁶ Aylat, Mugal, Sadat, Bomodi, Aymaq, Barahawi and Baloch tribes live in Farah, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.⁹⁰⁷

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, Farah has an airport with scheduled passenger services to regional destinations.⁹⁰⁸ Part of the Ring Road leads through Farah, connecting the province with the regional centre of Herat in the north and the provinces of Nimroz and Helmand in the south and southeast, respectively.⁹⁰⁹ Cross-border transport and trade with Iran

⁹⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Farah, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 39; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile of Farah, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁰⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Farah Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Farah, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

⁹⁰⁹ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

is reportedly possible at Abu Nasr Farahi port.⁹¹⁰ In September 2018, Tolonews reported security problems near the border crossing, as the route towards the border leads through militant-controlled areas.⁹¹¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Farah is one of the main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces in western Afghanistan.⁹¹² Regarding the size of poppy cultivation in hectares, Farah ranked 5th among all Afghan provinces in 2018, with a decrease of poppy acreage by 15% compared to 2017,⁹¹³ after opium-poppy cultivation had increased by 41% in 2017 compared to 2016.⁹¹⁴

2.8.2 Conflict background and actors in Farah

In June 2018, AAN in June 2018 called the Taliban ‘[...] a persistent and growing force in Farah since 2001, rebuilding their strength quietly after the U.S. invasion and then seizing territory in remote districts.’⁹¹⁵ Accordingly, the Taliban were never fully defeated after 2001 and kept a strong presence in the province – especially in Bala Buluk.⁹¹⁶ In February 2018, the Washington Post stated that approximately 60 % of Farah was controlled by insurgents, while the government controlled only the provincial capital and 10 district centres, some of which are allegedly too dangerous for district officials to visit.⁹¹⁷

AAN noted that there might be an ethnic dimension favouring the maintenance of a strong Taliban organisation in some parts of the province. Taliban stronghold Shiwan village in Bala Buluk district for instance, is mostly inhabited by so-called *naqelin*, i.e. Pashtuns, who have been resettled from their original areas in Helmand by the Afghan monarch about 100 years ago. Shiwan's *naqelin* reportedly still maintain close links to the Taliban strongholds in Helmand. Additionally, AAN assumed that the Baloch minority in Farah helped to establish links to Baloch smugglers in neighbouring Nimroz, who are reportedly able to draw on ‘[...] century-old connections with Iran and Pakistan.’⁹¹⁸

According to AAN, Farah is of strategic interest to insurgents and pro-government strongmen because of its transport routes into bordering Iran.⁹¹⁹ Reportedly, the Taliban levy ‘taxes’ on cross-border traffic,⁹²⁰ as well as along the highway connecting Farah to Nimroz.⁹²¹ Opium-poppy cultivation is especially strong in the districts under Taliban control.⁹²² Drug production and smuggling is however not confined to Taliban insurgents, according to AAN; there is allegedly an increasing convergence of interests between the drug trade, Taliban networks and the local administration of Farah.⁹²³

Rivalries among local pro-government strongmen reportedly have had negative consequences on the security situation in the province, as ‘[...] Farah’s government officials competed over the seven unofficial border crossing points to Iran, at which they collected customs – and apparently pocketed most of it,’ – a practice, which allegedly continues according to AAN.⁹²⁴

⁹¹⁰ Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, [url](#); IRNA, Afghanistan opens Farah border to Iranian goods, 4 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p.16

⁹¹³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p.17

⁹¹⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, November 2017, [url](#), p.16

⁹¹⁵ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁶ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁷ Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁸ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹⁹ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁰ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹²¹ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹²² Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹²³ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁴ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

IS has been reportedly present in some parts of Farah in 2015.⁹²⁵ According to Iranian sources, Taliban fighters succeeded in dislodging IS militants.⁹²⁶

According to Washington Post, around 6 000 members of the security forces were employed in the province of Farah in early 2018 – approximately half as much as in neighbouring Helmand Province with a similar size. The Washington Post cited local officials stating that the strength of government forces in the province is insufficient, as a majority of police are ‘ghost officers’, i.e. policemen on the payrolls, which exist only on paper.⁹²⁷

In February 2018, 50 Italian soldiers were stationed near the airport of Farah City in order to support the Afghan forces in clearing operations.⁹²⁸ In August 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed the deployment of US Special Forces to assist in the training of the Afghan armed forces in Farah.⁹²⁹

Farah is under the responsibility of the 207th ANA Zafar Corps.⁹³⁰

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Farah province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.⁹³¹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

FARAH	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁹³² April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Anar Dara	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	/
Bakwa	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control
Bala Buluk	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Gulistan	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control

⁹²⁵ Osman, B., The Shadows of ‘Islamic State’ in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?, AAN, 12 February 2015, [url](#); Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27; VoA, Taliban Captures IS Bases in Afghanistan, 5 January 2016, [url](#)

⁹²⁶ Middle East Institute, Afghans see Iran’s hand in Taliban’s latest gains in western Afghanistan, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁷ Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 50 Italian troops in Farah to support Afghan forces, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁹ Khaama Press, MoD confirms deployment of US Special Forces in Farah province, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁰ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#), last modified 6 September 2018; Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

⁹³¹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁹³² LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Khaki Safed	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Lash Wa Juwayn	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Pur Chaman	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Pusht Rod	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Qala Kah (formerly called Pusht Koh)	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Shib Koh	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Taliban control	TB control
Farah (capital)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Farah Rod	/	/	/	/	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%

2.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.8.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 275 civilian casualties (122 deaths and 153 injured) in the province of Farah. This represents a decrease of 19 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.⁹³³

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Farah, Bala Baluk and Pushtrod in the highest category. The districts of Anar Dara, Qala-e-Kah and Khak-e-Safed are in the third highest category, the districts of Shibkoh, Bakwa and Gulistan in the category below, and the district of Lash-e-Juwayn and Pur Chaman in the second lowest category.⁹³⁴

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 215 incidents related to insurgents in Farah.⁹³⁵

⁹³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁹³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁹³⁵ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

Throughout 2018, the Taliban attacked military posts and security checkpoints, mainly in the district of Bala Buluk,⁹³⁶ but also in the district of Pushtud,⁹³⁷ as well as in the outskirts of Farah City⁹³⁸, and within the provincial capital itself.⁹³⁹ The district centre of Anar Dara was reportedly briefly captured by the Taliban in March 2018.⁹⁴⁰

In May 2018, the insurgents succeeded in overrunning parts of Farah City for the first time in three years.⁹⁴¹ The Taliban had already closed in on Farah City in October 2016;⁹⁴² and in 2017, the British newspaper Guardian reported three failed attempts to capture the provincial capital.⁹⁴³ In the beginning of 2018, Afghan officials warned that Taliban insurgents were no longer only on the outskirts of Farah, but had actually entered the city.⁹⁴⁴ According to AAN, the Taliban employed a strategy of consolidating control over rural areas and infiltrating the provincial centre's outskirts before eventually attacking the centre itself.⁹⁴⁵

According to Tolonews, altogether approximately 2000 Taliban fighters originating from the provinces of Helmand, Herat, Ghor, and Zabul have been involved in the large-scale attack on Farah City in May 2018.⁹⁴⁶ Afghanistan Analysts Network however stated that this number cannot be confirmed.⁹⁴⁷ As the Taliban were comparatively well-equipped – using for instance night-vision goggles and helmet cameras –, Afghan officials accused Russia of arming the Taliban. Russian authorities rejected this, pointing out that the Taliban, with abundant income from opium production and trade, might have acquired Russian night-vision gear on the black market in Pakistan, or in former Soviet countries.⁹⁴⁸

With the aid of US and Afghan airstrikes, government forces reportedly repelled the Taliban from Farah City after hours of fighting.⁹⁴⁹ Afghan and US forces conducted several airstrikes in Farah in 2018, for

⁹³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 killed as police, Taliban clash in Farah, 17 February 2018, [url](#); LWJ, As security in Farah worsens, Taliban stage deadly attack, 24 February 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Dozens Dead After Taliban Ambush On Afghan Government Forces, 10 March 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Attacks Kill Nine Afghan Soldiers, Police, 24 April 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Soldiers Reported Killed In Militant Attack, 14 July 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, 51 militants killed, wounded in Bala Bolok clashes, claims Farah officials, 7 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban launch deadly attacks on security posts in Farah province, 17 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban launch deadly attacks on security posts in Farah province, 17 September 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 17 Afghan Soldiers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁸ RFE/RL, At Least 10 Afghan Security Forces Killed In Two Separate Attacks, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁹ Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Taliban overruns parts of Afghan city of Farah in major offensive, 15 May 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 17 Afghans Killed In Taliban Attacks As U.S. Peace Envoy Heads To Region, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁰ Khaama Press, Farah's Anar Dara has reportedly fallen into Taliban hands, 12 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Farah: Taliban overrun Anar Dara district, 12 March 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghan troops push back Taliban fighters in Farah province, 13 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ Washington Post (The), Taliban overruns parts of Afghan city of Farah in major offensive, 15 May 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, UN Says More Than 100,000 Afghans Displaced In 2018, 23 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴² Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴³ Guardian (The), Russia accused of supplying Taliban as power shifts create strange bedfellows, 22 October 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁴ LWJ, As security in Farah worsens, Taliban stage deadly attack, 24 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ Ruttig, T. et al., Surrounding the Cities: The meaning of the latest battle for Farah (I), AAN, 6 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁶ Tolonews, 7 Provincial Centers Face 'Serious Security Threats', 16 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁷ Ruttig, T. et al., Surrounding the Cities: The meaning of the latest battle for Farah (I), AAN, 6 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁸ New York Times (The), Using Night-Vision Goggles, Taliban Stage Lethal Attack, 20 February 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), Russia accused of supplying Taliban as power shifts create strange bedfellows, 22 October 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁹ Washington Post (The), Taliban overruns parts of Afghan city of Farah in major offensive, 15 May 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces foil Taliban's bid to carry out coordinated attack in Farah, 26 May 2018, [url](#)

instance in April,⁹⁵⁰ May,⁹⁵¹ July,⁹⁵² September,⁹⁵³ November,⁹⁵⁴ and December,⁹⁵⁵ as well as in January 2019.⁹⁵⁶ According to a UN Secretary-General's report of February 2019, Farah was among the six provinces with the largest number of airstrikes in Afghanistan in the period of December 2018 to February 2019.⁹⁵⁷

In June 2018, a former district chief of Pur Chaman was arrested with several of his employees on charges of involvement in terrorist related activities.⁹⁵⁸ In July, 11 civilians travelling from Herat to Kabul died and about 40 were injured when their bus hit a roadside bomb in the district of Bala Buluk.⁹⁵⁹ In December 2018, MoI officials arrested a police officer allegedly affiliated to the Taliban and accused of facilitating a Taliban attack on police forces in November 2018 which resulted in the deaths of 22 policemen.⁹⁶⁰ In January 2019, Taliban insurgents kidnapped several persons, among them a local journalist, who was later killed by the Taliban.⁹⁶¹

2.8.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 24 674 persons displaced from Farah province, most of whom (23 662) were displaced within the province and the others went to Badghis, Helmand, Herat, Kandahar and Nimroz provinces.⁹⁶²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 2 135 persons displaced from Farah province, a large part of them (2 051) were displaced within the province and the rest of them were displaced to Herat province.⁹⁶³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 23 662 persons displaced to Farah province all coming from within the province itself.⁹⁶⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 2 051 persons displaced to Farah province, all coming from the province itself.⁹⁶⁵

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Anar Dara	197	/	115	/
Bakwa	102	/	57	/

⁹⁵⁰ Khaama Press, Joint airstrikes leave 37 militants dead, 7 wounded in Farah, 16 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵¹ Khaama Press, Video: Deadly airstrikes target Taliban after Farah city attack, 16 May 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban leader Mullah Din Mohammad and comrades killed in Farah airstrike, 21 May 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces foil Taliban's bid to carry out coordinated attack in Farah, 26 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵² Khaama Press, AAF targets Humvee vehicle captured by Taliban leaving 4 militants dead, 4 July 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Badar-16 operations kick off against Taliban in Farah province, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵³ Khaama Press, 46 militants killed, 38 thousand kgs of explosives in Farah airstrikes, 24 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁴ Khaama Press, Humvee APC destroyed, 9 militants killed in AAF airstrike in Farah province, 23 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁵ Khaama Press, 54 militants killed during the joint operations in past 24 hours: MoD, 22 December 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Drone strike target militants in Farah province, 23 December 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban commander among 7 killed in Farah airstrikes, 24 December 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁶ Khaama Press, 29 Taliban militants killed in coalition airstrike in Kandahar, 6 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁵⁸ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest ex-district chief in Farah over terror charges, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁹ RFE/RL, Bomb Kills At Least 11 In Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁰ Khaama Press, MoI arrest police officer affiliated with Taliban in Farah province, 22 December 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶¹ RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Free Hostages As Taliban Kidnap Government Employees, 5 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Reporters Without Borders reacts to the killing of a journalist by Taliban, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

Bala Buluk	5 062	109	154	/
Farah	4 983	23 553	914	2 051
Gulistan	408	/	21	/
Khaki Safed	744	/	165	/
Lash Wa Juwayn	8	/	/	/
Purchaman	259	/	112	/
Pusht Rod	12 631	/	557	/
QalaKah	157	/	35	/
Shib Koh	46	/	5	/

In 2018, 25 % of Farah's population was either a returnee or an IDP.⁹⁶⁶ According to UNOCHA, fighting and clashes between ANDSF and armed groups were the main reasons of displacements⁹⁶⁷ even in the provincial capital where fighting has 'displaced more than 10,000 people to neighbouring villages, before returning to their homes after security forces had regained control of the area. Some 500 people reportedly also displaced from Farah City into Herat'.⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12 – 18 March 2018, 19 March 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 – 8 April 2018, 9 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 – 20 May 2018, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

2.9 Faryab

2.9.1 General description of the province



Bordering Turkmenistan to the west and north, Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul to the east, Ghor to the south and Badghis in the south-west, the province of Faryab is situated in the north-western region of Afghanistan. The provincial capital is Maymana. The province comprises the following districts: Almar,

Andkhoy, Bilcheragh, Dawlatabad, Garziwan, Khan-e-Char Bagh, Khwajasabzposh, Kohestan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorghon, Shirintagab.⁹⁶⁹ According to UNODC, the district of Ghormach became part of Faryab in 2017.⁹⁷⁰ In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, Frontier Post noted that Ghormach's administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons.⁹⁷¹ The administrative belonging of Ghormach seems to be disputed. Afghanistan Analysts Network reported in 2017 that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.⁹⁷² In 2018, AAN stated that Ghormach had been 'temporarily transferred' to Faryab according to a list of Afghanistan's district numbers which was jointly published by the Central Statistics Organization and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG).⁹⁷³ The 2018/19 population estimation of the Afghan CSO, as well as the publication of the 2018 parliamentary election results by the Independent Election Commission again listed Ghormach as part of Badghis.⁹⁷⁴

Estimates by the Afghanistan CSO report the population of Faryab to be 1 069 540 in 2018/19.⁹⁷⁵ Together with Sar-e Pul, Faryab is one of the two provinces with an Uzbek majority in Afghanistan. Additionally, Tajiks/Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Hazara, Moghol and other smaller ethnicities live in the province.⁹⁷⁶

A part of the Ring Road leads through Faryab, connecting the province with neighbouring Jawzjan and the regional centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh Province.⁹⁷⁷ Another stretch of the Ring Road, planned to connect the district of Qaysar in Faryab with the site of Laman in Badghis south-west of Faryab, is under construction. According to an assessment by SIGAR, only 15 % of this projected 233-kilometre section of the Ring Road between Qaysar and Laman has been built as of September 2017 despite considerable funding since 2005.⁹⁷⁸ SIGAR linked the project's failure mostly to security issues and estimates the prospects for a timely completion to be bleak, due to increasing insecurity in the region.⁹⁷⁹ According to AAN, parts of the paved highway between Badghis and Faryab have been under Taliban control in the past,⁹⁸⁰ and in March 2018, the Taliban were threatening parts of the Ring Road, as well as important provincial roads.⁹⁸¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Faryab was among the ten main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018 – though it ranked within the lowest third of those ten provinces. Compared to 2017, the size of poppy-cultivating acreage in Faryab decreased by 64% in 2018, even

⁹⁶⁹ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Faryab, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 35; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁷¹ Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷² Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁷³ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Faryab, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 35-37

⁹⁷⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁷⁶ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile Faryab province, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁷⁷ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ SIGAR, Afghanistan's Ring Road from Qaysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over \$249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁹⁷⁹ SIGAR, Afghanistan's Ring Road from Qaysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over \$249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁹⁸⁰ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁸¹ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

though UNODC counted Ghormach – a district with sizeable opium-poppy cultivation – as part of Faryab for the first time in 2018.⁹⁸² UNODC links the decrease mainly to this year's weather conditions, as Faryab was affected by a drought.⁹⁸³

2.9.2 Conflict background and actors in Faryab

According to AAN, '[...] Faryab is strategically important as it connects the western parts of the country with the north – it was through Faryab that the Taliban moved to capture Mazar-e Sharif in 1997 and 1998 and from where anti-Taliban forces came to re-capture the city in 2001.'⁹⁸⁴ Khaama Press reported in January 2019 that 'Faryab is among the relatively volatile provinces in North of Afghanistan where Taliban militants are actively operating in some of its districts and often attempt to carry out attacks against the government and security institutions.'⁹⁸⁵

AAN links the Taliban's success in Faryab from 2007 onwards to '[...] local Jamiati-Jombesh rivalries, poppy-cultivation interests and radical propaganda by religious preachers, coupled with the absolute inconsistency of government outreach [...],'⁹⁸⁶ as well as the exploitation of local land and water conflicts and the rearmament of local commanders.⁹⁸⁷ According to AAN, fighting broke out between local pro-government militias in early 2018, which further weakened the resistance against anti-government insurgents.⁹⁸⁸

According to AAN, the Taliban became increasingly successful in the province after drawing on local fighters – which is a change in strategy compared to the Taliban's approach before 2001. Since 2008, Faryab's Taliban shadow governors mostly have been Uzbeks and also a majority of the Taliban district officers are Uzbeks in districts with an Uzbek majority, along with a few Tajiks. Pashtuns serve on mid-level posts in the districts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab where Pashtuns form a considerable share of the population.⁹⁸⁹ However, AAN reported that the strategy of endorsement towards non-Pashtun ethnic groups among Faryab's Taliban limits the group's organisational capacity as some Pashtun Taliban commanders ignore instructions of Uzbek shadow governors. In order to avoid tensions, the current shadow governor allegedly deploys a strategy of individual smaller operations by each group in their own areas instead of joint operations with larger numbers of fighters.⁹⁹⁰

General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Jombesh party leader and self-proclaimed sole representative of the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan, allegedly perceived the Taliban outreach to Uzbek communities as a threat. Subsequently, Dostum put considerable effort in combatting the Taliban influence on Uzbek communities in Faryab and led several counteroffensives of pro-government (Jombesh) militias together with the ANSF throughout 2015 and 2016. According to AAN, there were '[...] some initial successes, but no significant long-term results': Dostum was reportedly able to clear most parts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab (as well as Ghormach) of Taliban militants. Local government forces and pro-government militias have however not been able to hold most of the areas after

⁹⁸² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁹⁸³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 25

⁹⁸⁴ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁵ Khaama Press, Afghan Air Force bomb Taliban gathering in Faryab province, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁶ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁷ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁸ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁹ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁰ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

Dostum moved out of Faryab.⁹⁹¹ According to the analyst Deedee Derksen, the rearmament of local militias by Dostum might have strengthened the Taliban in the long run, as large numbers of militiamen formerly affiliated to Dostum might have defected to the Taliban after their funding by Dostum dried up.⁹⁹²

Besides local Taliban insurgents, a small Taliban-affiliated group of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) reportedly fights in Faryab.⁹⁹³ In April 2018, Qari Hekmat, the leader of the self-proclaimed ISKP, which operated in Jawzjan, was killed in a US airstrike in Bilcheragh close to Jawzjan's borders. The fact that Hekmat has been killed in Faryab should be attributed to the village's proximity to Hekmat's stronghold in Jawzjan, according to AAN. AAN stated that Hekmat had shown no signs of planning to expand towards Faryab⁹⁹⁴ and in the beginning of August 2018, the group was defeated by the Taliban in Jawzjan.⁹⁹⁵

In terms of the presence government security forces, Faryab is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.⁹⁹⁶

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Faryab province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.⁹⁹⁷ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

FARYAB	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ⁹⁹⁸ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Almar	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Andkhoy	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Bilcheragh	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control

⁹⁹¹ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁹² War on the Rocks, In Afghanistan, Today's Pro-Government Militias Could Be Tomorrow's Insurgents, 11 December 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁹³ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁴ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁵ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁶ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#), last modified 6 September 2018; Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁹⁷ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁸ LWJ is living map that is frequently updated.

Dawlatabad	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Garziwan	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Khan-e-Char Bagh	Gov control	GIroA Influence	GIroA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Khwajasabzposh	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Kohestan	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Taliban control	/
Maymana (capital)	Gov control	GIroA Influence	GIroA Influence	Contested	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Pashtunkot	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	INS activity	Taliban control	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Qaramqol	Open Taliban presence - low	GIroA Influence	GIroA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Qaysar	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Qorghhan	Open Taliban presence - low	GIroA Influence	GIroA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Shirintagab	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	INS activity	Taliban control	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Khawaja Musa⁹⁹⁹	/	/	/	/	TB control
Khaibar	/	/	/	/	TB control
Lolash	/	/	/	/	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Juma Bazar¹⁰⁰⁰	/	/	/	/	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Chilgazi¹⁰⁰¹	/	/	/	/	TB control
Bandar¹⁰⁰²	/	/	/	/	TB control

⁹⁹⁹ According to Pajhwok Afghan News Khwaja Musa is an area located in Pashtunkot district. (Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab Governor Denies Khwaja Musa Fell to Taliban, 2 March 2016, [url](#))

¹⁰⁰⁰ According to Pajhwok Afghan News Juma Bazar is the capital of Khwajasabzposh district. (Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2018 - Faryab Administrative Units, n.d., [url](#))

¹⁰⁰¹ According to Anadolu Agency (AA) Chilgazi is an area in Ghormach district. (Anadolu Agency (AA), Taliban Overrun Military Base in Afghanistan, 14 August 2018, [url](#))

¹⁰⁰² According to Afghanistan Times Bandar is an area in Kohestan district. (Afghanistan Times, Taliban Martyred Six of a Family in Faryab, 1 January 2018, [url](#))

2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.9.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 646 civilian casualties (230 deaths and 416 injured) in the province of Faryab. This represents an increase of 1 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by UXO/landmines.¹⁰⁰³

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Dawlatabad, Shirintagab, Khwajasabzposh, Pashtunkot, Qaysar and Almar in the highest category and the district of Kohestan in the second highest category. Qaramqol, Garziwan, and Bilcheragh districts are in the third highest category, Maymana in the category below, and Qurghan, Andkhoy and Khan-e-Char Bagh in the lowest categories.¹⁰⁰⁴

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 259 incidents related to insurgents in Faryab province.¹⁰⁰⁵

In March 2018, AAN stated that '[...] Faryab has become one of the most active fronts in the countrywide war between the Taliban and the government and its allies' over the past two years.¹⁰⁰⁶ Most of the districts of Faryab have been under Taliban control in the beginning of 2018 according to the same report, with the government controlling only the district centres and a few surrounding villages in the districts of Shirintagab, Khwajasabzposh, Dawlatabad, Pashtunkot, Almar, Qaysar, Bilcheragh, Kohestan and Garziwan.¹⁰⁰⁷ The district of Ghormach – now again part of Badghis – was fully captured by the Taliban in August 2017 and again in August 2018, after it had changed hands several times during recent years.¹⁰⁰⁸ Additionally, the Taliban also increased their presence along the Ring Road by establishing mobile checkpoints and searching vehicles for government employees and security force members along a crucial part of the highway connecting major trading centre Mazar-e Sharif in the north-east with Herat in the west of the country.¹⁰⁰⁹

According to AAN's report published in the beginning of October 2018, almost two thirds of Faryab's voters were prevented from registering for the 2018 parliamentary elections due to insecurity.¹⁰¹⁰

As the Taliban gained control over a majority of Faryab's districts in 2017, taking the provincial capital Maymana 'practically under siege', the Afghan government and – for the first time since 2014 – also NATO forces shifted troops towards the province.¹⁰¹¹ AAN analysts Obaid Ali and Thomas Ruttig took this as a sign of worry by the government forces, anticipating that Maymana might eventually be captured by the Taliban. According to the same report, the AAF had intensified airstrikes in the province at least since January 2018, while airstrikes had already caused considerable casualties among civilians in 2017.¹⁰¹² AAF airstrikes, as well as clashes between Taliban and government forces,

¹⁰⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁰⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁰⁵ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁰ Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (17): Voters disenfranchised in Faryab, AAN, 12 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹¹ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹² Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

continued in early 2019.¹⁰¹³ According to a UN Secretary General report of February 2019, Faryab was among the six provinces with the largest number of airstrikes in Afghanistan in the period of December 2018 to February 2019.¹⁰¹⁴

2.9.3.1 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 68 267 persons displaced from Faryab province mainly within the province itself, but also to Jawzjan, Balkh, Herat, Ghor and Kandahar.¹⁰¹⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 7 336 persons displaced from Faryab province, mainly within the province itself but also to Balkh province (2 226).¹⁰¹⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 51 126 persons displaced to Faryab province. All of them were originating from the province itself.¹⁰¹⁷

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 4 613 persons displaced to Faryab province, all of them originating from the province itself.¹⁰¹⁸

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Almar	8 769	1 526	336	/
Andkhoy	1 736	12 740	/	/
Bilcheragh	1 345	/	161	/
Dawlatabad	10 911	/	728	/
Garziwan	525	/	329	/
Khwajasabzposh	5 415	/	686	/
Kohestan	1 323	/	245	/
Pashtunkot	16 415	5 922	3 493	/
Qaysar	3 110	336	875	763
Qaramqol	4 627	441	/	/
Qorghon	1 393	/	/	/
Shirintagab	10 640	1 078	378	/
Maymana	/	29 083	/	3 850
n/a	2 058	/	/	/

¹⁰¹³ Frontier Post (The), Operations against rebels to continue: Defence Minister, 9 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Iranians among 29 insurgents killed in Faryab clashes, 2 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a dozen insurgents killed, 7 wounded in Faryab, 3 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's deputy district chief killed in airstrike, 6 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 34 Taliban killed, 20 wounded in Faryab raids, 7 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Air Force bomb Taliban gathering in Faryab province, 14 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 children rescued from Taliban jail, 19 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁴ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

According to UNOCHA, quoted by AAN, 30 282 Fariyabis left their places of origin, between January and September 2018, due to fightings and drought.¹⁰¹⁹

In May 2018, many IDPs went from Dawlatabad and two other districts to Maymana city due to conflict.¹⁰²⁰ In September 2018, 2 100 individuals came to Maymana due to an attack on their village in Pashtunkot district,¹⁰²¹ and 400 families were displaced in Maymana City due to military operations in Shirintagab district in January 2019.¹⁰²²

¹⁰¹⁹ Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (17): Voters disenfranchised in Faryab, AAN, 12 October 2018, [url](#)

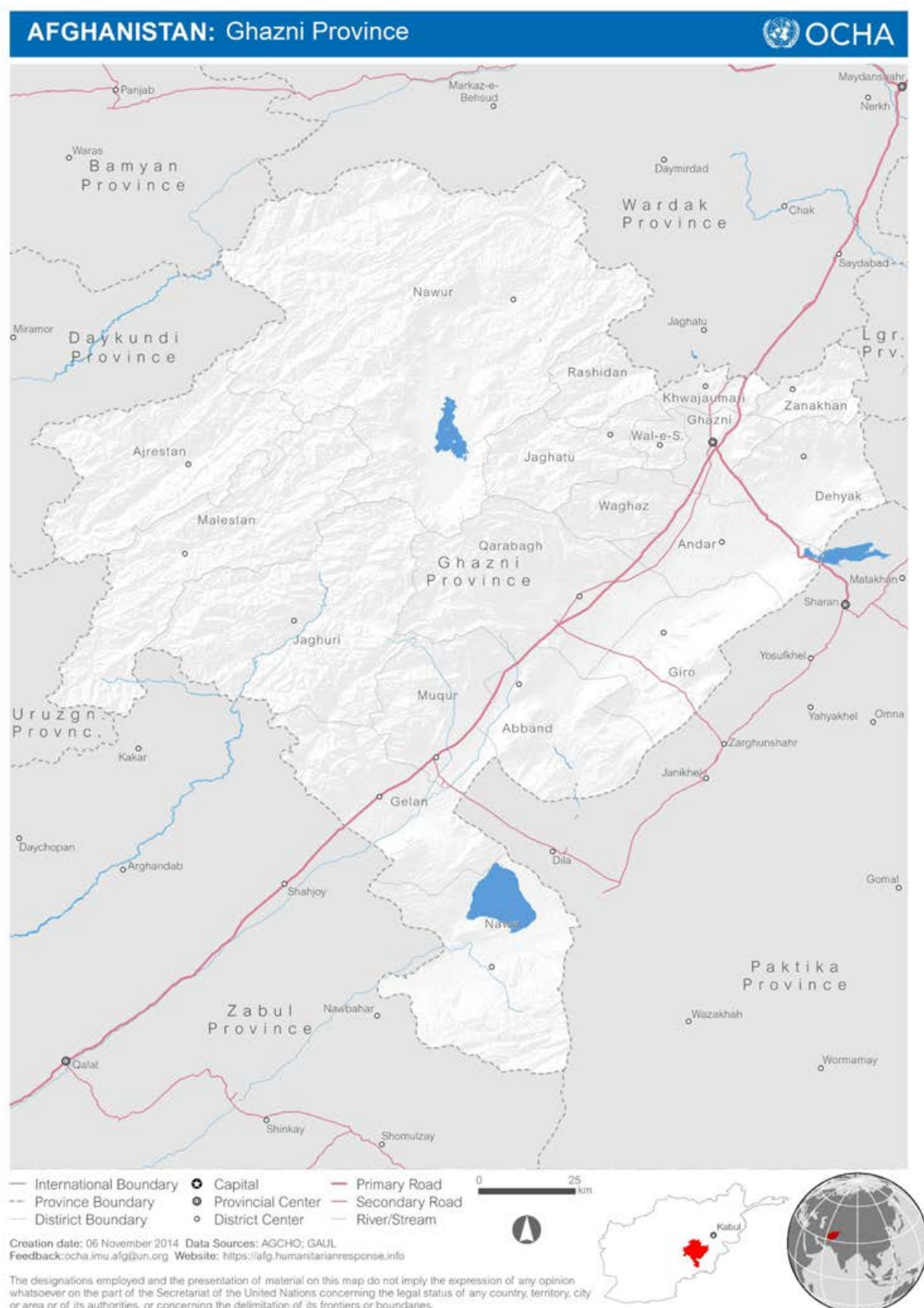
¹⁰²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 21-27 May 2018, 28 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 10-16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 01-07 January 2019, 10 January 2019, [url](#)

2.10 Ghazni

2.10.1 General description of the province



The province of Ghazni is located in the southeast of Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Bamyan and Wardak to the north, Logar, Paktya and Paktika to the east, Zabul to the south and Uruzgan and Daykundi to the west. Ghazni does not share an international border. The province has 19

administrative units: Ghazni district with the provincial capital of Ghazni City, as well as the districts of Abband, Ajrestan, Andar, Dehyak, Gelan, Giro, Jaghatu, Jaghuri, Khwajaumari, Malestan, Muqur, Nawa, Nawur, Qarabagh, Rashidan, Waghaz, Walimuhammad-e Shahid (Khugyani), and Zanakhan.¹⁰²³ The district of Andar is also known as Shelgar.¹⁰²⁴

According to estimates by the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Ghazni is 1 315 041 in 2018/19.¹⁰²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News states that Ghazni is inhabited by Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazara, as well as of several smaller groups such as Bayats, Sadats and Sikhs.¹⁰²⁶ Nearly half of Ghazni's population are reportedly Pashtuns, with a bit less than a half being Hazaras, and about 5 % Tajiks.¹⁰²⁷

A US military expert called Ghazni City a 'key intersection', as it is situated on the Ring Road (or Highway 1), connecting the capital Kabul with major population centre Kandahar in the south. Additionally, the road to Paktika's capital Sharan branches off the Ring Road in Ghazni City, while the road to Paktia's capital Gardez forks a bit north of Ghazni City. Hence, control over Ghazni is of strategic importance.¹⁰²⁸

According to UNOCHA, Highway 1 was partially destroyed and contaminated with IEDs in August 2018.¹⁰²⁹ At the end of August 2018, this stretch of the Ring Road near Ghazni City had reportedly been cleared of IEDs and reopened for civilian traffic. Accordingly, UNOCHA stated in August 2018 that '[...] travel from Kabul to Ghazni via Highway 1 is possible but remains risky, notably due to sporadic fighting between Saydabad, Wardak, and Ghazni.'¹⁰³⁰ Afghanistan Analysts Network reported in December 2018 that the Ghazni-Paktika highway was under Taliban control and closed for civilian and government vehicles, with the insurgents continuing to put pressure on the Kabul-Kandahar highway.¹⁰³¹

Zarkashan mine, reportedly one of the biggest gold mines in Afghanistan, lies in the district of Muqur. In February 2018, according to AAN, Muqur's residents complained that Taliban insurgents were mining in Zarkashan with the help of Pakistani engineers.¹⁰³²

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Ghazni was not one of the ten main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹⁰³³ While Ghazni was reportedly poppy-free between 2013 and 2016, approximately 1 000 hectares of opium-poppy have been cultivated in 2017. In 2018, the size of the acreage decreased by 64 %.¹⁰³⁴ Most of Ghazni's opium-poppy has been cultivated in the insecure district of Ajrestan in 2018.¹⁰³⁵

2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni

Voice of America (VoA) termed Ghazni a 'restive' province in the beginning of 2018.¹⁰³⁶ According to AAN, the Taliban have 'long-established significant influence' in the province and dominated militarily '[...] all but one of the 18 district centres and some larger areas in three districts' in July 2018,¹⁰³⁷ with

¹⁰²³ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 16; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: The arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Ghazni, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ Naval Postgraduate School, Ghazni Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰²⁸ Clearance Jobs, Taliban Seizure of Ghazni City Returns Terror Organization to its Roots, 13 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁹ UN News, 'No safe way' into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict Update No. 4, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³¹ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³² Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰³⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰³⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰³⁶ VoA, IS Leaflets Threaten Residents in Restive Afghan Province, 10 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁷ Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

the provincial capital remaining an exception until August 2018, when the Taliban overran Ghazni City.¹⁰³⁸

According to various sources reporting on Taliban attacks, the Afghan security forces were understaffed in Ghazni in 2018 (for more information see section [2.10.3.1](#)).¹⁰³⁹ Supplementing the ANP, ALP, and NDS paramilitary forces, a newly established ANA Territorial Force (ANA TF) is being piloted in the district of Jaghori as part of a pilot project. According to AAN, the establishment of this new local defence force has been authorised in February 2018 by presidential decree in order to create a force protecting local people and holding territory without being co-opted by strongmen or factional interests. While the decision to choose Jaghori as one of the pilot regions for the deployment of ANA TF was reportedly made before the Taliban attacks on Jaghori and Malestan in November 2018, AAN assumed that the attacks might have accelerated the formation of the Jaghori ANA TF companies.¹⁰⁴⁰

During the attack on Ghazni City in August 2018, the government forces were aided by US air strikes and US Army Special Forces on the ground.¹⁰⁴¹ In November 2018, three US special operations soldiers were killed in an IED explosion in Andar district at the outskirts of Ghazni City, a fourth soldier wounded in the attack died in December.¹⁰⁴²

Ghazni is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps.¹⁰⁴³

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Ghazni province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.¹⁰⁴⁴ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

¹⁰³⁸ New York Times (The), Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: 'A Catastrophe', 12 August 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Fierce clash ongoing for control of Ajiristan district HQ, 20 May 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: 'A Catastrophe', 12 August 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Dozens Of Commandos 'Missing' In Ghazni's Ajristan District, 13 August 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan: Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#); Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁰ Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ Time, Exclusive: Inside the U.S. Fight to Save Ghazni From the Taliban, 23 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴² Army Times, Fourth soldier dies from large IED blast in Afghanistan, 3 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 US Army personnel killed in Afghanistan last year, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴³ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#), last modified 6 September 2018

¹⁰⁴⁴ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

GHAZNI	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁰⁴⁵ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Jaghuri	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Malestan	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Nawur	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Taliban control	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Ajrestan ¹⁰⁴⁶	Open Taliban presence – Medium	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Andar (Shilgar)	Open Taliban Presence – high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control/
Qarabagh	Open Taliban presence – Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control : 95%; Gov control: 5%
Giro	Open Taliban presence – Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Taliban control	TB control : 99%; Gov control: 1%
Muqur	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Contested	TB control : 95%; Gov control: 5%
Waghaz	Open Taliban presence – Medium	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Gelan	Open Taliban presence – Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control : 94%; Gov control: 6%

¹⁰⁴⁵ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

¹⁰⁴⁶ According to the Taliban Ajrestan district is located in Daykundi province. (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#))

Abband	Open Taliban presence – Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control : 93%; Gov control: 7%
Nawa	Taliban control	INS activity	INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Dehyak	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Taliban control	TB control
Rashidan	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Zanakhan	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Khwajaumari	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Jaghata (Bahram-e-Shahid)	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Taliban control	TB control
Walimuhammad-e-Shahid (Khogyani)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Taliban control	TB control
Ghazni (capital)	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%

2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.10.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 653 civilian casualties (253 deaths and 400 injured) in Ghazni. This represents an increase of 84 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and targeted or deliberate killings.¹⁰⁴⁷

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Andar in the highest category and the districts of Ajrestan, Qarabagh, Dehyak and Ghazni in the second highest category. Gelan, Jaghatu, Muqur, Waghaz and Zanakhan districts are in the third highest category and the districts of Khwajaumari, Abband and Giro in the fourth category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.¹⁰⁴⁸

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 476 incidents related to insurgents in Ghazni province.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁰⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁴⁹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

Throughout 2018 and early 2019, Ghazni continued to be a major battlefield between Taliban insurgents and the Afghan government – backed by US forces since the second half of 2018.¹⁰⁵⁰ Starting in spring 2018, the Taliban increasingly expanded their control in the province. They slowly approached the outskirts of Ghazni City, established road checkpoints, extorted money and killed government employees as well as politicians.¹⁰⁵¹ In the middle of August 2018, the Taliban captured large parts of Ghazni City, leading to fierce clashes between the insurgents and government forces.¹⁰⁵² After five days, the government regained control over the provincial capital – though, according to AAN, it is disputed, whether this was because of the security forces' counterattack backed by airstrikes, or because of a strategic retreat by the Taliban.¹⁰⁵³

Airstrikes carried out in August 2018 led to civilian casualties and destroyed civilian homes.¹⁰⁵⁴ UNAMA recorded 262 civilian casualties (79 deaths, 183 injured) related to the Taliban attacks in August 2018. According to UNAMA, most of the civilian casualties were caused by indirect weapons; mainly rockets and mortars, as well as small arms fire during ground engagement. UNAMA reported seven airstrikes carried out by the pro-government forces, causing the death of 32 persons and injuring 49 others. Furthermore, the Taliban '[...] burned down large parts of the bazaar area, causing many people to lose their livelihoods, and intentionally damaged two media corporations.'¹⁰⁵⁵

The parliamentary election, which should have taken place in October 2018, was first postponed to April 2019 in Ghazni due to the volatile security situation.¹⁰⁵⁶ In late December 2018, the Independent Election Commission announced that the parliamentary election in Ghazni, as well as the presidential election in all of Afghanistan will be held with a three-month delay in July 2019.¹⁰⁵⁷ In March 2019 the elections have been postponed again, this time to 28 September 2019.¹⁰⁵⁸

Simultaneously with the attack on Ghazni City, the Taliban captured the district of Ajrestan west of the provincial capital, as well as an ANA base in Faryab, and a base in Baghlan Province. The New York Times took this as an indicator for Taliban military capacity,¹⁰⁵⁹ while the security forces allegedly showed a lack of coordination in Ghazni.¹⁰⁶⁰ An entire ANA commando of approximately 100 soldiers reportedly disappeared during the attack in Ajrestan.¹⁰⁶¹ After fleeing into mountainous areas, about

¹⁰⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Fierce clash ongoing for control of Ajiristan district HQ, 20 May 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: 'A Catastrophe', 12 August 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Dozens Of Commandos 'Missing' In Ghazni's Ajristan District, 13 August 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan: Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#); Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Ghazni police killed, 5 injured in Taliban attack, 1 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 70 militants killed, scores injured in nation-wide operations: MoD, 4 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 Taliban killed in Ghazni clash, blast, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵¹ Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵² Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan Der Albtraum von Ghazni, 15 August 2018 [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁴ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians on Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁰⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians on Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁰⁵⁶ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁷ France 24, Afghan presidential election delayed until July 20, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁹ New York Times (The), Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: 'A Catastrophe', 12 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶¹ Tolonews, Dozens Of Commandos 'Missing' In Ghazni's Ajristan District, 13 August 2018, [url](#)

20 survivors reached neighbouring Miramor district in Daykundi two days later, recounting that approximately 40 soldiers had been killed by Taliban ambushes during their flight.¹⁰⁶²

In November 2018, the Taliban launched a major offensive against the Hazara-dominated, formerly peaceful districts of Jaghori and Malestan, after the insurgents had already attacked neighbouring Khas Uruzgan in Uruzgan Province in the end of October.¹⁰⁶³ According to AAN, the attacks have been '[...] unprecedented in their reach and led to massive displacement.¹⁰⁶⁴ RFE/RL and AAN interpreted the attacks as an attempt to gain a foothold among Hazara communities, after the traditionally Pashtun-dominated Taliban have succeeded in governing ethnic Tajik and Uzbek areas in the north of Afghanistan. However, according to RFE/RL, the integration of Hazara fighters into Taliban ranks might be much harder to achieve due to the history of 'past atrocities' against of Hazaras by the Taliban.¹⁰⁶⁵

In 2018, sources reported that the security force's response to the Taliban attacks has been perceived as too slow – fuelling concerns of an anti-Hazara bias of the government, as well as ethnic targeting by the Taliban – leading Hazara representatives to start to mobilise forces in order to defend Jaghori and Malestan.¹⁰⁶⁶ Furthermore, Hazara activists protested against the government in Kabul in 2018, urging for more effective measures to restore security in the districts under threat.¹⁰⁶⁷ By the end of November 2018, the Taliban had been pushed out of Jaghori and Malestan. The threat of renewed attacks however still exists, according to AAN.¹⁰⁶⁸

AAN reports that the takeover of Andar in October 2018 '[...] actually normalised public services.¹⁰⁶⁹ A school, as well as a hospital, which had left the district centre because of fighting, were allowed to move back in October 2018. In this regard AAN found that 'full control by one side has proved a better situation for civilians than their district being contested.'¹⁰⁷⁰

2.10.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 46 311 persons displaced from Ghazni, most of whom (37 611) went to Ghazni district and the others were displaced to Bamyan province (2 617), Kabul district (2 562), Daykundi province (2 229) and in less important numbers in Helmand, Herat, Kandahar, Khost, Nimroz, Paktya and Zabul provinces.¹⁰⁷¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 83 persons displaced from Ghazni.¹⁰⁷²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 37 779 persons displaced to Ghazni province, all displaced to Ghazni district.¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁶² New York Times (The), Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: 'A Catastrophe', 12 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶³ RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#); Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁵ RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁶ Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Reporterly, Awakened Community: How an Unexpected Protest Lit Up at the Heart of Kabul, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Reporterly, Awakened Community: How an Unexpected Protest Lit Up at the Heart of Kabul, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁸ Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁰ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Ghazni province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹⁰⁷⁴

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Ajrestan	219	/	/	/
Andar	763	/	/	/
Dehyak	81	/	/	/
Ghazni	38 038	37 779	/	/
Giro	/	/	35	/
Jaghuri	3 038	/	48	/
Malestan	3 753	/	/	/
Muqur	139	/	/	/
Qarabagh	189	/	/	/
Waghaz	91	/	/	/

In 2018, Ghazni was considered by UNOCHA as one of ‘the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities’.¹⁰⁷⁵

During the week of 29 January to 4 February 2018, 3 400 people came to the provincial capital because of military operations, intimidations and forced taxations by non-state armed groups; however districts of origin were not mentioned in the UNOCHA weekly report of 5 February 2018.¹⁰⁷⁶ In May 2018, 4 district centres were attacked by insurgents causing the forced displacement of 10 000 people within their districts or to the provincial capital.¹⁰⁷⁷ The assault on Ghazni city by the Taliban on 10 August 2018 caused the displacement of more than 21 000 people.¹⁰⁷⁸

In November 2018, heavy fighting in Malistan and Jaghuri districts have resulted in displacements within the province or further¹⁰⁷⁹ and the displacement levels have intensified on 10 November because of ground operations and airstrikes.¹⁰⁸⁰ In these two affected districts, families had to move repeatedly.¹⁰⁸¹ On 15 November 2018, 760 families from Malestan and Jaghuri districts were displaced to Bamyān province.¹⁰⁸²

¹⁰⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁰⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 January- 4 February, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 – 21 May 2018, 22 May 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes Flash Update No.1, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ Tolonews, 21,000 Displaced After Ghazni Crisis: OCHA, 27 August 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict Update No. 5 (as of 26 August 2018), 26 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 05 – 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes Flash Update No.2, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

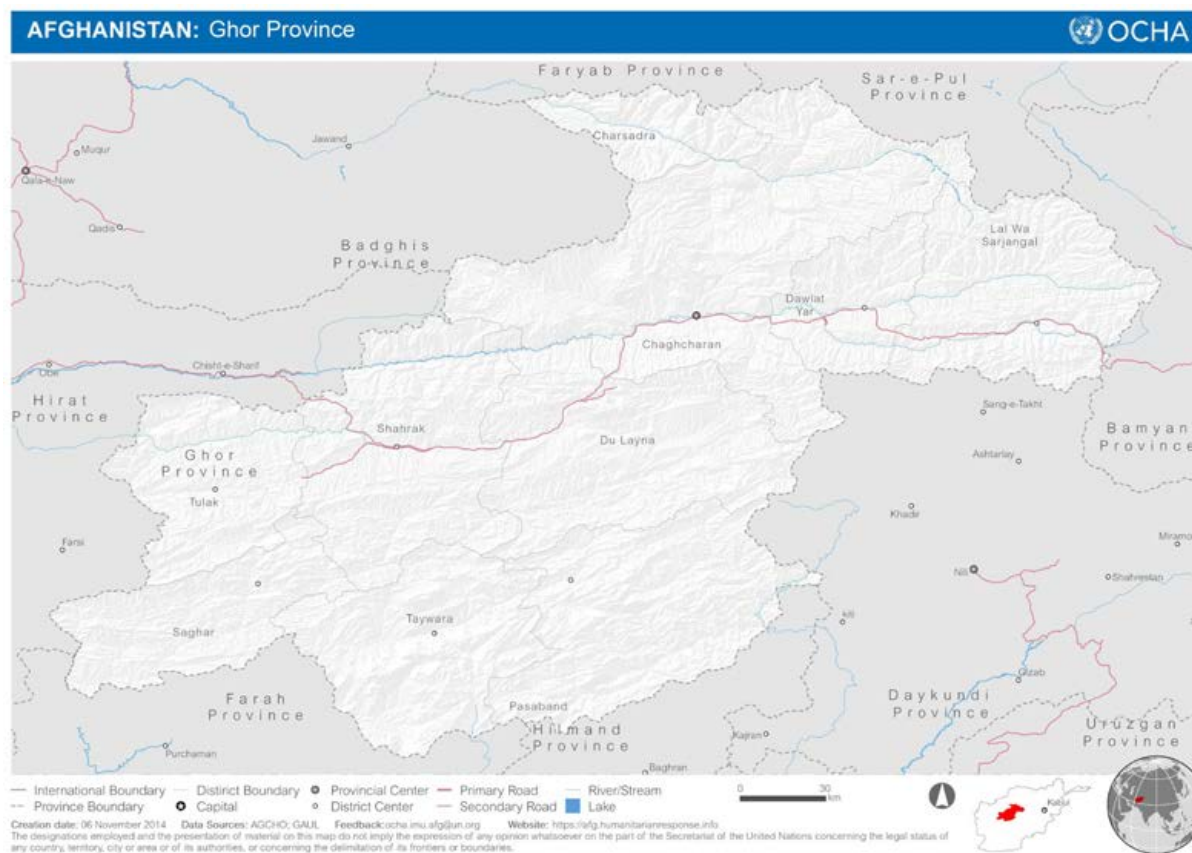
¹⁰⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes Flash Update No.1, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes Flash Update No.1, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸² ERM, Household Assessment Report, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

2.11 Ghor

2.11.1 General description of the province



The province of Ghor is located in central-northwestern Afghanistan and does not share an international border. It is surrounded by the provinces of Herat and Badghis to the west, Faryab and Sar-e Pul to the north, Bamiyan and Daykundi to the east, and Helmand and Farah to the south. Ghor is divided into ten districts: Chaghcharan (Feroz Koh), Charsadra, Dawlatyar, Du Layna, Lal Wa Sarjangan, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, and Tulak.¹⁰⁸³ The provincial capital of Ghor is called Feroz Koh or Chaghcharan. While Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), the national broadcasting corporation of Afghanistan, stated that Chaghcharan was renamed to Feroz Koh in 2014, the Independent Election Commission and the Afghan Central Statistics Organization refer to Chaghcharan as Ghor's provincial capital in 2018 publications.¹⁰⁸⁴

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Ghor to be 738 224 in 2018/19.¹⁰⁸⁵ According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, the largest ethnic group in Ghor are Tajiks, followed by Hazaras and a small number of Pashtuns and Uzbeks,¹⁰⁸⁶ RFE/RL stated that Aimaqs

¹⁰⁸³ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Ghor, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 29; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghor Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Ghor, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁴ RTA, Ghor Province, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Afghan Islamic Press, Name of Chaghcharan city being changed to Feroz Koh, 21 April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Ghor, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁰⁸⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁸⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

constitute the majority of Ghor.¹⁰⁸⁷ The Aimaqs are '[...] closely related to the Hazara, and to some degree the Tajiks [...]' according to the US Naval Postgraduate School.¹⁰⁸⁸

Afghan airline Kam Air, which used to operate in Ghor, suspended flights to Chaghcharan after several Kam Air staff members were killed in an attack in Kabul in January 2018.¹⁰⁸⁹ This reportedly posed a problem to Ghor's residents as the highways to Herat and Kabul are insecure and in bad condition.¹⁰⁹⁰ According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, scheduled passenger service to Chaghcharan was again available in March 2019.¹⁰⁹¹

Taliban insurgents and unidentified gunmen posed a security threat on several roads in Ghor in 2018.¹⁰⁹² Furthermore, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that a bridge, which had remained under construction for eight years, caused problems on the highway to Kabul, as crossing the river Harirod is nearly impossible in the district of Lal Wa Sarjangal in rainy seasons.¹⁰⁹³

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Ghor was not among the ten main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹⁰⁹⁴ Compared to 2017, opium-poppy cultivation reportedly decreased by 15 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating districts have been Chaghcharan, Pasaband, and Taywara.¹⁰⁹⁵

2.11.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghor

According to AAN, 'Ghor is known for its particularly confusing pattern of conflicts, involving insurgent groups and 'freelancing' militias, the dividing line between which is all but hermetic [...].'¹⁰⁹⁶ Besides Taliban insurgents, armed groups partially affiliated to political parties in the central government are present in the province. According to AAN, the 'insurgent' activities of some groups can be hardly distinguished from crime and allegiances have been shifting several times in the past.¹⁰⁹⁷ The absence of rule of law and government is allegedly a particular pressing problem in Ghor.¹⁰⁹⁸

AAN reported in November 2016 of a network of militants active in the district of Chaghcharan, which maintained close links to the political party and former militia, Jamiat-e Islami, but also with established links to the Taliban after 2010. It was said to sympathise with ISKP after 2015 – even though AAN stated that claims of an IS-affiliation of the group proved wrong. While the network's criminal activities led to protests and resistance of local residents, the government forces' weak presence in Ghor, as well as the network's affiliation with Jamiat reportedly prevented its disarmament. On the contrary, after fighting between the group and the Taliban erupted, provincial officials treated the group as a 'popular uprising' force and the ANSF provided logistical support for the fight against the Taliban. However, when ANSF launched a clearing operation against the network in the wake of protests caused by the killing of more than 30 civilians by the network in 2016, the Taliban allegedly

¹⁰⁸⁷ RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won't Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹¹ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹⁰⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#); Frontier Post (The), Gunmen seized 5 WFP wheat trucks in Ghor, 6 February 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Armed Men Gun Down Three Travelers On Herat-Ghor Highway, 17 April 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Six Afghan Civilians Said Killed In Attack In Western Province, 17 April 2018, [url](#); 1TV News, Gunmen kill three passengers in Ghor, 19 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban plant bombs on all routes to Ghor's Pasaband, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 years on, Harirod bridge still incomplete in Ghor, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁹⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ruttig, T., The 'Humvee Bomb' Series: The October wave of Taleban attacks in 2017 context, AAN, 7 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁷ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁸ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017, [url](#); New York Times (The), No Justice, 'No Value' for Women in a Lawless Afghan Province, 7 July 2017, [url](#); IWPR, Afghanistan: Women Abused in Lawless Ghor, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

fought against ANSF, as they perceived the presence of government forces as a threat against their strongholds in neighbouring Charsada district.¹⁰⁹⁹

Furthermore, according to an AAN report of 2017, an MP from Ghor province stated that affiliates of Hezb-i-Islami, a rival party to Jamiat-e Islami, distributed a large quantity of weapons to their supporters in Ghor.¹¹⁰⁰ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, two sons of a former Hezb-i-Islami commander died in a clash with Taliban insurgents in January 2018. The fighting reportedly erupted over the collection of *ushr* taxes, respectively a leadership dispute between the former Hezb-i-Islami commander and Taliban insurgents.¹¹⁰¹

The ANSF conducted operations in Ghor in 2018.¹¹⁰² According to a report of January 2019, the newly established ANA TF will be stationed 'soon' in several districts of Ghor.¹¹⁰³

The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of ANA operations in the province of Ghor.¹¹⁰⁴

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Ghor province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹¹⁰⁵ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

GHOR	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of: July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹¹⁰⁶ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Chaghcharan (Firoz Koh) (capital)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Lal Wa Sarjantal	Gov control	GI RoA Control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Dawlatyar	Gov control	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Charsadra	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

¹⁰⁹⁹ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁰ Ruttig, T., A Matter of Registration: Factional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 25 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁰¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander's sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰² Tolonews, Casualties Rise Amid Heavy Clashes In 10 Provinces, 13 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰³ Tolonews, Territorial Army To Begin Mission In West, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁴ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁵ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁶ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Du Layna	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Shahrak	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 75%; Gov control: 25%
Taywara	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Pasaband	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Saghar	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 93%; Gov control: 7%
Tulak	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 92%; Gov control: 8%
Murghab	/	/	/	/	TB control

2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.11.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 64 civilian casualties (28 deaths and 36 injured) in Ghor. This represents an increase of 94 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were targeted or deliberate killings, followed by ground engagements and (non-suicide) IEDs.¹¹⁰⁷

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Taywara and Feroz Koh (Chagcharan) in the second highest category and the districts of Du Laina, Pasaband and Shahrak in the third highest category. Dawlatyar and Charsadra districts are in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.¹¹⁰⁸

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 56 incidents related to insurgents in Ghor province.¹¹⁰⁹

The Taliban reportedly gained significant strength in Ghor around 2010.¹¹¹⁰ Areas of Shahrak district have been under Taliban control for years now, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.¹¹¹¹ Throughout 2018, the Taliban conducted several operations in Ghor, abducting and assassinating persons,¹¹¹² attacking voter registration centres in the city of Chaghcharan twice in the wake of the 2018

¹¹⁰⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹¹⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁰⁹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹¹¹⁰ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹¹¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor: Taliban lash 18-year-old girl on elopement charges, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 health workers kidnapped in Ghor, 2 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Abducted health workers released in Ghor, 11 March 2018, [url](#); TRT World, Roadside bomb kills district chief in Afghanistan's western Ghor province, 7 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor: Taliban kidnap 6 including 3 girl students, 23 July 2018, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Assassinate Director of Population Register in Ghor, 27 October 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban shot dead population registration official in Ghor, 27 October 2018, [url](#);

parliamentary election,¹¹¹³ and planting mines on roads.¹¹¹⁴ In November 2018, Taliban insurgents reportedly burnt the TV sets of residents in remote villages of Dawlatyar district.¹¹¹⁵

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, residents of Shahrak and Du Layna voiced fear over a growing Taliban presence and an increasing number of terrorist attacks in July 2018.¹¹¹⁶ Heavy clashes between Taliban and security forces, as well as local militias in May 2018 reportedly caused the death of 46 combatants in Shahrak.¹¹¹⁷ In November 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Interior acknowledged that the Taliban had sought to expand their attacks in Ghor in 2018.¹¹¹⁸ In December 2018, the Taliban shadow governor of Ghor was reportedly killed by a drone strike in the bordering province of Helmand.¹¹¹⁹

Taliban insurgents have been allegedly stopping passengers on the Ghor-Herat highway, issuing documents under the title 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and Taliban's Economic Commission', extorting people and taking government employees hostage.¹¹²⁰ According to Frontier Post, in February 2018, gunmen seized five lorries carrying wheat provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) on the way from Herat to Chaghcharan in Shahrak district. Officials blamed Taliban insurgents for the hijacking, while the Taliban did not claim responsibility.¹¹²¹

In April and November 2018, news sources reported killings of passengers travelling from Daykundi to Herat by unknown gunmen at the outskirts of the provincial capital.¹¹²² In December 2018, Taliban insurgents reportedly planted bombs on all routes leading to the district of Pasaband in the south of Ghor, blocking the transport of goods to the province.¹¹²³

Pajhwok Afghan News and Khaama Press reported the arrest of one of the leaders of the network which was mentioned in section 2.11.2, as well as the seizure of a large quantity of arms and explosives during an NDS operation in Lal Wa Sarjangan district in February 2018.¹¹²⁴ The captive was called a 'senior ISIS' leader by the news sources¹¹²⁵ – a label rejected by AAN in 2016 as a one-sided pledge of allegiance by the captive at the most.¹¹²⁶

The lack of law enforcement by the government reportedly has particularly negative consequences on women in Ghor; Ghor was described by the New York Times in 2017 as '[...] may be the country's capital of gender-based violence and abuse.'¹¹²⁷ Newspapers reported cases of Taliban or other non-government forces' extra-judicial rulings in 2017 and 2018 that led to the stoning, forced marriage, lashing or murder of women allegedly for breaking sharia law in 2017 and 2018.¹¹²⁸ According to the

¹¹¹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 rebel killed in attack on Ghor voter registration centre, 26 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Taliban who stormed Ghor voter center killed, 10 May 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban plant bombs on all routes to Ghor's Pasaband, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁵ Salaam Times, Taliban burn residents' TVs in Ghor to hide group's crimes, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban growing presence worries Ghor residents, 2 July 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Battle for Ghor's Awshan area takes 46 lives: Official, 13 May 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁸ Tolonews, Interior Ministry Confirms Spike in Casualty Toll This Year, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban's shadow governor for Ghor has reportedly been killed, 4 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²¹ Frontier Post (The), Gunmen seized 5 WFP wheat trucks in Ghor, 6 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²² Tolonews, Armed Men Gun Down Three Travelers On Herat-Ghor Highway, 17 April 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Six Afghan Civilians Said Killed In Attack In Western Province, 17 April 2018, [url](#); 1TV News, Gunmen kill three passengers in Ghor, 19 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban plant bombs on all routes to Ghor's Pasaband, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Weapons seized, senior Daesh held in Ghor, 11 February 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Senior ISIS leader arrested by Afghan forces in Ghor province, 12 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²⁵ Khaama Press, Senior ISIS leader arrested by Afghan forces in Ghor province, 12 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²⁶ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹¹²⁷ New York Times (The), No Justice, 'No Value' for Women in a Lawless Afghan Province, 7 July 2017, [url](#)

¹¹²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor: Taliban lash 18-year-old girl on elopement charges, 28 June 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), No Justice, 'No Value' for Women in a Lawless Afghan Province, 7 July 2017, [url](#); IWPR, Afghanistan: Women Abused in Lawless Ghor, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

Afghan news website Tolonews, the number of so-called ‘Kangaroo Courts’ – extra-judicial courts run by anti-government forces – increased in 2017 and early 2018 in the province.¹¹²⁹

Two radio stations were reportedly burned down by unidentified men in Ghor in late 2017 and early 2018.¹¹³⁰

2.11.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 13 142 persons displaced from Ghor, most of whom (10 305) were displaced within the province; 2 755 went to Herat province and the rest went to Nimroz and Kandahar provinces.¹¹³¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 294 persons displaced from Ghor.¹¹³²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 11 755 persons displaced to Ghor province, with 1 210 of them originating from Badghis province.¹¹³³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 246 persons displaced to Ghor province; all of them were displaced within the province.¹¹³⁴

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Chaghcharan	1 076	10 097	/	246
Charsadra	1 260	/	150	/
Dawlatyar	392	62	/	/
Du Layna	4 187	532	/	/
Pasaband	480	/	90	/
Saghar	686	/	/	/
Shahrak	3 972	1 064	48	/
Taywara	243	/	/	/
Tulak	846	/	6	/

Fighting was the main cause of displacement: in May 2018, 5 000 people were displaced within Shahrak district and to neighbouring districts such as Dolayna and Chaghcharan.¹¹³⁵ In October 2018, operations of ANSF against a militia commander has resulted in displacements in Lal Wa Sarjantal district.¹¹³⁶ Ghor province was also affected by drought in 2018 which caused internal displacements in August 2018.¹¹³⁷

¹¹²⁹ Tolonews, Kangaroo Courts Increased in Afghanistan in 1396, 20 March 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³⁰ TKG, Local Radio Station Burned in Ghor, 24 December 2017, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Unknown Gunmen Torch Radio Station in Ghor, 22 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

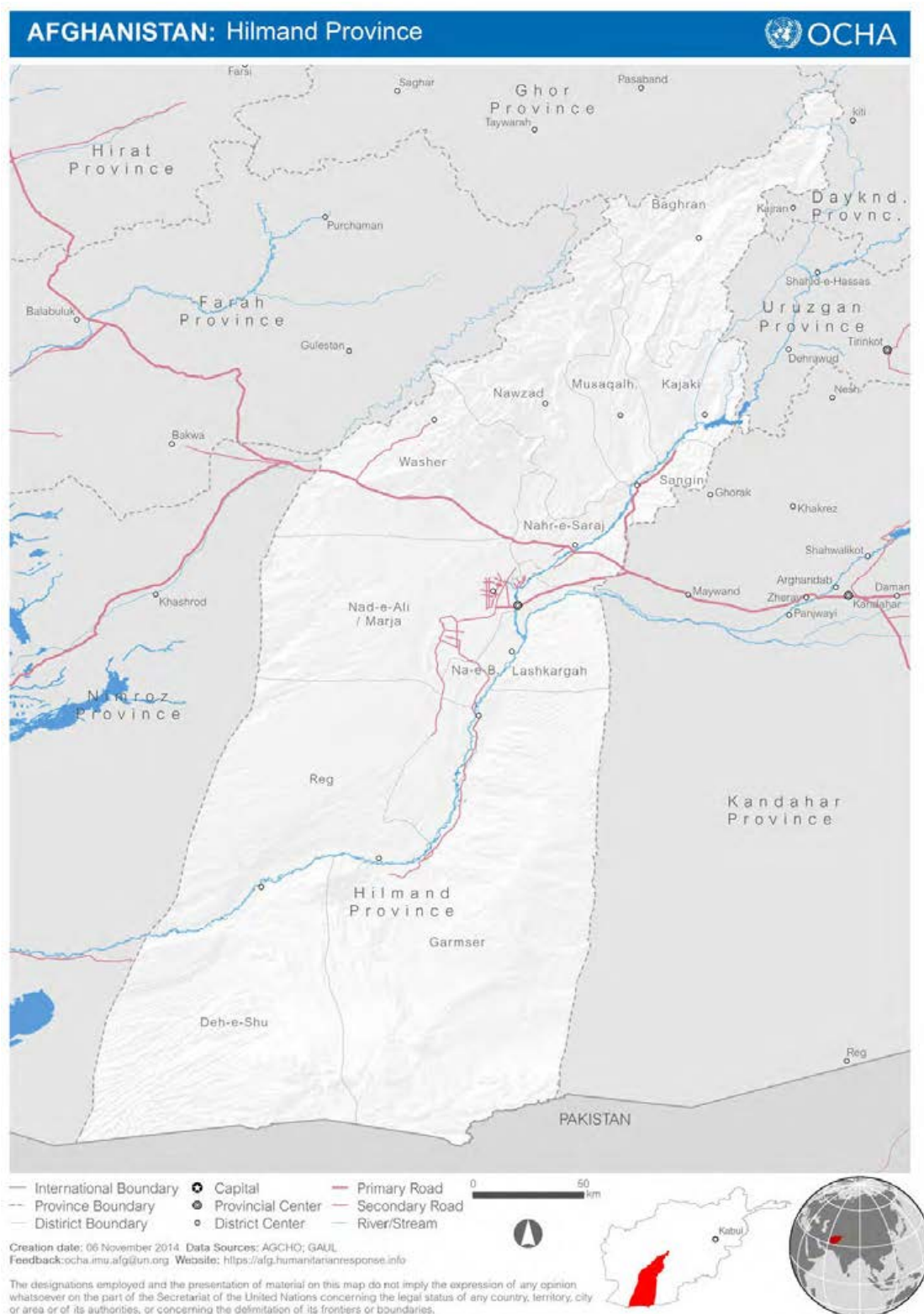
¹¹³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 – 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8-14 October 2018, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 27 August – 2 September 2018, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

2.12 Helmand

2.12.1 General description of the province



The province of Helmand is situated in southern Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Nimroz, and Farah to the west, Ghor, and Daykundi to the north, and Uruzgan, as well as Kandahar to the east. In

the south, Helmand shares a 162-kilometre-border with Pakistan along the Durand line.¹¹³⁸ Helmand is the largest province of Afghanistan.¹¹³⁹ It is divided into the districts of Baghran, Deh-e-Shu, Garmser, Kajaki, Lashkargah, Musaqla, Nad-e Ali, Marja (formerly part of Nad-e-Ali¹¹⁴⁰), Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereshk), Nawa-e-Barikzayi (Nawa), Nawamish, Nawzad, Reg-e-Khan Nishin (Reg), Sangin, and Washer. The provincial capital of Helmand is Lashkargah.¹¹⁴¹ According to the Afghan Central Statistics Organization, Marja and Nawamish are so-called 'temporary' districts,¹¹⁴² as they '[...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.'¹¹⁴³ Hazara-dominated Nawamish was reportedly split from the Pashtun-majority district of Baghran by a presidential order in March 2016. In June 2017, its administrative affairs were temporarily transferred to neighbouring Daykundi Province.¹¹⁴⁴ The 2018 parliamentary elections in Nawamish were however administered from Lashkargah, causing protests in the district.¹¹⁴⁵

According to CSO estimates, the population of Helmand is 1 395 514 in 2018/19.¹¹⁴⁶ The majority of Helmand's residents are reportedly Pashtuns, with a Baloch minority in the south at the border to the Pakistani province Balochistan¹¹⁴⁷ and Hazaras in Nawamish in the north.¹¹⁴⁸ While Helmand's northern districts – Baghran, Kajaki and Musa Qala – are mainly populated by members of the Alizai tribe, the districts of Marja and Nad-e-Ali are more heterogeneous, inhabited by Nurzai, Ishaqzai, Alizai, Alekozai, and several smaller tribes.¹¹⁴⁹ The Ishaqzai are allegedly '[...] one of the most religiously conservative tribes across Afghanistan,'¹¹⁵⁰ with the late Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur belonging to this tribe.¹¹⁵¹

According to AAN, the more heterogeneous composition of the districts in the south of Helmand was the result of a large-scale irrigation and agriculture project mainly funded by USAID until 1970, which created new arable land to be cultivated by so-called *naqileen* – i.e. Pashtuns from other parts of Afghanistan.¹¹⁵² Author Carter Malkesian noted that this allegedly led to a rift in Helmand's society and the *naqileen* predominantly allied with the Taliban against the older landed tribes, particularly in the district of Garmser in southern Helmand.¹¹⁵³

The province has a 'significant geo-strategic importance' according to Pajhwok Afghan News,¹¹⁵⁴ as a section of the Ring Road runs through the districts of Nahr-e-Saraj, Sangin and Washer,¹¹⁵⁵ connecting major population centre Herat in the west with Kandahar in the east and eventually the capital

¹¹³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹³⁹ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁰ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁴¹ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Hilmand, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 36

¹¹⁴² Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 36

¹¹⁴³ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁴ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁵ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Polls in Nawamish being administered from Helmand, 29 July 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁴⁷ Naval Postgraduate School, Helmand Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁸ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁹ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁰ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#); Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taleban's strategic goals, 26 December 2015, [url](#)

¹¹⁵² Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ Malkasian, C., War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier, 2013, p. 266

¹¹⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁵ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

Kabul.¹¹⁵⁶ A domestic airport with scheduled passenger service reportedly exists in Helmand's capital Lashkargah.¹¹⁵⁷

Helmand is one of Afghanistan's most fertile regions, with a climate favouring the cultivation of a variety of crops – including opium –, and Helmand river providing the necessary irrigation through a 'relatively organized' canal system.¹¹⁵⁸

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Helmand remained by far the largest opium-poppy cultivating province in 2018 and accounted for 52 % of the total opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Compared to 2017, Helmand's opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 5 % in 2018.¹¹⁵⁹ The province's pivotal role for opium-poppy cultivation allegedly contributes considerably to its strategic importance for the Taliban: whoever controls Helmand is rewarded with large-scale revenues, according to several accounts.¹¹⁶⁰

2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand

Helmand is reportedly '[...] one of Afghanistan's most volatile provinces and the deadliest for international forces in 16 years of hostilities.'¹¹⁶¹ The Taliban are reportedly able to draw on large numbers of supporters among Helmand's population.¹¹⁶²

According to AAN, local strongmen returned to rule in Helmand after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 and were rewarded with local government posts by then newly appointed President Hamid Karzai. These strongmen could then secure control over patronage networks and resources, such as revenues from opium-poppy cultivation. Much of the violence of Helmand has been – and still is – driven by the drug economy. As stated by AAN, 'allegations of abuses by these strongmen were legion and included illegal arrests and torture, all aggravated by the marginalization of "out" tribes who saw their poppy crops selectively eradicated and government ranks packed out by their rivals.' This contributed allegedly much to the Taliban's appeal in the eyes of the local population.¹¹⁶³

As a precondition for their deployment in the region, British officials demanded the clearing of local government posts from strongmen in 2006 – a demand, which President Karzai reluctantly fulfilled. However, according to AAN, removing the strongmen '[...] eliminated the source of much of the resentment, which was driving the province towards insurgency, but also the means of containing it,' as security in the province was mostly based on agreements between the strongmen in government positions and local militias.¹¹⁶⁴

After the local militias withdrew and the British troops were unable to fill the gaps, the Taliban enhanced their operations in the province. In order to counter this development, US forces have been deployed in large numbers in Helmand from 2008 onwards. While the Taliban were pushed back from some areas, such as Marja, ISAF '[...] repeatedly squandered the chance to build a durable political settlement [...]' in Sangin, according to AAN.¹¹⁶⁵ After the international troops largely withdrew in

¹¹⁵⁶ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁷ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹¹⁵⁸ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹¹⁶⁰ N-TV, Taliban auf dem Vormarsch: In Helmand geht es um Afghanistans Zukunft [Taliban on the rise: Afghanistan's future at the stake in Helmand], 23 December 2015, [url](#); Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taliban's strategic goals, 26 December 2015, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁶¹ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁶² Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁶³ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁴ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁵ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

2014, the Taliban overran several 'chiefdoms' in Helmand, which had been under control of ANP, ALP and pro-government militia commanders.¹¹⁶⁶

According to AAN, the government forces' lack of success can be partially traced to their lack of strength, as up to 40 % of officially enrolled troops have been alleged to be 'ghost soldiers' – i.e. soldiers existing only on paper. Furthermore, AAN mentions a lack of communication between the different branches of the security forces, as well as a new combat strategy by the Taliban as further reasons for the government forces' weak performance. In 2015 and early 2016, the Taliban were able to expand their control in various districts, according to AAN.¹¹⁶⁷

In 2017, US Marines returned to Helmand, reportedly in order to advise Afghan government forces from inside military bases and in order to increase airstrikes without conducting ground operations on their own.¹¹⁶⁸ Another report indicated that the Marines have been in combat in Helmand, even though fighting was mainly done by Afghan troops, while the US forces stayed behind.¹¹⁶⁹ According to the US newspaper LA Times, the outspoken aim of the Marine's deployment in Helmand has been to secure the provincial capital Lashkargah from falling to the Taliban.¹¹⁷⁰

Throughout 2017, the US-backed government forces launched several operations, pushing the Taliban away from major towns and highways, reportedly eliminating the threat to Lashkargah.¹¹⁷¹ However, in February 2018, the Taliban allegedly still controlled approximately half of the province.¹¹⁷² Aided by airstrikes, government forces reportedly took back Nawa district as their biggest success in Helmand in 2017.¹¹⁷³ According to the LA Times, the Afghan security forces remain dependent on US support in order to stay on the offensive.¹¹⁷⁴

Besides the Taliban, Al Qaeda is allegedly present in Helmand. According to LWJ, Al Qaeda closely collaborates with the Taliban – even though the Pentagon reportedly stated that the two groups do not maintain strategic relationships.¹¹⁷⁵ In August 2018, Afghan security forces reportedly killed seven Al Qaeda members in Helmand.¹¹⁷⁶

According to the news magazine The Diplomat, as of September 2018, there has been no known presence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Helmand.¹¹⁷⁷

On the government side, along with Afghan security forces such as the ANP, ALP, ANA, pro-government 'uprising groups' as well as the US forces, a special division called the Sangorian is reportedly active in Helmand.¹¹⁷⁸ The Sangorian was established in January 2016 by the operational commander of the

¹¹⁶⁶ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁷ Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁸ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁹ AP News, Marines see Afghan forces improve in Helmand battles, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁰ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁷¹ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁷² AP News, Marines see Afghan forces improve in Helmand battles, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷³ Military Times, Helmand again the focus of US strategy in Afghanistan, 11 December 2017, [url](#); AP News, Marines see Afghan forces improve in Helmand battles, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁴ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁵ LWJ, Afghan forces target al Qaeda commanders in Helmand and Nangarhar, 7 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁶ LWJ, Afghan forces target al Qaeda commanders in Helmand and Nangarhar, 7 August 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Top Al-Qaeda Loyalist Killed in Helmand, 7 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁷ Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁸ Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Secret Afghan Force Mimics, Infiltrates Taliban, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

Afghan forces in Helmand as a covert anti-Taliban militia with the aim of infiltrating and weakening the Taliban from within. Its fighters are locals, Taliban dissidents and former Taliban insurgents.¹¹⁷⁹

Helmand is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps.¹¹⁸⁰

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Helmand province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹¹⁸¹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

HELMAND	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹¹⁸² April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Baghran	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Deh-e-Shu	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Garmser	Taliban control (East)/Open Taliban presence – Medium (West)	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Kajaki	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 99%; Gov control: 1%
Lashkargah (capital)	Open Taliban Presence - medium/low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Musaqala	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Nad-e-Ali (Marja)	Open Taliban Presence - high	Nad-e-Ali: contested; Marja: INS activity	Nad-e-Ali: GIRoA Influence and Marja: INS activity	Contested	Nad-e-Ali: Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50% and Marja: TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereshk)	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%

¹¹⁷⁹ Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁰ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁸¹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁸² LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Nawa-e-Barakzaiy (Nawa)	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 55 %; TB control: 45 %
Nawzad	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Reg (Khaneshin)	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Sangin	Taliban control	INS activity	INS activity	Taliban control	TB control (except for Gov presence: 2 %)
Washer	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Baghni	/	/	/	/	TB control

2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.12.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 880 civilian casualties (281 deaths and 599 injured) in Helmand. This represents a decrease of 11 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and suicide or complex attacks.¹¹⁸³

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Lashkargah, Nad-e Ali, Nawa-e-Barakzaiy, Sangin and Nahr-e Saraj in the highest category and the district of Garmser in the second highest category. Kajaki districts are in the third highest category and the districts of Musa Qala, Nawzad, and Washer in the category below. The remaining districts are placed in the lowest categories.¹¹⁸⁴

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 313 incidents related to insurgents in Helmand province.¹¹⁸⁵

Throughout 2018 and early 2019, US and Afghan forces continued operations in the province,¹¹⁸⁶ including airstrikes reportedly inflicting considerable damage among civilians.¹¹⁸⁷ The UN Secretary-General reported in the end of February 2019 that approximately one third of all airstrikes in Afghanistan were carried out in the province of Helmand in the period of November 2018 to February 2019. This is the largest share of airstrikes carried out in a single province.¹¹⁸⁸

¹¹⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹¹⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁸⁵ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹¹⁸⁶ RFE/RL, Ten Suspected Insurgents Killed In Afghanistan's Helmand, 10 March 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Army: Dozens Of Militants Killed In Operations, 21 April 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, 'At Least 30 Afghan Civilians' Killed In Air Strike, 28 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 70 militants killed, scores injured in nation-wide operations: MoD, 4 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Air Strike In Afghanistan Kills 16 From Same Family, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁷ RFE/RL, 'At Least 30 Afghan Civilians' Killed In Air Strike, 28 November 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Air Strike In Afghanistan Kills 16 From Same Family, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁸ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url](#)

In December 2018, the Taliban shadow governor of Helmand allegedly died in a US airstrike.¹¹⁸⁹ Newspapers reported on several occasions about the liberation of captives of the Taliban by government forces.¹¹⁹⁰ The Taliban, on the other hand, repeatedly attacked security checkpoints or security forces.¹¹⁹¹ Several suicide attacks took place in Helmand in 2018, some of them attributed to the Taliban, while those responsible for others remained unclear.¹¹⁹² UNAMA counted five Taliban suicide attacks causing 121 civilian casualties (28 deaths, 93 injuries) in 2018.¹¹⁹³

Besides suicide attacks, insurgents might have targeted civilians in Helmand by group poisoning in 2018, as more than 50 schoolgirls were hospitalised in Lashkargah in April 2018 after showing symptoms of poisoning.¹¹⁹⁴ Preceding the 2018 parliamentary election, a bomb attack reportedly killed eight people at an election rally in Lashkargah. According to RFE/RL, no one claimed responsibility for the attack.¹¹⁹⁵

A car bomb blast killing 16 persons near a sports stadium in Lashkargah in March 2018 sparked peace protests, including the formation of a peace camp and eventually a peace march from Helmand to Kabul, which led to widespread media coverage and support of residents from other provinces.¹¹⁹⁶ Notably, according to RFE/RL, women also participated in the sit-ins, which is unusual in the conservative Pashtun-dominated region.¹¹⁹⁷

2.12.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 8 269 persons displaced from Helmand province. They were mainly displaced within the province itself (6 615) and Kandahar (1 551).¹¹⁹⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 259 persons displaced from Helmand province, mainly within the province itself.¹¹⁹⁹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 6 615 persons displaced to Helmand province. They were all originating from the province itself.¹²⁰⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 237 persons displaced to Lashkargah district in Helmand province, they were all originating from Nad-e-Ali/Marja district in the province itself.¹²⁰¹

¹¹⁸⁹ LWJ, Taliban shadow governor for Helmand killed in US airstrike, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁰ RFE/RL, 'Dozens Of People Freed' From Taliban Custody In Afghanistan, 31 May 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Special Forces Free 61 From Taliban Captivity, 3 August 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Free Hostages As Taliban Kidnap Government Employees, 5 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁹¹ RFE/RL, Sixteen Afghan Pro-Government Fighters Killed In Taliban Attack, 12 February 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least Two Afghan Soldiers Killed In Taliban Attack, 27 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Nad Ali district administrative chief survives Taliban attack, 13 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Soldiers Reported Killed In Militant Attack, 14 July 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹² Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Deadly car bombing near Helmand stadium, 23 March 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Suicide Car Bomber Kills 13 At Afghan Wrestling Match, 23 March 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Suicide Bomber Kills Six In Afghanistan, 28 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians on Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹⁹⁴ RFE/RL, More Than 50 Afghan Schoolgirls Hospitalized For Suspected Poisoning, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁵ RFE/RL, At Least Eight Killed In Afghan Election Rally Blast, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁶ RFE/RL, 'Stop This War': Afghan Women Challenge Taliban, Rally For Peace, 29 March 2018, [url](#); Sabawoon, A.M., Going Nationwide: The Helmand peace march initiative, AAN, 23 April 2018, [url](#); Sabawoon, A.M., and Ruttig, T., "The Eid ceasefire helped our efforts well": Helmand peace marchers keep up the pressure, AAN, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁷ RFE/RL, 'Stop This War': Afghan Women Challenge Taliban, Rally For Peace, 29 March 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Baghran	/	/	22	/
Deh-e-Shu	14	/	/	/
Garmser	80	/	/	/
Kajaki	682	/	/	/
Lashkargah	329	2 624	/	237
Musaqalah	44	/	/	/
Nad-e-Ali/Marja	3 816	1 737	237	/
Nahr-e-Saraj	2 481	2 422	/	/
Nawa-e-Barakzaiy	280	/	/	/
Nawzad	21	/	/	/
Sangin	522	/	/	/

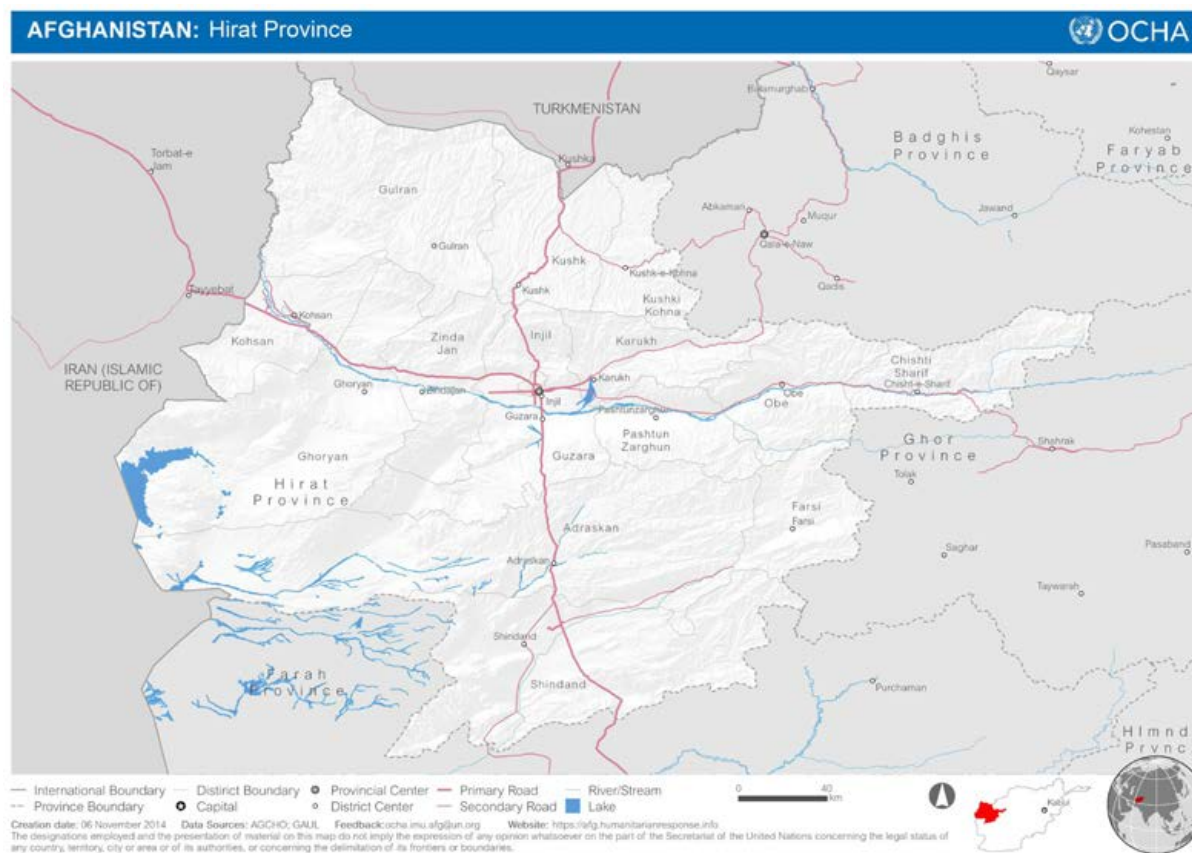
According to UNOCHA, about 1 400 individuals were displaced from Khanshin to Lashkargah due to drought and lack of water as of December 2018. About 600 IDPs came to Lashkargah from Ghazni and Farah provinces due to insecurity.¹²⁰² According to the report for the period 20 – 26 November 2018, around 229 IDP families went from Nad-e Ali district to Lashkargah because of fighting.¹²⁰³

¹²⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 26 November – 3 December 2018, 5 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 20 - 26 November 2018, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

2.13 Herat

2.13.1 General description of the province



The province of Herat is located in the west of Afghanistan, sharing an international border with Iran to the west and Turkmenistan to the north, as well as with the provinces of Badghis to the northeast, Ghor to the east, and Farah to the south.¹²⁰⁴ Herat is divided into 16 districts: Adrasan, Chisti Sharif, Farsi, Ghoryan, Gulistan, Guzara (Nizam-e Shahid), Herat, Injil, Karukh, Kohsan, Kushk (Rubat-e Sangi), Kushki Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, Shindand, Zinda Jan. Additionally, there are four ‘temporary’ districts – Poshtko, Koh-e Zore (Koh-e Zavar), Zawol, and Zer Koh –,¹²⁰⁵ which have been carved out of Shindand district for a better allocation of funds.¹²⁰⁶ The provincial capital of Herat is the city of Herat.¹²⁰⁷ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat is one of the largest provinces of Afghanistan.¹²⁰⁸

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of the province at 1 967 180 in 2018/19, with 506 896 of its residents living in the provincial capital.¹²⁰⁹ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbeks and Aimaks are the main ethnic groups in the province, with Pashtuns representing the majority in 11 border districts.¹²¹⁰ A 2015 USIP report stated that ‘historically, Herat city has been a Tajik-dominated enclave in a Pashtun-majority province that includes sizeable Hazara

¹²⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Hirat Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Hirat, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 38-39

¹²⁰⁶ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt won’t talk peace from a weak position: Ghani, 1 June 2015, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 38

¹²⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁰⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 38

¹²¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., [url](#)

and Aimaq minorities.¹²¹¹ Large-scale migration reportedly changed the ethnic composition of the city. According to AAN, the share of Shia Hazaras has been particularly increasing since 2001 due to repatriation from Iran and displacement from provinces of central Afghanistan.¹²¹² USIP noted that the '[...] degree of ethnic segregation in Herat today is pronounced.'¹²¹³

The province is connected to other major cities by the Ring Road.¹²¹⁴ A primary road leads from Herat eastwards to Ghor and Bamyan and on to Kabul.¹²¹⁵ Other highways connect the provincial capital with the Afghan-Turkmen border crossing at Torghundi, as well as with the Afghan-Iranian border crossing at Islam Qala.¹²¹⁶ According to the Afghan newspaper Salaam Times, the Taliban have been extorting money from traders and other citizens on the highway between Kabul and Herat, as well as Herat and Farah, while local officials claimed in December 2018 that the roads leading to the border ports at Torghundi and Islam Qala were secure due to an enhanced presence of the security forces in the area.¹²¹⁷ The UN Secretary-General noted in his report covering events from 10 September to 7 December 2018 that 'the Taliban also carried out frequent attacks [...] along the Herat-Qala-e-Naw road in the west, complicating Government [sic] access and limiting the movements of residents.'¹²¹⁸

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations exists in the vicinity of Herat City.¹²¹⁹

While agriculture is an important source of income for many dwellers in rural parts of Herat, '[...] urban commercial and industrial ventures dominate Herat City's economy' and the proximity of Iran is a determining factor for the city.¹²²⁰

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Herat was not one of the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹²²¹ Compared to 2017, Herat's opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 46 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating provinces in 2018 have been Kushk and Shindand.¹²²²

2.13.2 Conflict background and actors in Herat

According to Khaama Press, 'Herat has been among the relatively calm provinces in West of Afghanistan but the Taliban militants are active in some of its remote districts and often attempt to carry out terrorist related activities.'¹²²³

AAN described the district and provincial administration in Herat in January 2017 as 'generally dysfunct', with political power '[...] scattered among many actors [...]'.¹²²⁴ According to a report of January 2017, the security situation has been deteriorating, as violent clashes between government forces and insurgents – reportedly mostly the Taliban – as well as between different Taliban factions increased. AAN linked the upsurge of fighting to the weak position of key district and provincial

¹²¹¹ USIP, Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, 2015, [url](#), p.8

¹²¹² Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹³ USIP, Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, 2015, [url](#), p.8

¹²¹⁴ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁵ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁶ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁷ Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban's 'customs tax' extortion, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²¹⁸ UN Secretary-General, The Situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹²¹⁹ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹²²⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Herat Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹²²¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹²²² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹²²³ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leader killed in Herat drone strike, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²²⁴ Kazemi, R.S., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017, [url](#)

officials, who have been mostly assigned as interim candidates lacking a full mandate after President Ashraf Ghani summarily dismissed their predecessors in 2014.¹²²⁵

Within the Taliban, conflicts emerged after the announcement of the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2015.¹²²⁶ Mullah Rasool, following a more conciliatory stance towards the government in Kabul, split away from the mainstream Taliban together with approximately 1 000 fighters. While the government forces in Herat reportedly do not fight against the Rasool group, which advocated peace talks and pledged to protect a large government pipeline project in the region, at least 60 clashes between the group and the mainstream Taliban reportedly took place between 2015 and 2017, leaving hundreds of Taliban fighters dead according to the US military newsportal Stars and Stripes.¹²²⁷

The district of Nizam-e Shahid near Herat City, as well as Herat City itself, reportedly witnessed an upsurge of criminality in recent years. AAN attributed this to the alleged practice of local strongmen to settle disputes by contract killings, while '[...] there are reports that locals whose fortunes have worsened in the wake of the international military drawdown are resorting to abductions and thefts as a quick way to make lots of money.'¹²²⁸ These developments have been allegedly facilitated by corruption within the police.¹²²⁹ Besides criminal acts, the Taliban are allegedly also active in the city, causing casualties among security force members as well as civilians.¹²³⁰

Between 2017 and 2018, ISKP reportedly conducted three suicide attacks in Herat City.¹²³¹

The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Herat.¹²³² Italian forces are stationed in the province of Herat as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.¹²³³

In October 2018, AAN reported that 'large swathes of territory in the province, particularly areas far from the provincial and district centres, are either contested or partially or completely controlled by the Taliban'.¹²³⁴

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Herat province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹²³⁵ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

¹²²⁵ Kazemi, R.S., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁶ Kazemi, R.S., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017, [url](#); Giustozzi, A./Mangal, S., An Interview with Mullah Rasool on Reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, 16 March 2016, [url](#); Stars and Stripes, Taliban vs. Taliban clash in Afghanistan's west leaves 40 dead, 2 November 2018, [url](#)

¹²²⁷ Stars and Stripes, Taliban vs. Taliban clash in Afghanistan's west leaves 40 dead, 2 November 2018, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ Kazemi, R.S., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017, [url](#)

¹²²⁹ Kazemi, R.S., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017, [url](#)

¹²³⁰ Khaama Press, Gunmen attack Police District Center Herat city, casualties feared, 12 January 2019, [url](#); Gulf Times, Taliban attack on Afghan police station kills five, 13 January 2019, [url](#)

¹²³¹ taz, 29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat], 3 August 2017, [url](#); Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²³² Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

¹²³³ Khaama Press, President Ghani met with Italy's defense minister Elisabetta Trenta, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²³⁴ Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²³⁵ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

HERAT	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹²³⁶ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Adraskan	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Chishti Sharif	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Farsi	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Ghoryan	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Gulran	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Guzara	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Herat (capital)	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Injil	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Karukh	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kohsan	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Kushk	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	/
Kushki Kohna	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Obe	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Pashtun Zarghun	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Shindand	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS Activity	Contested	Contested	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Zinda Jan	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Rabat-e-Sangi	/	/	/	/	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%

¹²³⁶ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.13.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 259 civilian casualties (95 deaths and 164 injured) in the province of Herat. This represents a decrease of 48 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by ground engagements and targeted killings.¹²³⁷

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Shindand (together with the 'temporary' districts formerly part of Shindand) in the highest category, and the district of Herat in the second highest category. Adraskan and Obe districts are in the category below and Guzara, Pashtun Zarghun, Kushk, Kushk-e-Kuhna and Chist-e Sharif districts are in the fourth category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.¹²³⁸

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 175 incidents related to insurgents in Herat province.¹²³⁹

Shindand is allegedly the most volatile district of Herat, witnessing violent clashes between rival Taliban factions, as well as between the mainstream Taliban and pro-government forces.¹²⁴⁰ Government forces conducted operations in Shindand in December 2018¹²⁴¹ and January 2019.¹²⁴² In December 2018 AAN noted that the continued infighting in Shindand had the 'surprising' effect of the 2018 parliamentary elections actually taking place in the districts under 'influence or control' of the Rasool Taliban faction.¹²⁴³ The same source however also noted that 'the insecure district of Shindand, which borders Farah province and has been divided into five smaller districts, also witnessed a patchy, insecure and, in some places, non-existent election'.¹²⁴⁴

According to Tolonews, besides Shindand, Obe is the other insecure district in Herat.¹²⁴⁵ AAN stated in December 2018 that 'at present, the exercise of control over Obe district is not static. It changes daily.' AAN described the situation in the district as a 'mutually-hurting stalemate.' Reportedly, with the exception of healthcare, the Taliban interfere directly with public services provided in the district.¹²⁴⁶ In October 2018, Khaama Press reported the death of the Taliban deputy shadow governor of Herat in the district of Obe, allegedly, due to wounds inflicted during government operations a few days earlier.¹²⁴⁷

¹²³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹²³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹²³⁹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹²⁴⁰ VoA, 11 Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attack on Herat Province, 13 April 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Clash among Afghan forces and Taliban leaves 15 dead, wounded in Herat, 28 April 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghan soldiers killed in 'coordinated Taliban attack' in Herat, 7 December 2018, [url](#); Ariana News, Infighting Leaves 45 Taliban Militants Killed or Wounded in Herat, 30 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat intelligence officer killed in Taliban ambush, 30 November 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴¹ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leaders killed in U.S. drone strikes in West of Afghanistan, 27 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴² Khaama Press, Afghan and Coalition Forces kill 6 militants in separate operations, airstrike, 26 January 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁴³ Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁴ Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁵ Tolonews, Concerns Rise Over Possible Taliban Attacks On Herat Districts, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁶ Kazemi, R.S., One Land, Two Rules (2): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Obeh district of Herat province, AAN, 9 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban's deputy shadow governor dies of critical wounds in Herat, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

The mainstream Taliban faction and government forces also clashed in the districts of Zawal¹²⁴⁸ and Guzra.¹²⁴⁹ According to Khaama Press, in December 2018 Taliban leaders were killed in two separate drone strikes in the districts of Farsi and Zawal.¹²⁵⁰

In March 2018, IS reportedly conducted an attack, killing at least one person and wounding seven others, in front of a Shia mosque in the city.¹²⁵¹ In April 2018, at least six civilians, including four children, were killed by a bomb attack near a mosque and a bazaar.¹²⁵² In June 2018, a publicly known local Shia cleric was killed in Herat City, in September 2018, police and mosque guards reportedly prevented a suicide attack on a Shia mosque in the district of Injil.¹²⁵³ AAN claimed that attacks on Shia religious figures and sites have increased in Herat since 2016, citing demographic changes, radicalisation among some religious figures, strategic considerations by the Nangarhar-based ISKP, and the proximity to Iran as possible reasons for the increase in attacks. AAN, however, has pointed out that widespread sectarian conflict between Herat's Shia and Sunni population was unlikely 'at least in the foreseeable future' due to the prevailing 'Shia-Sunni solidarity' among Heratis.¹²⁵⁴

In February 2018, the newsportal Arab News reported that all of Herat's districts have been cleared of landmines in a 10-year-long effort, except for Shindand and Gulran. The volatile security situation has so far prevented the clearance of these two remaining districts.¹²⁵⁵ Yet, in December 2018 RFE/RL reported that three civilians were killed after their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in Guzra district.¹²⁵⁶

Further, 12 civilians were killed in January 2018 when a roadside bomb hit a vehicle in Gulran district.¹²⁵⁷ A bomb blast in the Tang-i-Til locality of Shindand district killed least six people and wounded seven others in April 2018.¹²⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News reported at least four road construction workers being killed by unidentified armed men in Shindand district in May 2018.¹²⁵⁹

2.13.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 609 persons displaced from Herat province, most of which (570) were displaced within the province.¹²⁶⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 60 persons displaced from Herat province.¹²⁶¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 5 482 persons displaced to Herat province: most of whom (2 755) were from Ghor province; other IDPs were from Badghis, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kunar and Paktya provinces.¹²⁶²

¹²⁴⁸ Khaama Press, 17 Afghan army soldiers martyred in Herat attack: officials, 9 June 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁹ The New Arab, 'Taliban roadside bomb; in Afghanistan's Herat province kills civilians, 8 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁰ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leader killed in Herat drone strike, 17 December 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Top Taliban leader killed in Herat drone strike, 25 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵¹ Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵² RFE/RL, Bomb Attack Kills At Least Six In Western Afghanistan, 9 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵³ Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁴ Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁵ Arab News, Thousands of lives saved as Herat cleared of landmines, 18 February 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁶ RFE/RL, Three Civilians Killed In Afghan Roadside Bombing, 8 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 civilians dead in Herat landmine explosion, 21 January 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 killed, 7 wounded in Shindand rickshaw blast, 9 April 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 road construction workers killed in Herat, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 558 persons displaced to Herat province most of whom (1 270) were displaced from Badghis province.¹²⁶³

District	Displaced from (2018) ¹²⁶⁴	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Karukh	/	/	/	1 020
Kushk	75	/	/	/
Obe	6	/	/	/
Shindand	521	/	/	60
Guzara	/	10	/	/
Herat	/	5 125	/	538
Injil	/	347	/	/

In 2018, Herat province hosted the ‘the highest number of IDPs and returnees nationwide – more than 200 000’.¹²⁶⁵ In August 2018, 12 000 displaced families were displaced in Herat city, mainly in the west of the provincial capital.¹²⁶⁶ In November 2018, 147 600 people out of 223 100 people displaced by drought in Western Afghanistan were displaced in Herat province.¹²⁶⁷

¹²⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁴ The district of origin of 7 persons displaced is not mentioned in UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

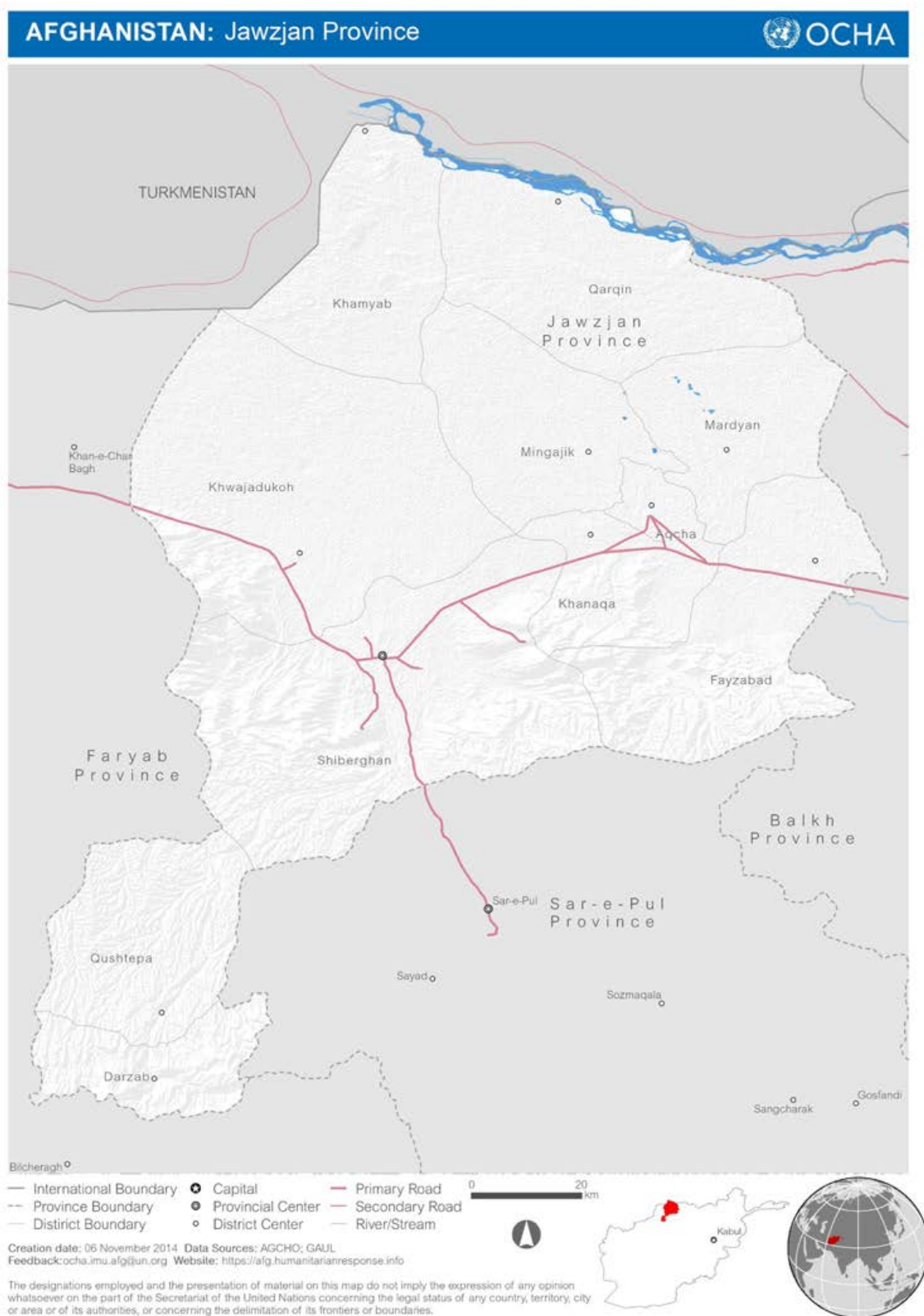
¹²⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 12

¹²⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) - Western Region Afghanistan - Meeting Summary, 14 August 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 October – 4 November 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

2.14 Jawzjan

2.14.1 General description of the province



Jawzjan is situated in the north of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan to the north, Balkh to the east, Sar-e Pul to the south, and Faryab to the west.¹²⁶⁸ The province is divided into the following districts: Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khamyab, Khanaqa, Khwajadukoh, Mardyan, Mingajik, Qarqin, and Qushtepa, as well as the provincial capital Shiberghan.¹²⁶⁹ According to AAN, Darzab has been transferred from Faryab to Jawzjan because of security reasons. Later, the district of Qushtepa was carved out of Darzab.¹²⁷⁰

The Afghan CSO estimates the population of Jawzjan to be 579 833 in 2018/19.¹²⁷¹ According to a provincial profile of 2008, the two largest ethnic groups in the province are Uzbek and Turkmen, with smaller groups of Pashtuns and so-called Arabs – i.e. descendants of migrants who left the Arabian peninsula in the 14th century –, as well as some Tajiks and Kuchi nomads, whose numbers vary depending on the season.¹²⁷²

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Jawzjan with the major population centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh, as well as Faryab to the west. Another main road connects neighbouring Sar-e Pul to the Ring Road in Shiberghan.¹²⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News reported a growing number of security incidents on the highway between Sheberghan and Mazar-e Sharif in November 2018. Travellers reportedly have been caught in crossfire as security forces and Taliban insurgents clashed on the highway in the districts of Aqcha in Jawzjan and Chahar Boluk in Balkh.¹²⁷⁴ Furthermore, armed robberies reportedly took place on the highway in the above mentioned districts, as well as in Mingajik.¹²⁷⁵ According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, Shiberghan airport does not have scheduled passenger services as of March 2019.¹²⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News termed Jawzjan '[...] one of the strategic provinces of the country', with '[...] immense natural gas reserves [...]'.¹²⁷⁷

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Jawzjan lost its poppy-free status in 2016. While opium-poppy cultivation reached a peak in 2017 – with a nearly eightfold increase compared to 2016 –, the size of the opium-poppy cultivating area in Jawzjan decreased by 90 % in 2018 compared to 2017.¹²⁷⁸ UNODC links the decrease in acreage to 2018's severe draught in northern Afghanistan.¹²⁷⁹ Jawzjan was not among the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹²⁸⁰

2.14.2 Conflict background and actors in Jawzjan

Despite being home to the former powerful Uzbek militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum and the presence of his 'former militia fighters', insurgent activity reportedly increased in Jawzjan after NATO-led forces handed over control to Afghan security forces in 2012.¹²⁸¹ A 2017 study on Islamic State (IS) presence in Afghanistan found that 'there are enormous numbers of armed forces in [...] Jawzjan [...], among which the irregular (arbakee, private paramilitary units of commanders) and anti-government

¹²⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁹ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Jawzjan, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 34

¹²⁷⁰ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁷¹ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹²⁷² Larsson, K., A Provincial Survey of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Saripul, November 2008, [url](#)

¹²⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commuters say insecurity worsens on Balkh-Jawzjan road, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Commuters say insecurity worsens on Balkh-Jawzjan road, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁶ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹²⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan background profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁷⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹²⁷⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 26

¹²⁸⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹²⁸¹ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

forces (mostly various local Taliban groups) clearly outnumber the ANSF (ANA, ANP and ALP) and National Uprising units.’¹²⁸²

AAN reported in 2017 that the Taliban became increasingly successful in Jawzjan, setting up administrative and military institutions, after opening their ranks to non-Pashtun fighters. The recruitment of Uzbeks allegedly proved particularly successful in the province.¹²⁸³ Subsequently, the Taliban were able to expand their control in Jawzjan as well as in other provinces of northern Afghanistan.¹²⁸⁴ Within Jawzjan, they have been reportedly pushing into the province's northern and eastern parts, as well as the strategic areas around the provincial centre.¹²⁸⁵

AAN reported that conflict emerged between local Taliban commanders and the Taliban leadership in 2014 after the latter tried to enhance the accountability of the commanders in operations. According to AAN, the appearance of IMU in Qushtepa subsequently favoured the formation of an ‘Islamic State (IS)’ faction in the district.¹²⁸⁶

IMU, which had infiltrated Jawzjan in early 2015 from neighbouring Faryab Province according to RFE/RL,¹²⁸⁷ has been a former ally of the Taliban, but shifted allegiance towards IS after the disclosure of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death in 2015.¹²⁸⁸ The presence of IMU in Jawzjan reportedly provided Qari Hekmat and his followers with an opportunity to pledge allegiance to IS. Subsequently, Hekmat succeeded in shaping his former Taliban unit into an independent IS-associated group.¹²⁸⁹ AAN stated that it had found no reliable evidence of a connection between Hekmat's IS group and Nangarhar's Islamic State Khorasan Province, which is allegedly recognised by the ‘Daesh central’ in Syria and Iraq (i.e. the main franchise) as an IS branch.¹²⁹⁰ A study on IS presence in Afghanistan published in 2017 supports this finding.¹²⁹¹

According to AAN, Hekmat's shift to ‘IS’ was rather driven by ‘[...] power-saving opportunism [...]’ than by ideological motives.¹²⁹² The self-proclaimed IS group managed to hold control over the districts of Qushtepa and Darzab for three years, fighting the Taliban¹²⁹³ – though not expanding its territory due to the widespread Taliban presence in the province¹²⁹⁴ –, and initially outlasting the death of its founder by a US drone strike in April 2018.¹²⁹⁵ In August 2018, the Taliban overran the group's strongholds, prompting a faction of Hekmat's former unit to surrender to the government forces in fear of retaliation by the Taliban, while others (reportedly mainly Central Asian fighters) surrendered to the Taliban. According to AAN, the Taliban took over Qushtepa and Darzab after the group's defeat.¹²⁹⁶

¹²⁸² Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 28-29

¹²⁸³ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁵ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁶ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁷ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁸⁸ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#); AAN, Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁹ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁰ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹¹ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 28-29

¹²⁹² Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹³ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, AAN, 11 November 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat's IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Afghanistan 120 Tote bei Kämpfen zwischen Taliban und IS [Afghanistan: 120 Dead in Clashes Between Taliban and IS], 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁴ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁵ Ali, O., Still under the IS's Black Flag: Qari Hekmat's ISKP island in Jawzjan after his death by drone, AAN, 15 May 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

Regarding the government forces, the province of Jawzjan is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.¹²⁹⁷

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Jawzjan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹²⁹⁸ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

JAWZJAN	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹²⁹⁹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Aqcha	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	Contested	Contested	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Darzab	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS Activity	INS Activity	Taliban control	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Fayzabad	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 93%; Gov control: 7%
Khamyab	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	INS Activity	Taliban control	TB control
Khanaqa	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Khwajadukoh	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Mardyan	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Mingajik	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 93%; Gov control: 7%
Qarqin	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Qushtepa	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Shiberghan (capital)	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%

¹²⁹⁷ Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁹⁸ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.14.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 183 civilian casualties (61 deaths and 122 injured) in Jawzjan. This represents an increase of 55 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.¹³⁰⁰

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Darzab in the highest category and the district of Qushtepa in the second highest category. Aqchah, Fayzabad, Khanaqa, and Sheberghan districts are in the category below and Mardyan in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are placed in the two lowest categories.¹³⁰¹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 111 incidents related to insurgents in Jawzjan province.¹³⁰²

Fighting between government forces and insurgents caused casualties among fighters throughout 2018 and early 2019, e.g. in the districts of Aqcha,¹³⁰³ Darzab,¹³⁰⁴ Fayzabad,¹³⁰⁵ Khamab,¹³⁰⁶ Qushtepa,¹³⁰⁷ and Sheberghan.¹³⁰⁸ According to UNAMA, 'foreshadowing trends seen throughout the year, 2018 began with a spike in civilian harm caused by a series of airstrikes by international military forces in early January in Nangarhar and Jawzjan provinces [...].'¹³⁰⁹ The government forces conducted several ground operations and airstrikes in the province in 2018.¹³¹⁰

Due to security reasons, the 2018 parliamentary elections did not take place in the districts of Darzab, Khamyab and Mardyan.¹³¹¹ In another district, two children were injured in a rocket attack on a polling station.¹³¹²

In June 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported about an increase in the number of rapes and sexual violence against women, as well as killings of male relatives by self-proclaimed IS fighters in the district

¹³⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹³⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁰² Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹³⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Taliban killed in clash with Jawzjan uprising force, 2 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Policeman among 3 killed in Jawzjan clash, 8 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan clash leaves 37 dead and wounded, 13 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 Daesh, 3 Taliban killed in Jawzjan, Farah incidents, 27 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Daesh killed, 6 police wounded in Jawzjan clash, 1 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 Daesh, 3 local police killed in Jawzjan firefight, 20 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 15 rebels killed in Jawzjan clash, 8 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban militants recapture 7 Jawzjan villages, 13 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Taliban killed in clash with Jawzjan uprising force, 2 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 pro-government fighters killed in Jawzjan attack, 10 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁶ Khaama Press, Taliban militants overrun Khamab district in Jawzjan province, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 38 Taliban killed in Jawzjan, Faryab clashes, 8 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Uprising group commander among 7 soldiers killed in Jawzjan, 15 December 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 8

¹³¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 civilians, 26 Daesh militants killed in Jawzjan airstrikes, 2 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Air Strikes on Daesh, Jawzjan, 7 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 60 rebels killed in military offensives countrywide, 9 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 Daesh insurgents killed in Jawzjan airstrike, 4 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 Daesh rebels killed and wounded in Jawzjan offensive, 17 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 71 militants killed in round-the-clock operations: MoD, 23 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 rebels killed, 20 injured in fresh operations: MoD, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Frenchman among 8 rebels killed in Jawzjan, 11 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, No elections in 3 high security risk districts of Jawzjan, 17 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, 46 killed, 240 injured in nationwide poll violence, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

of Darzab.¹³¹³ In the same district, the self-proclaimed IS fighters reportedly beheaded a twelve-year old boy on charges of supplying food to the police,¹³¹⁴ as well as an adult accused of spying for the government forces.¹³¹⁵ The Taliban allegedly punished two women for having phone contact with men in October 2018 in Darzab.¹³¹⁶ UNAMA reported that Anti-Government Elements hindered health care personnel in Jawzjan from conducting vaccination campaigns (including for Polio) on two occasions in 2018.¹³¹⁷

2.14.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 261 persons who were displaced from Jawzjan province within the province itself and also to the district of Nahr-e-Shah in Balkh province. According to the same data, IDPs from outside of Jawzjan province, mainly came from Faryab province.¹³¹⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 329 persons displaced from Qushtepa district to Shiberghan district in Jawzjan province.¹³¹⁹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 7 981 persons displaced to Jawzjan province, including 1 638 from the province itself and 6 077 from Faryab.¹³²⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 868 persons displaced to Shiberghan district, mostly from Qushtepa district within the province, and from Faryab.¹³²¹

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Darzab	630	/	/	/
Fayzabad	84	/	/	/
Mardyan	539	/	/	/
Qushtepa	1 008	/	329	/
Shiberghan	/	7 981	/	868

According to UNOCHA data in 2018, IDPs came to Shiberghan mainly from Faryab province and Jawzjan province itself due to conflicts.¹³²²

According to UNHCR, Jawzjan province is one of the five provinces with the lowest rates of IDP enrolment for male children (37 %) and female children (30 %).¹³²³

¹³¹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Daesh atrocities growing in Jawzjan's Darzab district', 20 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan: Daesh militants behead 12-year-old child, 17 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh behead alleged govt spy in Jawzjan, 21 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban whip 2 women over phone contact with men, 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹³¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

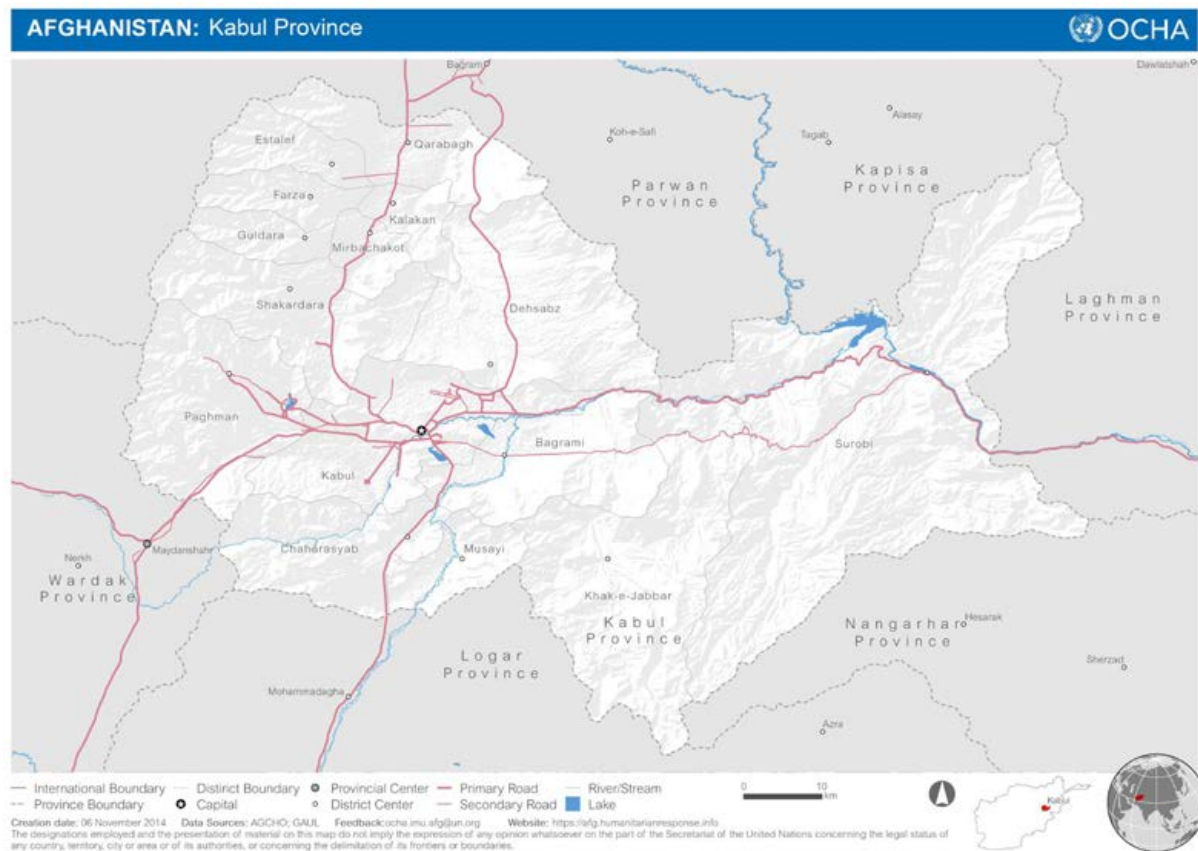
¹³²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³²³ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 17

2.15 Kabul Province

2.15.1 General description of the province



Kabul province is located in central Afghanistan.¹³²⁴ It borders Parwan and Kapisa to the north, Laghman to the east, Nangarhar to the south-east, Logar to the south, and Wardak to the west.¹³²⁵ Kabul city being the provincial capital,¹³²⁶ the province is divided into the following districts: Bagrami, Chahrasyab, Dehsabz, Estalef, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khak-e-Jabbar, Mirbachakot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara and Surobi.¹³²⁷ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Kabul province is estimated at 4 860 880 for 2018/19,¹³²⁸ comprising Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baloch, Sikhs and Hindus.¹³²⁹ The majority of the population of Kabul province are Sunni Muslims, but there are also Shias, Sikhs and Hindus.¹³³⁰

Major roads depart from Kabul city and connect the Afghan capital with the rest of the country. The main highway to Mazar-e Sharif passes through the districts of Shakardara, Mirbachakot, Kalakan and Qarabagh. Another primary road connects Kabul city with Bagram in Parwan province and passes through Dehsabz and Qarabagh district. The Kabul-Jalalabad highway leads to Nangarhar through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e-Jabbar and Surobi. The Kabul-Kandahar highway connects Kabul to Wardak

¹³²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul province background profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹³²⁵ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹³²⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹³²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹³²⁸ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul province background profile, n.d., [url](#); Naval Postgraduate School, Kabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹³³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul province background profile, n.d., [url](#); Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#)

province through Paghman district in the south-west of the province. Another primary road passes through Bagrami and Chahrasayab in the south and connects Kabul city with Logar province.¹³³¹ Kabul city hosts an airport which was served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.¹³³²

As reported by Landinfo in September 2018 [informal translation], many of the incidents outside of the capital took place along the main highways, with insurgents usually attacking Afghan security forces' outposts and civilians often being caught in the cross-fire. Furthermore, IEDs were often used on the road network in Kabul province. The Afghan security authorities have been investing many resources in trying to secure the metropolitan area and the capital. Road network control is important, among other things, to prevent insurgents from transporting explosives into Kabul city and thus being able to carry out suicide or complex attacks.¹³³³ For instance, the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, which in 2015 was considered one of the 'world's most dangerous roads' and 'one of the most important trade routes in Afghanistan', passes through areas where Taliban were active, like Surobi district.¹³³⁴ The highly secured Green Village compound lies along this highway.¹³³⁵ The road was closed for hours after a terrorist attack on the compound in January 2019.¹³³⁶

Moreover, Landinfo [informal translation] reported on security incidents taking place along the road network in Paghman district and occasional incidents along the highways through Qarabagh, Dehsabz districts.¹³³⁷

According to the 2018 UNODC survey Kabul province saw an increase in cultivation area by 11 % compared to 2017. Poppy-cultivation was limited to the Uzbin valley of Surobi district, where security was 'extremely poor'.¹³³⁸

2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul province

As reported by AAN in July 2015, the government's control over Uzbin valley in Surobi district had decreased in the recent past and members of Hezb-e Islami, which has historically been the stronger group in the area, as well as the Taliban, were present in the district at that time.¹³³⁹ Surobi has a significant strategic relevance because of its proximity to Kabul city and the Salang highway.¹³⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Uzbin valley of Surobi district served as a relatively easily traversable connection to the insecure districts of Tagab in Kapisa and Badpash in Laghman.¹³⁴¹

According to UNAMA, reporting in November 2018, Surobi 'has in recent years suffered from several community conflicts. Earlier this year, for example, a mediation process [...] helped two tribes resolve a longstanding land dispute that had turned violent. According to Surobi local council head Rahmatullah, the major causes of conflict in the district are underdevelopment and poverty'.¹³⁴²

¹³³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹³³² Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹³³³ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018 [url](#), p. 4

¹³³⁴ Diplomat (The), Next Stop Jalalabad: Traveling on One of the World's Most Dangerous Roads, 13 December 2015, [url](#); Stars and Stripes, Afghans often unintended victims of Taliban attacks on Jalalabad Road, 31 January 2015, [url](#)

¹³³⁵ Der Spiegel, Autobomben-Anschlag vor Ausländerhotel, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³³⁶ Al Jazeera, Fatal blast rocks Afghan capital Kabul, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³³⁷ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018 [url](#), p. 4

¹³³⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

¹³³⁹ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁰ War on the Rocks, Remembering the French war in Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁴¹ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁴² UNAMA, Kabul elders call for participation of all Afghans in peacefully resolving community conflict, 15 November 2018, [url](#)

In its September 2018 update on the security situation in the central highlands of Afghanistan, Landinfo stated [informal translation] that it was not aware of ISKP activities outside Kabul city. In Kabul city, the group has carried out numerous attacks; however, not in the surrounding districts of Kabul province. In Kabul province, the major insurgent actor was the Taliban.¹³⁴³

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the main part of Kabul province is under the responsibility of the Train, Advise, and Assist Command - Capital (TAAC-C). Turkish forces and contingents from other nations lead the TAAC. The district Surobi falls under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps.¹³⁴⁴

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kabul province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹³⁴⁵ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

KABUL	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹³⁴⁶ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of: December 2018)
Bagrami	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Chaharasyab	Gov control	GIROA influence	GIROA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Dehsabz	Gov control	GIROA influence	GIROA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Estalef	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Farza	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Guldara	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kabul (capital)	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kalakan	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control

¹³⁴³ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018 [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁴⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹³⁴⁵ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁶ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Khak-e-Jabbar	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Mirbachakot	Gov control	GIRoA control	GIRoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Musayi	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Paghman	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Qarabagh	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Shakardara	Gov control	GIRoA control	GIRoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Surobi	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%

2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.15.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 1 866 civilian casualties (596 deaths and 1 270 injured) in Kabul province. This represents an increase of 2 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were suicide/complex attacks, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.¹³⁴⁷

According to Landinfo's September 2018 update on the security situation in the central highlands [informal translation], most of the civilian casualties in the province were recorded in Kabul city, as well as in Surobi district.¹³⁴⁸

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Kabul in the highest category and the district of Surobi in the third highest category. Paghman and Qara Bagh districts are in the fourth highest category and remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.¹³⁴⁹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 324 incidents related to insurgents in Kabul province, of which 36 were located outside of Kabul city according to the source's geotagging.¹³⁵⁰

Airstrikes were carried out by Afghan security forces in Surobi district in October 2018, killing and wounding Taliban insurgents.¹³⁵¹ Moreover, military ground operations were carried out in the same

¹³⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹³⁴⁸ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁵⁰ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹³⁵¹ Tolonews, 42 Taliban Insurgents Killed In ANSF Operations, 23 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants critically wounded in an airstrike in Kabul, 23 October 2018, [url](#)

district in July 2018.¹³⁵² The National Directorate of Security (NDS) purportedly arrested members of the Haqqani Network in Bagrami and Paghman districts, as well as in Kabul city in September 2018.¹³⁵³

As reported by Landinfo in September 2018 [informal translation], suicide attacks, which were the most frequent method of attack used in Kabul city, were also reported in other parts of the province.¹³⁵⁴ Taliban militants carried out attacks on Afghan security forces' outposts in Surobi district in July 2018, killing and wounding soldiers.¹³⁵⁵ Roadside bombs exploded in Paghman district in August 2018, killing security forces¹³⁵⁶ and in March 2018, killing civilians.¹³⁵⁷ Moreover, in December 2018 an explosion purportedly targeting a security forces' convoy took place in Paghman district, killing and wounding security personnel.¹³⁵⁸

2.15.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 35 persons displaced from Surobi district in Kabul province, all displaced to Pul-e-Alam district of Logar province.¹³⁵⁹

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Kabul province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹³⁶⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 9 422 persons displaced to Kabul province (mainly to Kabul district), coming from Nangarhar, Ghazni, Wardak, Kapisa, Baghlan, Logar, Kunduz, Paktya, Badghis, Samangan, Laghman, Uruzgan and Badakhshan provinces.¹³⁶¹ UNOCHA registered a peak of 476 IDPs coming from the provincial capital of Ghazni province in mid-August 2018, due to the three-day assault of the Taliban on Ghazni city¹³⁶² and a peak of 1 400 IDPs coming from Jaghuri district of Ghazni province mid-November 2018.¹³⁶³

¹³⁵² Khaama Press, Operations underway in Kabul's Surobi after last week's attack by militants, 9 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵³ Tolonews, 11 Haqqani Members Arrested In Kabul, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁴ Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁵⁵ Khaama Press, Afghan army helicopter crashes in Kabul, leaving one wounded, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁶ Khaama Press, Army soldiers suffer casualties in an explosion in Kabul, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁷ Siasat Daily (The), 2 killed in roadside blast in Afghanistan, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ Khaama Press, 6 killed, 6 wounded in Kabul explosion, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2018, 8 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 February, 12 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 11 March 2018, 11 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 March - 1 April, 9 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 - 29 April 2018, 30 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April - 6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 - 21 May 2018, 22 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) - Central Region Afghanistan, 28 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 28 May - 3 June 2018, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 18 - 24 June 2018, 25 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 9 - 15 July 2018, 16 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July - 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 13 - 19 August 2018, 20 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 6 - 12 August 2018, 14 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 3 - 9 September, 10 September, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 10 - 16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 30 September, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 October 2018, 14 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹³⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict, Update No. 2, 15 August 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes, Flash Update No. 1, 14 November 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 15 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes Flash Update No. 2, 17

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 176 persons displaced to Kabul province, all to Kabul district. These IDPs are mainly coming from Tagab and Nejrab districts in Kapisa province (889 IDPs) and from neighbouring Logar, Ghazni and Baghlan provinces.¹³⁶⁴

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Surobi	35	/	/	/
Kabul	/	9 254	/	1 176
Bagrami	/	98	/	/
Dehsabz	/	70	/	/

UNOCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan of December 2018 classified Kabul as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.¹³⁶⁵ IOM ranked Kabul district third out of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs from January to June 2018¹³⁶⁶ and seventh out of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.¹³⁶⁷

According to UNHCR, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces are the main areas of return since 2002 and into 2018.¹³⁶⁸ Kabul province remains a particularly attractive return destination and is described by UNHCR as one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who did not originate there.¹³⁶⁹

November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 18 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Tolonews, Taliban Attack Jaghori Following ANSF Operation, 20 November 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Poor Living Conditions Plague Ghanzi, Uruzgan IDP's, 30 November 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2019 Update to the 2018-2010 Humanitarian Response Plan, 21 December 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹³⁶⁶ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

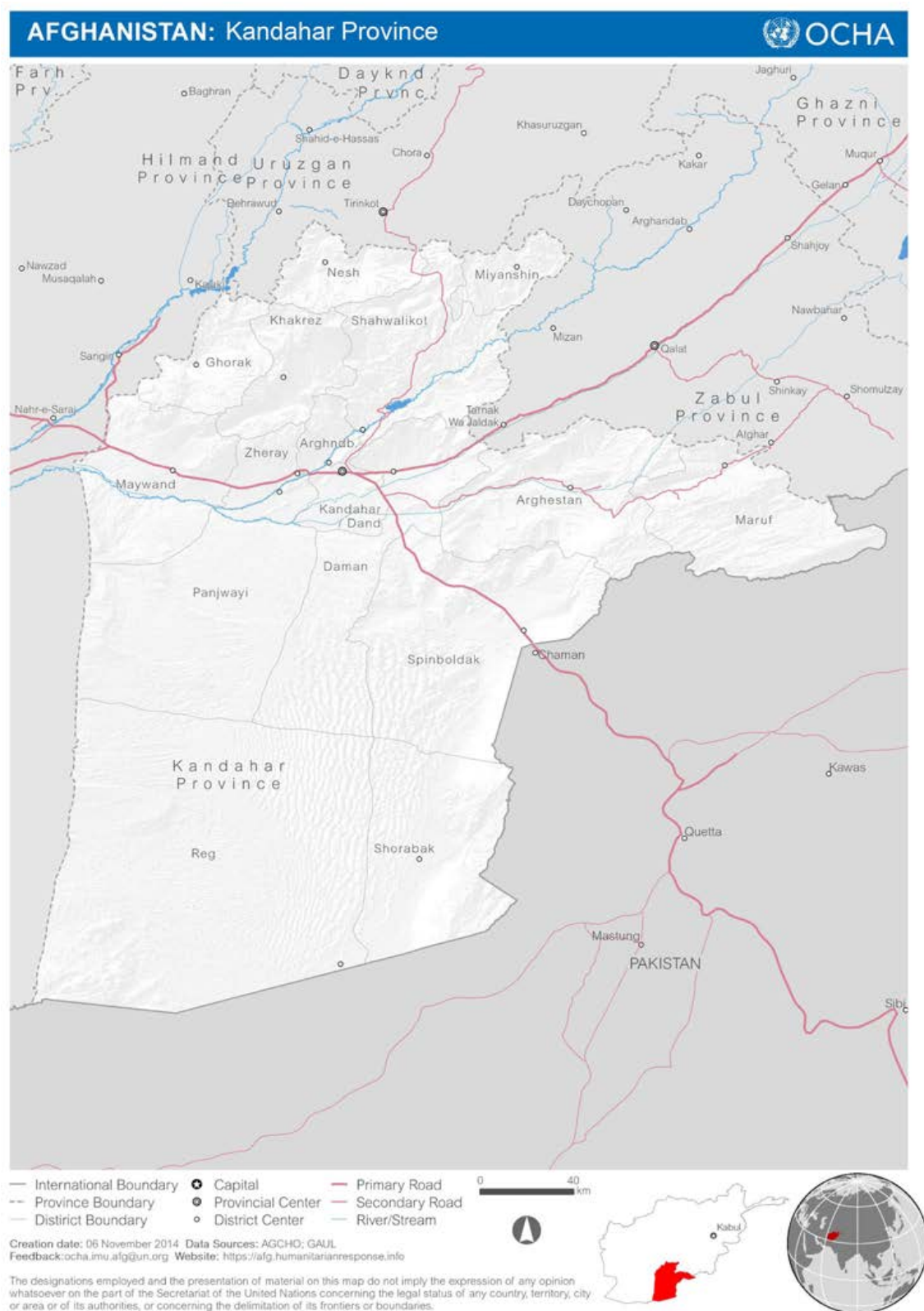
¹³⁶⁷ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹³⁶⁸ UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, April 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, May 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update, October 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁶⁹ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.16 Kandahar

2.16.1 General description of the province



The province of Kandahar is situated in the south of Afghanistan, bordering on Uruzgan and Zabul to the north, Helmand to the west, and Pakistan to the south and east.¹³⁷⁰ Kandahar is divided into the following districts: Arghandab, Arghestan, Daman, Ghorak, the provincial capital Kandahar, Khakrez, Maruf, Maywand, Miyanishin, Nesh, Panjwayi, Reg (Shiga), Shahwalikot, Shorabak, Spinboldak, and Zheray, as well as the ‘temporary’ districts of Dand and Takhtapul.¹³⁷¹ Temporary districts are administrative units that ‘[...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.’¹³⁷²

According to Afghanistan CSO estimates, the population of Kandahar is 1 337 183 in 2018/19, with 596 423 of its residents living in the provincial capital.¹³⁷³ The majority of Kandahar's population belongs to Pashtun tribes, with smaller groups of Baloch, Hazara and Tajiks, as well as other ethnicities, which are usually referred to as *Farsiwan*, i.e. Farsi/Dari speakers.¹³⁷⁴

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Kandahar with the major population centres of Herat and Kabul. In March 2018, the Afghan news portal Tolonews described the highway as being ‘[...] in extremely bad condition due to heavy road usage, a lack of maintenance and continued attacks by insurgents.’¹³⁷⁵ A northbound road towards Uruzgan forks in Kandahar City. Heading southwards, a road connects the city of Kandahar with the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Spin Boldak-Chaman.¹³⁷⁶ In October 2018, the border crossing reportedly has been closed due to clashes between Afghan and Pakistani security forces.¹³⁷⁷ According to the airport map of the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exists in Kandahar City.¹³⁷⁸

In 2016, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, aiming at transporting gas from Turkmenistan to India, was inaugurated.¹³⁷⁹ The pipeline is projected to lead through Afghanistan alongside the Ring Road from Herat to Kandahar¹³⁸⁰ and would therefore intersect Taliban-controlled areas. The Taliban reportedly agreed to the project and vowed not to attack construction workers.¹³⁸¹ However, in May 2018, Arab News reported that five workers had been killed and one was abducted by unidentified gunmen in Kandahar.¹³⁸²

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, after neighbouring Helmand, Kandahar hosted the second largest opium-poppy cultivating area in Afghanistan in 2018. Compared to 2017, the size of Kandahar's opium-poppy acreage decreased by 16 % in 2018.¹³⁸³ The main opium-poppy cultivating areas have been reportedly the districts of Maywand, Zheray, Nesh, Spinboldak, and Panjwayi.¹³⁸⁴

¹³⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kandahar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹³⁷¹ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Kandahar, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹³⁷² Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷³ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹³⁷⁴ Naval Postgraduate School, Kandahar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁷⁵ Tolonews, Seven Die In Kandahar-Herat Highway Accident, 14 March 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Govt Asked To Reconstruct Kabul-Kandahar Highway, 1 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁶ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan, Pakistani forces clash over border fence, 14 October 2018, [url](#); National (The), Pakistan and Afghan forces clash at border crossing, 16 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁸ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan – Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹³⁷⁹ Tolonews, All You Need To Know About TAPI Project, 24 February 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁰ Tolonews, All You Need To Know About TAPI Project, 24 February 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸¹ Arab News, Five working to clear way for gas pipeline killed in Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸² Arab News, Five working to clear way for gas pipeline killed in Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹³⁸⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 30

2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar

Kandahar is reportedly the 'birthplace' of the Taliban and therefore has symbolic importance for the group.¹³⁸⁵ Additionally, its location bordering the Pakistani province of Balochistan, which '[...] serves as the group's safe haven as well as a prime recruitment center,' and the role of opium-poppy cultivation in the province, add strategic importance to Kandahar.¹³⁸⁶ While Xinhua News Agency stated that the security situation has been improving in the province¹³⁸⁷ and Reuters described the province as 'relatively secure' in May 2018,¹³⁸⁸ Khaama Press and LWJ reported an increase in Taliban attacks throughout late 2017 to early 2019.¹³⁸⁹ According to the Afghan news portal Ariana News, Kandahar '[...] witnessed a sharp increase in deadly attacks by the militants in recent months where Afghan security forces and their international allies have also doubled counter-attacks [...].'¹³⁹⁰ Kandahar has been one of the four provinces with the highest casualty rates in 2018, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.¹³⁹¹

Listing several murders of women with public profiles an article about such murders in Afghanistan published in the London Review of Books indicated that the situation of women deteriorated significantly in Kandahar after foreign donors, who had been fostering women's rights, largely left the province. Citing an NGO representative of Kandahar, she stated that '[...] the Western presence had produced a generation of educated women society [in Kandahar] had no use for.'¹³⁹²

AAN credited the years of relative stability in the province to the presence of the powerful strongman and police chief General Abdul Razeq. The US allegedly backed Razeq because of his strong stance against the Taliban.¹³⁹³ Human Rights Watch reported on several war crimes by Razeq and his followers, which the US and Afghan governments reportedly largely ignored for the sake of security in Kandahar.¹³⁹⁴ According to AAN, 'Razeq's rule drove the insurgency, but also contained it': Razeq removed the Taliban from Kandahar City and its surrounding districts, while the Taliban control over more distant areas reportedly remained 'significant but static.'¹³⁹⁵ In October 2018, Razeq was assassinated, allegedly by the Taliban.¹³⁹⁶ AAN assumed that power struggles are a likely going to be the result of Razeq's death, as Razeq's former post as provincial police chief is a lucrative position thanks to the opium-poppy industry in neighbouring Helmand.¹³⁹⁷

¹³⁸⁵ ISW, Regional Command South, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁸⁶ LWJ, Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar, 19 October 2017, [url](#); Reuters, Heavy casualties as blast rocks Afghan city of Kandahar, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁷ Xinhua News Agency, Two civilians injured in S. Afghan shoot out, 11 March, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁸ Reuters, Heavy casualties as blast rocks Afghan city of Kandahar, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁹ Khaama Press, Afghan forces suffer casualties in Kandahar VBIED suicide attack, 28 September 2017, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar, 19 October 2017, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion targets military convoy in Kandahar province, 11 March 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, 3 terrorist networks busted in Kandahar province, 22 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁰ Ariana News, 11 Children Killed as Car Bomb Targets Foreign Forces Convoy in Kandahar, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2018 casualties indicate 7 percent surge, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁹² Jeong, M., Diary: Femicide in Kandahar, 31 August 2017, [url](#). May Jeong is a visiting scholar at the New York University Journalism Institute.

¹³⁹³ Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁴ HRW, "Today We Shall All Die": Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015, [url](#); Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁵ Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁶ Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁷ Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

The Afghan forces, aided by foreign forces, carried out several operations in Kandahar in 2018 and early 2019.¹³⁹⁸ LWJ claimed in May 2018 that '[...] Afghan security forces appear to be focusing on Taliban forces in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar [...]'.¹³⁹⁹

Kandahar is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps.¹⁴⁰⁰

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kandahar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁴⁰¹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

KANDAHAR	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁴⁰² April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Kandahar (Dand) (capital)	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Zheray	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence/	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Daman	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Arghandab	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Arghestan	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Panjwayi	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Maruf	Open Taliban presence - low	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%

¹³⁹⁸ RFE/RL, 'Dozens' Of Taliban Militants Killed In Southern Afghanistan, 2 February 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion targets military convoy in Kandahar province, 11 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 70 militants killed, scores injured in nation-wide operations: MoD, 4 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants, civilians suffered casualties in Kandahar raid, 19 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 3 terrorist networks busted in Kandahar province, 22 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Deadly airstrikes target Taliban training camp in Kandahar province, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁹ LWJ, Taliban's 2018 offensive encompasses all regions of Afghanistan, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁰ [NATO](#), Resolute Support Afghanistan, Afghan 205th Corps Increases Capabilities with Eagle Strike Company, 16 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰¹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰² LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Spinboldak	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%
Maywand	Open Taliban presence - low	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Shahwalikot	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Khakrez	Open Taliban presence - low	INS Activity	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Nesh	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Ghorak	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control
Reg	Taliban control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control
Miyanshin	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS Activity	Taliban control	TB control)
Shorabak	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control
Takhta Pul	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%

2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.16.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 537 civilian casualties (204 deaths and 333 injured) in the province of Kandahar. This represents a decrease of 25 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by ground engagements and search operations.¹⁴⁰³ Between 1 January and 30 September 2018, UNAMA reported that 'pressure-plate IEDs left over from fighting in recent years continue to be of particular concern in many parts of Kandahar, where pressure-plate and other non-suicide IEDs caused most of the civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Element use of IEDs in the province. Anti-Government Elements also continue to impact civilians with remote-controlled IEDs targeting Pro-Government Forces in civilian populated areas, particularly in Kandahar'.¹⁴⁰⁴

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Kandahar,

¹⁴⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁴⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report, Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 7-8

Maiwand and Shah Wali Kot in the highest category and the districts of Khakrez, Maruf, Miyanshin and Nesh in the second highest category. The districts of Arghistan, Daman, Ghorak, Spin Boldak, and Zheray are placed in the category below while Arghandab and Panjwayi fall in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are in lower categories.¹⁴⁰⁵

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 243 incidents related to insurgents in Kandahar province.¹⁴⁰⁶

The Taliban conducted several attacks on security checkpoints in the province throughout 2018 and early 2019, resulting in casualties.¹⁴⁰⁷ Furthermore, IED blasts caused casualties among civilians,¹⁴⁰⁸ killing for instance eleven children in a car bomb blast targeted at a convoy of foreign forces in April 2018.¹⁴⁰⁹

RFE/RL reported in October 2018 that four civilians were accidentally killed in an airstrike by the Afghan Air Force in the district of Maruf. AAF allegedly targeted Taliban insurgents, who mixed with a wedding procession after they had launched an attack.¹⁴¹⁰ In February 2018 Afghan special forces reportedly ‘summarily executed civilians in Kandahar province during military operations from January 31 to February 1, 2018’ according to Human Rights Watch.¹⁴¹¹

The 2018 parliamentary election was postponed for a week in Kandahar due to the assassination of General Abdul Razeq shortly before.¹⁴¹² In late September 2018, an election candidate from the Kuchi community, a nomadic Pashtun group, was shot dead in the province.¹⁴¹³

2.16.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 789 persons displaced from Kandahar province. They were mainly displaced within the province itself.¹⁴¹⁴

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Kandahar province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.¹⁴¹⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 439 persons displaced to Kandahar province, including 1 551 from Helmand.¹⁴¹⁶

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Kandahar province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.¹⁴¹⁷

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Ghorak	127	/	/	/

¹⁴⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁰⁶ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁴⁰⁷ RFE/RL, Dozen Afghan Security Personnel Killed In Taliban Attacks , 18 May 2018, [url](#); Arab News, Daesh fighters in Afghanistan kill at least 15 Taliban, 17 July 2018, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban Suffer Heavy Casualties in Kandahar, 10 May 2018, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban Blow Up Afghan Army Outpost in Kandahar, 2 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 ANA soldiers killed, 6 wounded in Taliban assault, 2 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Border police among 23 killed in Kandahar firefight, 5 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁸ Reuters, Heavy casualties as blast rocks Afghan city of Kandahar, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁹ Ariana News, 11 Children Killed as Car Bomb Targets Foreign Forces Convoy in Kandahar, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁰ RFE/RL, Air Strike Kills Four Civilians In Southern Afghanistan, 5 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹¹ HRW, Afghanistan: Alleged Summary Executions by Special Forces, 21 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹² Van Bijlert, M., Before Election Day Three: Looking at Kandahar’s upcoming vote, AAN, 26 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹³ RFE/RL, Afghan Candidates Killed On The Campaign Trail, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

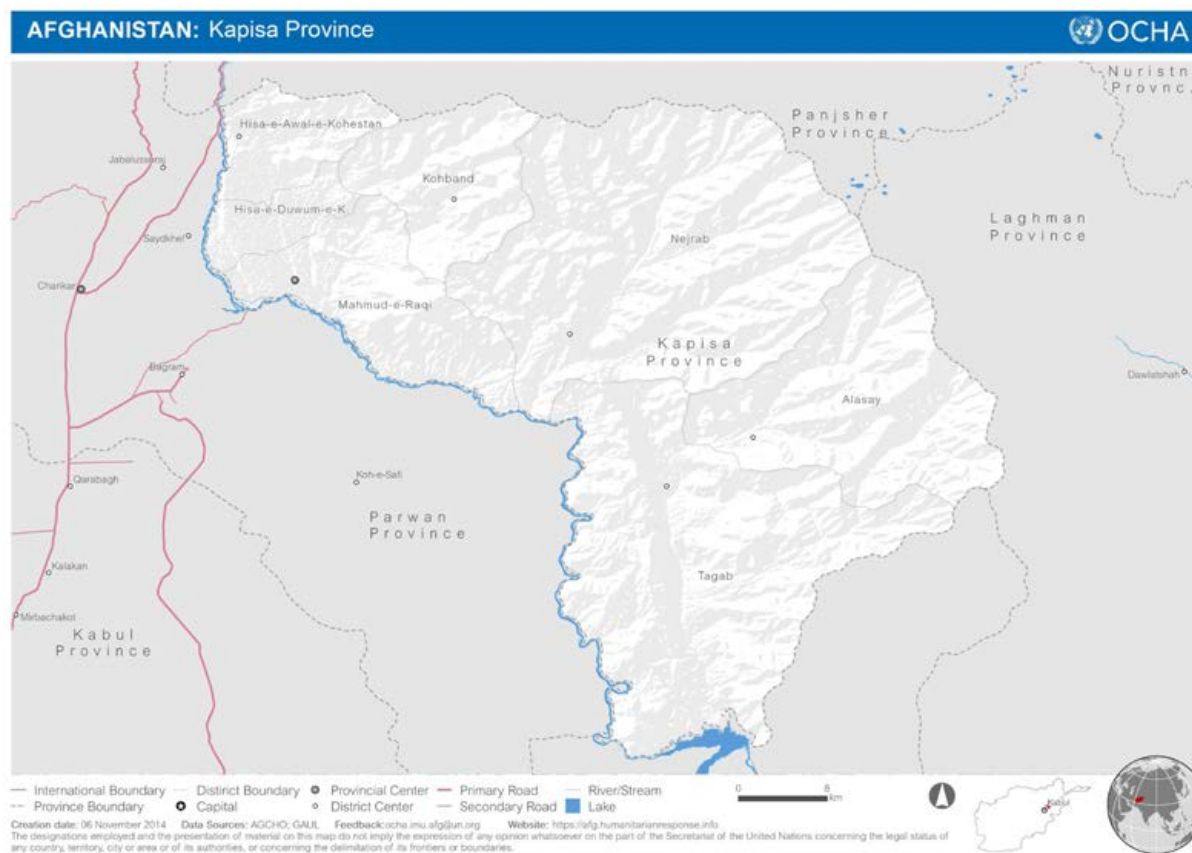
¹⁴¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

Khakrez	305	/	/	/
Maruf	6	/	/	/
Maywand	47	/	/	/
Nesh	163	/	/	/
Reg	10	/	/	/
Shahwalikot	131	/	/	/
Kandahar / Dand	/	3 439	/	/

2.17 Kapisa

2.17.1 General description of the province



The province of Kapisa is situated in central-eastern Afghanistan, surrounded by the provinces of Panjshir to the north, Laghman to the east, Kabul to the south, and Parwan to the west.¹⁴¹⁸ Kapisa is divided into the following districts: Alasay, Hisa-e Awal-e-Kohestan, Hissa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan, Kohband, Mahmud-e-Raqi, Nejrab, and Tagab. Mahmud-e-Raqi is the provincial capital of Kapisa.¹⁴¹⁹

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Kapisa at 471 574 in 2018/19.¹⁴²⁰ The major ethnic groups of Kapisa are Tajik, Pashtun, and Nuristani,¹⁴²¹ with the Tajiks, which are the largest single group, living mainly in the northern part of the province.¹⁴²²

A primary road connects the capital of Kapisa to Kabul City.¹⁴²³

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Kapisa was not among Afghanistan's ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces in 2018.¹⁴²⁴ The size of the opium-poppy acreage reportedly decreased by 60 % in 2018 compared to 2017. Opium-poppy was mainly cultivated in the districts of Tagab and Alasay.¹⁴²⁵

¹⁴¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁹ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Kapisa, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴²⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴²¹ Foreign Policy, Are Ethnic Politics Afghanistan's Great Hope?, 11 November 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kapisa Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴²² Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A two-district case study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴²³ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁴²⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa

According to AAN, Kapisa has strategic importance, as '[...] it is a small province in the middle of almost everything: it is easy for insurgents to try and reach Kapisa's capital and the neighbouring provinces.'¹⁴²⁶

A 2014 report by the New York Times stated that the battle between Taliban insurgents and government forces intensified after the French ISAF forces left the province in 2012. The New York Times traced the Taliban's success partially to a lack of capacity or 'unwillingness' by the Afghan security forces to overtake Taliban-controlled areas in Kapisa, leading to US forces' allegations of infiltration of the ANA by the insurgents or close cooperation between the Afghan Army and the insurgents. The Taliban, on the other hand, reportedly were a 'disciplined' force in Kapisa, '[...] able to operate freely.'¹⁴²⁷

AAN surmised in 2012 that Kapisa might be 'sociologically divided' into southern districts more sympathetic towards the insurgents, and the north, 'where allegiance to Jamiat-e Islami makes community support for the Taliban less likely'.¹⁴²⁸ In 2015, the southern districts of Alasay, Nijrab, and Tagab were reported to be the most insecure districts of Kapisa. According to AAN, the political landscape in Kapisa was characterized by a '[...] never-ending story of local warlords and Taleban competing with each other [...]', and the poor economic situation of many residents which '[contributed] to the high rates of militancy and private feuds [...]' in some districts of the province.¹⁴²⁹

Kapisa is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps.¹⁴³⁰

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kapisa province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁴³¹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

KAPISA	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁴³² April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Tagab	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%

¹⁴²⁶ Foschini, F., In Kabul's Shadow: the attacks in the provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁷ New York Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁸ Foschini, F., In Kabul's Shadow: the attacks in the provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁹ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A two-district case study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁰ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#), last modified 6 September 2018

¹⁴³¹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³² LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Nejrab	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA influence	GIROA influence	Contested	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Alasay	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Mahmud-e-Raqi (capital)	Gov control	GIROA influence	GIROA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan	Gov control	GIROA influence	GIROA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA influence	GIROA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kohband	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%

2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.17.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 139 civilian casualties (39 deaths and 100 injured) in Kapisa. This represents an increase of 38 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.¹⁴³³

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Tagab in the highest category, the district of Nijrab in the second highest category, the district of Alasay in the category below and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.¹⁴³⁴

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 81 incidents related to insurgents in Kapisa province.¹⁴³⁵

In February 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that the Taliban, as well as the ALP, have been collecting *ushr* taxes from Tagab's residents for years now.¹⁴³⁶ In 2018 and 2019, government forces reportedly carried out several operations in Kapisa, with US support, mainly in the districts of Tagab and Nijrab in 2018 and early 2019,¹⁴³⁷ retaking several villages in Tagab from the Taliban in January 2019.¹⁴³⁸

¹⁴³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁴³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴³⁵ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁴³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Both Taliban, ALP take ushr from Tagab residents, 20 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁷ Khaama Press, ISIS militants among 7 killed in Nangarhar and Kapisa drone strikes, 1 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban suffered heavy losses in joint operations: NATO, 6 March 2018, [url](#); AA, Afghan government says 171 terrorists killed, 11 March 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Army: Dozens Of Militants Killed In Operations, 21 April 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), Airstrikes Are Killing More Civilians in Afghanistan, U.N. Warns, 26 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 2 children killed in Laghman, Kapisa airstrikes, 26 November 2018, [url](#); Xinhua News Agency, Airstrike kills 10 Taliban militants in Afghanistan's Kapisa province, 1 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 50 rebels killed, 80pc of Tagab area cleared, 6 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 Taliban killed in ongoing Kapisa operation, 2 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban judge reconciles with govt in Kapisa, 18 January 2019, [url](#)

In September 2018, an airstrike killed nine civilians in the district of Tagab.¹⁴³⁹ In late November 2018, two children reportedly were killed by an airstrike in Tagab district.¹⁴⁴⁰

According to the website of the US Central Command, the Taliban shadow governor of Kapisa, as well as the district shadow governor of Tagab, were killed in a US airstrike in July 2018.¹⁴⁴¹

2.17.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 7 560 persons displaced from Kapisa province, mainly within the province itself or in neighbouring provinces Kabul and Parwan.¹⁴⁴²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 330 persons displaced from Nejrab and Tagab districts in Kapisa province, mainly to Kabul district of Kabul province and within the province itself in Mahmud-e-Raqi district.¹⁴⁴³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 5 789 persons displaced to Kapisa province, mainly coming from within the province itself (5 600 IDPs) or from neighbouring provinces Parwan, Laghman, Nuristan, Baghlan, Samangan and Kunar.¹⁴⁴⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 350 persons displaced to Mahmud-e-Raqi district in Kapisa province, all coming from within the province itself from Nejrab district.¹⁴⁴⁵

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Tagab	5 019	3 402	245	/
Alasay	693	/	/	/
Nejrab	1 848	1 351	1 085	/
Mahmud-e-Raqi	/	854	/	350
Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan	/	14	/	/
Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan	/	168	/	/

Throughout 2018, UNOCHA continuously reported conflict induced displacement in and from the insecure districts of Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab. According to UNOCHA, the main reasons for these displacements are military (clearing) operations, insecurity and ongoing armed conflict, threats by non-state armed groups, economic problems and frequent intimidation. The IDP families mainly found refuge in the Tamir area (district center) of Tagab, the district center of Nejrab and in the districts of Mahmud-e-Raqi, Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan and Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan.¹⁴⁴⁶

¹⁴³⁹ UNAMA, Concerns About Rising Number of Civilian Casualties from Airstrikes, 25 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 2 children killed in Laghman, Kapisa airstrikes, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴¹ US, Central Command, Taliban's Two Top Leaders in Kapisa Province Killed, 27 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 3 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2018, 8 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary,

In April 2018, UNOCHA reported a peak of 1 000 displaced families (7 000 individuals) due to an ANSF military operation (by the name of Sailab) in the insecure areas of Afghanistan, Ghain and Pacha Ghan of Nejrab district, launched to 'clear' the region from opposition groups.¹⁴⁴⁷ The IDP families settled in Maghdud Khil, Koramai, China, Tarinan, and Chokambaz villages of Nejrab district or were displaced to 'secure districts' of Kapisa (like the provincial capital Mahmud-e-Raqi) and to Kabul.¹⁴⁴⁸

In January 2019, the provincial governor of Kapisa informed UNOCHA of the launch of ANSF military clearing operations in Nejrab district, leading to a 'big number of the population' being displaced from their places of origin such as Afghanistan, Ghain, Shpee and Pacha Ghan areas of Nejrab district to the center of the district, Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan, Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan and Mahmud-e-Raqi districts of Kapisa province.¹⁴⁴⁹ According to the governor, cited in a UNOCHA meeting report from January 2019, at that time, ANSF military operations were still ongoing in insecure areas of Kapisa province and several villages of Nejrab and Tagab districts became safe, which caused some of the displaced families to return home.¹⁴⁵⁰

Throughout 2018, UNOCHA reported regularly on IDPs arriving in Kapisa province coming from insecure areas in neighbouring provinces such as Baghlan, Samangan, Laghman, Nuristan, Parwan, Shigal Wa Sheltan district of Kunar province and Surobi district of Kabul province. These IDPs mainly went to the provincial capital of Mahmud-e-Raqi and in Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan district.¹⁴⁵¹

According to UNHCR Kapisa is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.¹⁴⁵²

14 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 8 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 21 - 27 May 2018, 28 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 31 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 28 May - 3 June 2018, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July - 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 31 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 26 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 30 September, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 7 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 9 December 2018, 9 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 11 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 6 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 - 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

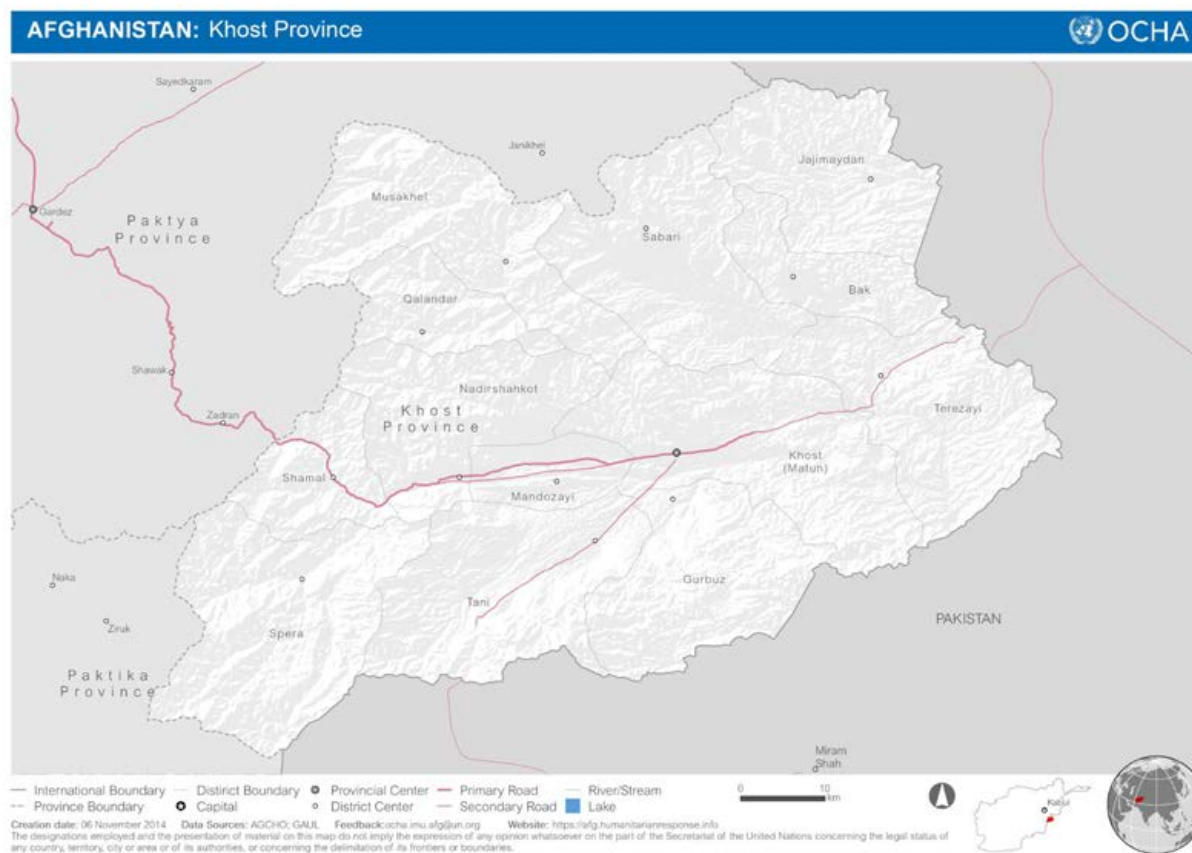
¹⁴⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁵¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 3 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2018, 8 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12 - 18 March 2018, 19 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 31 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 28 May - 3 June 2018, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July - 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1-7 October 2018, 8 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 7 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁵² UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.18 Khost

2.18.1 General description of the province



The province of Khost is situated in the eastern part of Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan to the east, Paktika to the southwest, and Paktya to the west and northwest.¹⁴⁵³ Khost is divided into the following districts: Ali Sher (Terezayi), Bak, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Khost (Matun), Mandozayi (Esmayel Khel), Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari (Yaqubi), Shamal, Spera, and Tani.¹⁴⁵⁴ The provincial capital of Khost is the city of Khost.¹⁴⁵⁵ Khost is part of Loya Paktya (i.e. 'Greater Paktya'), an area encompassing the provinces of Paktya, Paktika and Khost.¹⁴⁵⁶

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Khost at 614 584 in 2018/19.¹⁴⁵⁷ According to AAN founder Thomas Ruttig, Khost is part of one of the three major Pashtun regions of Afghanistan.¹⁴⁵⁸ The province is primarily inhabited by Pashtuns, with approximately 1 % Tajik and various other minorities¹⁴⁵⁹ living mostly in the city of Khost.¹⁴⁶⁰ According to the US-based Tribal Analysis Center (TAC),¹⁴⁶¹ the province is inhabited by a large number of tribes, among them the Zadran tribe,

¹⁴⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Khost, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁵⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Khost, 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁵⁶ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 57

¹⁴⁵⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁵⁸ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 57

¹⁴⁵⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Khost Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁰ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁴⁶¹ TAC is a [website](#) that provides pro-bono commentary and analysis on tribal issues; it does not carry out direct fieldwork but summarises information from a wide variety of sources. The Board of Editors consists of several scholars and former government analysts who worked on tribal issues.

namesake of the so-called ‘Zadran Arc’, which includes stretches of Western Khost, Paktya and Paktika.¹⁴⁶² Historically a strong tribe, TAC described the Zadran in 2013 as a ‘loose tribe’, characterized by infighting and multiple political affiliations.¹⁴⁶³ Furthermore, Kuchi and Musalyan nomads live in Khost seasonally.¹⁴⁶⁴

In 2013, TAC described Khost as a ‘[...] major transit hub for trade from Pakistan [...]’.¹⁴⁶⁵ Khost reportedly has three border crossings with Pakistan (Ghulam Khan, Babrak Tanai and Zazai Maidan).¹⁴⁶⁶ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, the key border crossing of Ghulam Khan was closed in 2014 due to military operations in Pakistan’s North Waziristan but reopened in March 2018.¹⁴⁶⁷ The border crossing of Zazai Maidan has also been temporarily closed in the past.¹⁴⁶⁸ In 2018, border disputes between Afghan and Pakistani security forces caused casualties among the fighting parties, as well as among civilians.¹⁴⁶⁹ RFE/RL stated that the border fencing, and continued border fortifications by Pakistan, ‘have threatened to disrupt the daily lives of people living in communities that straddle the border’.¹⁴⁷⁰

The so-called Khost-Gardez Pass connects Khost with neighbouring Paktya, Logar and ultimately Kabul.¹⁴⁷¹ According to a report by the US-based news site ThinkProgress, the Khost-Logar road leads through areas with a strong Taliban presence and hence potential Taliban checkpoints in the provinces of Paktya and Logar.¹⁴⁷² According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services does not exist in Khost.¹⁴⁷³

The 2018 UNODC Opium Survey reported that Khost has been poppy-free at least since 2013.¹⁴⁷⁴

2.18.2 Conflict background and actors in Khost

In 2009, Thomas Ruttig noted that Loya Paktya – encompassing Khost – has never been a Taliban stronghold.¹⁴⁷⁵ AAN stated in August 2018 that Khost ‘[...] features an active insurgency, but it remains somewhat curtailed by strong tribal affiliations and cohesive local communities.’¹⁴⁷⁶ AAN noted that due to the geographical terrain of mountainous Khost, insurgents are largely dependent on the collaboration of locals, as ‘the sworn hostility of even a minor community can be a logistical nightmare for insurgents, as they have to rely on mountain routes or secrecy for the security of their movements

¹⁴⁶² TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁴⁶³ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁴⁶⁴ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴⁶⁵ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁷ Pakistan Today, Tribesmen, business communities welcome Pak-Afghan Ghulam Khan border opening, 1 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Af-Pak trade via Ghulam Khan route set to resume, 5 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#); Dawn, Ghulam Khan route to open on 7th, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁹ RFE/RL, Afghanistan Returns Captured, Dead Pakistani Soldiers After Cross-Border Clash, 16 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Zazai Maidan residents clash with Pakistani forces, 15 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Pakistani soldiers killed in border clash, 16 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁰ RFE/RL, Afghanistan Returns Captured, Dead Pakistani Soldiers After Cross-Border Clash, 16 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷¹ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); New York Times (The), Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷² ThinkProgress, Afghans fearful as CIA-backed militias patrol the ground and U.S. drones haunt the skies, 13 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷³ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹⁴⁷⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁷⁵ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 58

¹⁴⁷⁶ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

and the success of their operations.¹⁴⁷⁷ AAN assumed that ‘this discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities.’¹⁴⁷⁸

The Haqqani network reportedly has been most active in the ‘Zadran Arc’,¹⁴⁷⁹ with its late founder Jalaluddin Haqqani being a member of the Zadran tribe.¹⁴⁸⁰ The group is affiliated with the Taliban, though it declared itself independent from the Quetta Shura from 2007 to 2015.¹⁴⁸¹ Declassified US cables quoted by Associated Press (AP) stated that the Haqqani network, contrary to other Taliban factions, ‘[...] functions more in the military area, and is not a force in setting Taliban political or social issues’,¹⁴⁸² a perception seemingly shared by Ruttig.¹⁴⁸³

The Haqqani network reportedly maintains close ties to the Pakistani secret service ISI, as well as other Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda.¹⁴⁸⁴ In 2017, the UN Security Council reported the presence of individuals affiliated to Al Qaeda in Khost.¹⁴⁸⁵ Jalaluddin Haqqani reportedly died aged 71 in September 2018. According to the Associated Press (AP), it is unlikely that Haqqani’s death will weaken the organization founded by him as Haqqani had already handed over control to his son Serajuddin at an earlier point of time.¹⁴⁸⁶

On the government side, a ‘campaign force’ named Khost Protection Force (KPF) reportedly has been the most influential security actor in the province.¹⁴⁸⁷ According to several sources, KPF is supported by the CIA and unaccountable to the provincial government. KPF has been accused of human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary arrests, most recently in January 2019 in the province of Paktia, as well as in Khost in December 2018.¹⁴⁸⁸

In 2018 and early 2019, regular Afghan security forces conducted ground operations and airstrikes in the province.¹⁴⁸⁹ Khost is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps.¹⁴⁹⁰

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Khost province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁴⁹¹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁸ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁹ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 62

¹⁴⁸⁰ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸¹ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴⁸² AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸³ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 73

¹⁴⁸⁴ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, pp. 75-76; New York Times (The), Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁵ UN Security Council, Twentieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 7 August 2017, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁴⁸⁶ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁷ Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁸ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), C.I.A.’s Afghan Forces Leave a Trail of Abuse and Anger, 31 December 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁹ Xinhua News Agency, Airstrike kills 4 Haqqani militants in Afghanistan, 26 July 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 62 insurgents killed, 17 injured in fresh raids: MoD, 20 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Afghan soldiers killed in Khost gunbattle, 10 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁰ Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁹¹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

KHOST	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁴⁹² April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Bak	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Gurbuz	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control
Jajimaydan	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	Gov control
Khost (Matun) (capital)	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Mandozayi	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Musakhel	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Nadirshahkot	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%
Qalandar	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	TB control
Sabari	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Shamal	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Spera	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 40%; Gov control: 40% ¹⁴⁹³
Tani	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Terazayi	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Alisher	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Ismail Khel	/	/	/	/	Gov control

¹⁴⁹² LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

¹⁴⁹³ The percentages referred to by the Taliban on their website sometimes don't add up to 100 %.

2.18.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.18.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 175 civilian casualties (84 deaths and 91 injured) in Khost. This represents a decrease of 3 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by targeted killings and search operations.¹⁴⁹⁴ With regard to all of Afghanistan, the same source further found that 'search operations caused 353 civilian casualties (284 deaths and 69 injured) with the majority caused by NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force, both of whom are supported by international military forces.'¹⁴⁹⁵

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Khost (Matun) in the second highest category. Musakhel, Sabari, Terezayi and Jaji Maydan are in the third highest category, the districts of Mandozayi, Nadir Shah Kot and Bak in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.¹⁴⁹⁶

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 67 incidents related to insurgents in Khost province.¹⁴⁹⁷

According to Khaama Press and Pajhwok Afghan News, all districts of Khost are comparatively calm.¹⁴⁹⁸ However, insurgent activity, as well as operations by Afghan security forces and the KPF 'campaign forces' caused civilian casualties in Khost in 2018 and early 2019. In February 2018, reportedly seven members of a family reportedly died in an operation of the security forces in the district of Terezayi,¹⁴⁹⁹ while an operation in Sabari district caused ten casualties (four deaths, six injuries). According to Pajhwok Afghan News, it was not clear whether the persons wounded or killed in Sabari were civilians.¹⁵⁰⁰ In July 2018, five members of a family were reportedly killed in an operation of the Afghan Special Forces in Bak district.¹⁵⁰¹ A clash between security forces and insurgents claimed the lives of four civilians in Nadirshahkot district in March 2018, according to Xinhua News Agency.¹⁵⁰² Residents later brought the coffins of the killed civilians to Khost City in order to protest, demanding prosecution for the deaths.¹⁵⁰³ Furthermore, the Kabul-Khost highway was blocked for several hours by protestors asking for a stop to 'campaign forces' operations.¹⁵⁰⁴ A KPF raid in December 2018 allegedly left four civilians dead, including a toddler.¹⁵⁰⁵

In April 2018, a journalist was reportedly shot dead in Khost.¹⁵⁰⁶ In May 2018, an explosion in a mosque serving as a voter registration centre for the upcoming parliamentary elections killed at least 17 persons.¹⁵⁰⁷ In June 2018, two people were shot dead and three others were injured in a Mosque in

¹⁴⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁴⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁹⁷ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁴⁹⁸ Khaama Press, Afghan forces thwart deadly VBIED attack in Khost province, 6 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Judges, attorneys not available in 3 Khost districts, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 members of a family killed in Khost operation, 8 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 people suffer casualties in Khost operation, 21 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family killed in Khost raid by Afghan special forces, 8 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰² Xinhua News Agency, Afghan gun battle claims 4 lives of civilians, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰³ Xinhua News Agency, Afghan gun battle claims 4 lives of civilians, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁴ Ariana News, Residents Protest against Operations of 'Campaign Forces' in Khost, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁵ New York Times (The), C.I.A.'s Afghan Forces Leave a Trail of Abuse and Anger, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁶ BBC News, BBC reporter Ahmad Shah killed in Afghanistan attack, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁷ BBC News, Afghanistan: At least 17 killed in Khost mosque blast, 6 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 killed in blast at voter registration centre in Khost, 6 May 2018, [url](#)

Mandozayi district.¹⁵⁰⁸ In January 2019, two people died and 20 persons were injured in the provincial capital in an explosion, for which nobody claimed responsibility.¹⁵⁰⁹

In November 2018, a bomb blast in the mosque of an army base reportedly killed 26 members of the Afghan security forces.¹⁵¹⁰

2.18.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 4 676 persons displaced from Khost province, of whom almost all (4 669) were displaced to the capital district, Khost (Matun).¹⁵¹¹

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Khost province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹⁵¹²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 6 139 persons displaced to Khost province from Baghlan, Ghazni, Logar, Nangarhar, Paktika and Paktya provinces.¹⁵¹³

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Khost province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹⁵¹⁴

District	Displaced from (2018) ¹⁵¹⁵	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Bak	28	/	/	/
Gurbuz	210	/	/	/
Jajimaydan	2 100	/	/	/
Musakhel	49	/	/	/
Sabari	2 212	/	/	/
Spera	28	/	/	/
Terezayi	49	/	/	/
Khost (Matun)	/	6 139	/	/

Causes of displacements are linked to the conflict according to UNOCHA: military operations in January 2018¹⁵¹⁶ and cross border shelling in Jajimaydan district in April 2018 drove 1 000 people living near the border to leave this area.¹⁵¹⁷

¹⁵⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed, 3 injured in gun attack on Khost mosque, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed, 3 injured in gun attack on Khost mosque, 7 June 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, 2 killed, over 20 wounded in an explosion in Khost province, 8 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁰ NBC News, Suicide blast kills dozens at mosque in Afghanistan's Khost province, 23 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

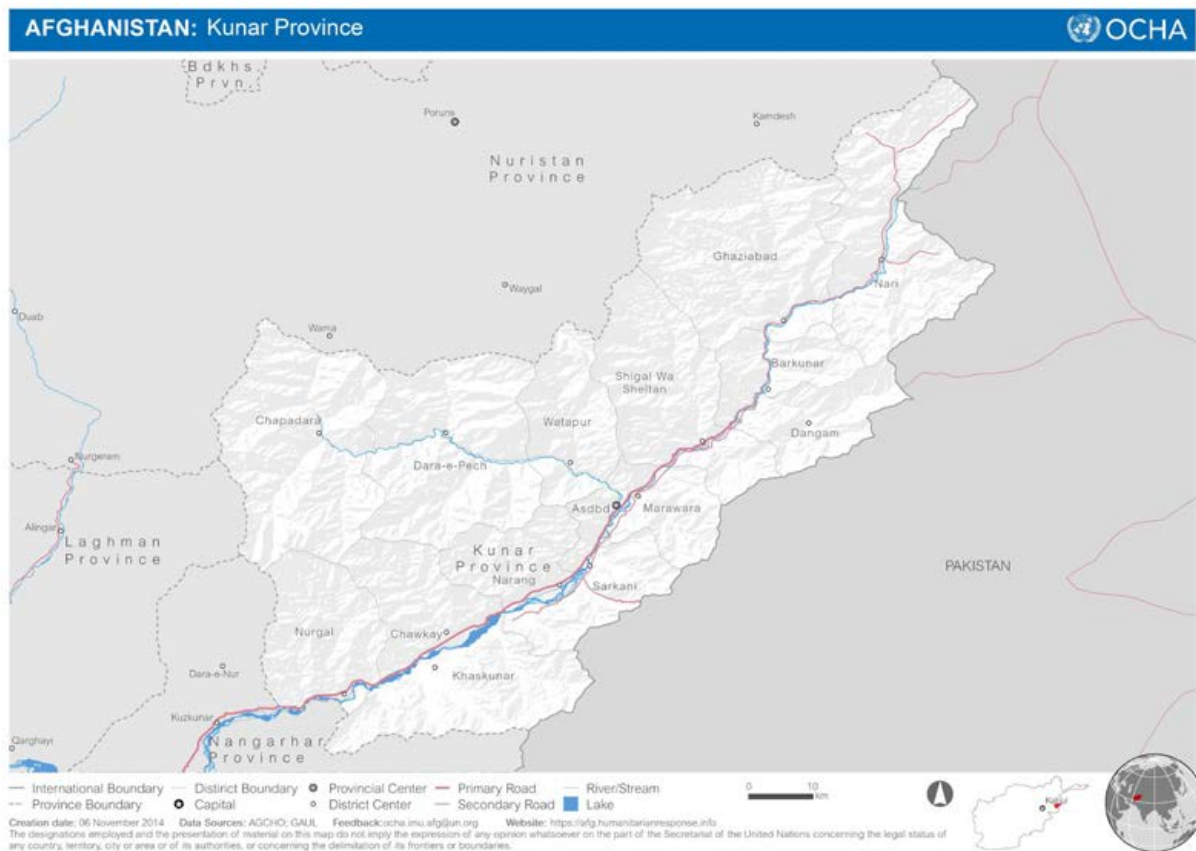
¹⁵¹⁵ The district of origin of 7 persons displaced is not mentioned in UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 22 - 29 January, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, [url](#)

2.19 Kunar

2.19.1 General description of the province



Kunar is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border; it borders Nuristan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Laghman to the west.¹⁵¹⁸ The provincial capital is Asadabad;¹⁵¹⁹ the province is divided into the following districts: Asadabad, Barkunar (also Asmar), Chapadara, Chawkay (also Sawkay), Dangam, Dara-e-Pech (also Manogi), Ghaziabad, Khashkunar, Marawara, Narang, Nari, Nurgal, Sarkani, Shigal,¹⁵²⁰ Watapur and Sheltan.¹⁵²¹ The latter is defined as a ‘temporary district’, meaning that it is considered to belong to Kunar province, but its status as such has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet.¹⁵²² According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Kunar is estimated at 482 115 for 2018/19.¹⁵²³ It is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai and Nuristani.¹⁵²⁴ The province, which is rich in forests, has been affected by high

¹⁵¹⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵²¹ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 20; US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵²² Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵²³ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵²⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

rates of illegal logging, mining and smuggling by insurgents, mafia groups and, allegedly, some government officials.¹⁵²⁵

A national highway from Jalalabad passes through the districts of Nurgal, Chawkay, Narang, Asadabad, Shigal and leads to Asmar.¹⁵²⁶ From Asmar the highway leads to Nuristan province through Ghaziabad and Nari districts. In 2017, insurgents built a stone wall on the road in order to limit the transit of government officials. The Afghan security forces reopened the road in August 2018 after a series of operations.¹⁵²⁷ The province shares a 175 kilometre-long border with Pakistan; through the Korengal valley, which lies west of the provincial capital, the insurgents have been entering and leaving the province during the years.¹⁵²⁸ Pakistani militants and Al Qaeda fighters used to access Afghanistan from the former tribal areas or urban centres in Pakistan and passed through insurgent controlled areas in Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Badakhshan.¹⁵²⁹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, opium-poppy cultivation levels in Kunar (1 723 hectares) remained similar to 2017 (1 634 hectares) representing a 6% increase in poppy cultivation.¹⁵³⁰

2.19.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunar

According to a government source quoted by Tolonews in March 2017, at least 15 terrorist organisations, among them ISKP, Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e Taiba, were active in the province.¹⁵³¹

Sources from 2018-2019 reported that Pakistan's Tehrik-e Taliban members run a military base, called Ghazi Camp, in Kunar province; they shifted it to Kunar after clearing operations by the military in Pakistan.¹⁵³²

ISKP is active in the province. According to the New York Times, ISKP fighters pushed back the Taliban from Korengal valley and expanded their control over it, as of January 2019. Before the takeover of the valley, ISKP expansion in the country 'had been contained' through military operations, but the seizure of the valley by the armed group again raised concerns over its expansion in the region. The consolidation of ISKP in the valley could 'threaten several neighboring districts', as well as the main road connecting Kunar with Nuristan province, speculated the New York Times in January 2019.¹⁵³³ According to the Kunar police chief quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in 2017, there were hundreds of ISKP militants in the province. They had started their activities in Chapadara and maintained training centres in Nari. Moreover, ISKP fighters have also appeared in areas of Nurgal, Watapur and Dara-e-Pech districts.¹⁵³⁴

As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Kunar as one of the IS 'strongholds' in Afghanistan.¹⁵³⁵ UNAMA's 2018 annual report noted that 'Daesh/ISKP is present in the east of Afghanistan, with an estimated 3,000 fighters currently active, primarily in Nangarhar and Kunar

¹⁵²⁵ IWPR, Illegal Logging Destroying Afghan Forests, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁶ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁷ Salaam Times, Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban, 9 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵²⁹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁵³¹ Tolonews, Daesh, Al-Qaeda Among 15 Terror Groups in Kunar, 14 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³² Dawn, Son of TTP chief killed in drone attack in Afghanistan, 8 March 2018, [url](#); RCD, Taliban Promotes Training Camp for 'Commando Mujahidin', 23 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵³³ New York Times (The), Violence Grows in Northern Afghanistan, but Neither Side Is Gaining Much Ground, 10 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds of Daesh rebels emerge in Kunar: police chief, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁵ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

provinces'.¹⁵³⁶ The same source further noted that with regards to Al Qaeda: 'Al-Qaeda is believed to maintain a limited presence in eastern Afghanistan, especially Kunar and Nuristan provinces, and to continue to have links to anti-Government groups operating throughout Afghanistan. Most recent reporting in mid-2018 suggested that Al-Qaeda operatives have recently increased from 100-120 individuals, based on mid-2017 estimates, to an estimated 250-400'.¹⁵³⁷

According to news magazine, the Diplomat reporting in 2017, a group of Hezb-e Islami militants have been based in Shigal district.¹⁵³⁸ Although as of 2017 they were communicating with other insurgent groups, they have neither joined the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, nor ISKP.¹⁵³⁹

According to local sources quoted by the IWPR, insurgents operating in areas not controlled by the government, like Chapadara and Dara-e-Pech, funded themselves through profits from deforestation and mining.¹⁵⁴⁰

In terms of presence of government security forces, Kunar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.¹⁵⁴¹

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kunar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.¹⁵⁴² When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

KUNAR	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁵⁴³ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Asadabad (capital)	Gov control	GIROA Control	GIROA Control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Barkunar	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	Contested	Contested	/
Chapadara	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Chawkay	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control

¹⁵³⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 60

¹⁵³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 61

¹⁵³⁸ Diplomat (The), Afghan Jihad Frozen in Time?, 25 April 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁹ USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁰ IWPR, Illegal Logging Destroying Afghan Forests, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁵⁴² BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴³ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Dangam	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Dara-e-Pech	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Ghaziabad	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	/
Khaskunar	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 70%; individual control (Abdul Wali): 30%
Marawara	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Narang	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%
Nari	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 65%; Gov control: 35%
Nurgal	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	/
Sarkani	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Shigal Wa Sheltan	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%
Watapur	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Asmar	/	/	/	/	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Manogi	/	/	/	/	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%

2.19.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.19.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 397 civilian casualties (128 deaths and 269 injured) in Kunar province. This represents an increase of 77 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.¹⁵⁴⁴

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Ghaziabad,

¹⁵⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

Watapur, and Sarkani in the highest category and Chapadara, Dara-e-Pech, Marawara, Nari, Dangam, Shigal and Chawkay in the second highest category. Bar Kunar is placed in the third highest category and Nurgal, Asad Abad and Khas Kunar are in the fourth highest category. The remaining district falls in the lower category.¹⁵⁴⁵

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 174 incidents related to insurgents in Kunar province.¹⁵⁴⁶

With regards to targeted killings, in 2018 UNAMA documented ‘nine incidents [...] in which Anti-Government Elements threatened health care personnel to stop vaccination campaigns, including for polio. Six of these incidents took place in the eastern region (Kunar and Nangarhar provinces)’¹⁵⁴⁷ and ‘on 28 July [2018], in Dara-i-Pech district, Kunar province, Daesh/ISKP killed four men for allegedly spying for pro-Government forces. The victims had been abducted and held in captivity for two months. Daesh/ISKP claimed responsibility for the execution of the men and published photos on the Amaq [IS-run] news website’.¹⁵⁴⁸

Airstrikes were carried out by Afghan and US security forces in Shigal District in December 2018 wounding Taliban fighters and causing ‘31 civilian casualties (13 deaths and 18 injured), including 28 women and children’,¹⁵⁴⁹ in Narang in late October 2018, killing three children;¹⁵⁵⁰ in Barkunar early October 2018, killing Taliban commanders;¹⁵⁵¹ in Marawara in June 2018, killing the chief of the Pakistani Taliban, Mullah Fazlullah;¹⁵⁵² and in March 2018, targeting Ghazi Camp, killing Fazlullah’s son and other members of TTP.¹⁵⁵³ Moreover, military ground operations by Afghan security forces were carried out in Dara-e-Pech in late January 2019,¹⁵⁵⁴ in Shigal District in December 2018,¹⁵⁵⁵ and in Watapur in September 2018, killing IS militants.¹⁵⁵⁶

Clashes between ISKP militants and Afghan security forces took place in Marawara and Watapur districts in December 2018, resulting in casualties among ISKP fighters.¹⁵⁵⁷ Suicide attacks took place in Sawkay district in late June 2018, killing and injuring policemen and civilians at a police checkpoint¹⁵⁵⁸ and in Watapur in March 2018, killing a Kunar provincial council member and a religious scholar.¹⁵⁵⁹

Clashes between the Taliban and ISKP militants took place in October 2018, killing and wounding fighters of both sides and also children.¹⁵⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵⁴⁶ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁵⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁵⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁵⁵⁰ New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Oct. 19-25, 26 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵¹ Khaama Press, Drone strike target Taliban’s Red Unit commanders in Kunar province, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵² Al Jazeera, Pakistan Taliban chief Mullah Fazlullah ‘killed in drone attack’, 15 June 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Suicide Bomber Kills Eight Policemen In Afghanistan’s Kunar Province, 26 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵³ Dawn, Son of TTP chief killed in drone attack in Afghanistan, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁴ Tolonews, Daesh Commander Killed In Kunar, 30 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Nearly 20 Taliban, ISIS-K militants killed during the operations of Afghan, Coalition Forces, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁵⁵⁶ Xinhua News Agency, Afghan forces launches operations against IS outfit, 24 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁷ Khaama Press, Afghan forces repulse ISIS attacks in two districts of Kunar province, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁸ RFE/RL, Suicide Bomber Kills Eight Policemen In Afghanistan’s Kunar Province, 26 June 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Suicide Bombing Claims Eight Lives In Kunar, 25 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁹ Tolonews, Kunar Provincial Council Member Killed In Suicide Attack, 30 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁰ Tribune Express (The), Several dead after Afghan Taliban, IS clash in Kunar, 6 October 2018, [url](#); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

In late January 2019 IS fighters were killed after the detonation of their own improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Dara-e-Pech district.¹⁵⁶¹ In late January 2019 Taliban were killed in the detonation of an IED allegedly installed by ISKP militants.¹⁵⁶²

Three civilians were killed and another 16 wounded in Shigal district in August 2018 when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb.¹⁵⁶³

2.19.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 15 207 persons displaced from Kunar, most of them (14 022) being displaced within the province.¹⁵⁶⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 104 persons displaced from Kunar province with all of them displaced within the province.¹⁵⁶⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 14 047 persons displaced to Kunar province.¹⁵⁶⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 104 persons displaced to Kunar province coming from Ghaziabad, Barkunar, Narang, Dara-e-Pech, Barkunar and Chapadara districts within the province.¹⁵⁶⁷

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Asadabad	/	1 962	/	/
Barkunar	842	1 129	47	34
Chapadara	759	531	11	/
Chawkay	3 758	3 507	/	/
Dangam	5 268	4 564	/	/
Dara-e-Pech	187	151	8	/
Ghaziabad	180	/	19	/
Khaskunar	/	234	/	11
Marawara	70	52	/	/
Narang	/	46	19	27
Nari	63		/	/
Nurgal	873	491	/	32
Sarkani	192	243	/	/
Shigal Wa Sheltan	511	292	/	/
Watapur	2 504	845	/	/

¹⁵⁶¹ Khaama Press, ISIS-K militants blown up by IED in Kunar province, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶² Khaama Press, ISIS-K bomb kill Taliban local commander in Kunar province, 19 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians dead, 16 wounded in Kunar roadside blast, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

During the first four months of 2018, and in July and December 2018, UNOCHA reported that people have been displaced because ‘threats and intimidation by Non State Armed Groups (NSAG)’¹⁵⁶⁸ and also due to clashes between these groups and ANSF, especially in Chawkay and Khaskunar districts in January 2018.¹⁵⁶⁹

Moreover, clashes between armed groups have resulted in the following displacements mainly within the province:

- 600 persons displaced within Nurgal district in May 2018,¹⁵⁷⁰
- in July 2018, 3 500 people were displaced in Chapadara district,¹⁵⁷¹
- 1 000 persons have been displaced within Watapur district in October 2018,¹⁵⁷²
- in August 2018, an armed group was targeted by ANSF operations in Asmar district causing the displacement of 2 700 people within the district and to other districts of Kunar.¹⁵⁷³

Cross-border shelling, especially in Dangam district, is another cause of displacements.¹⁵⁷⁴ For example in March 2018, 3 000 people went to Dangam district center as a result of these cross-border shelling.¹⁵⁷⁵

¹⁵⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 – 7 January 2018, 8 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 February 2018, 12 February 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 February – 4 March 2018, 5 March 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 June – 10 June 2018, 11 June 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 – 8 April 2018, 9 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 10 December – 16 December 2018, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 – 14 January 2018, 16 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 – 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 – 8 July 2018, 9 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1-7 October 2018, 8 October 2018, [url](#)

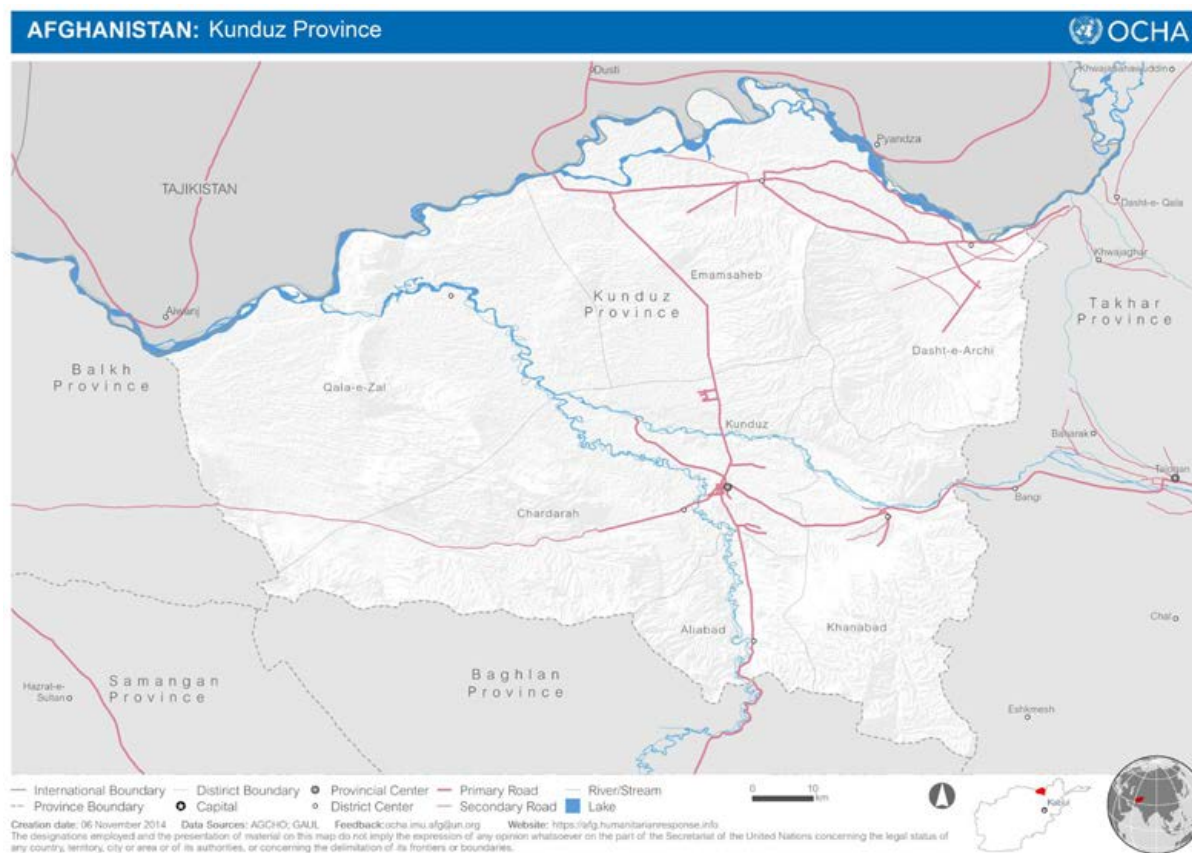
¹⁵⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July – 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 19 – 25 March 2018, 25 March 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 – 8 April 2018, 9 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 – 29 July 2018, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 19 – 25 March 2018, 25 March 2018, [url](#)

2.20 Kunduz

2.20.1 General description of the province



Kunduz is located in northern Afghanistan; it borders Tajikistan to the north, Takhar province to the east, Baghlan province to the south, and Balkh province to the west.¹⁵⁷⁶ The provincial capital is Kunduz city¹⁵⁷⁷ and the province is divided into the following districts: Aliabad, Chardarah, Dasht-e-Archi, Emamsaheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-e-Zal.¹⁵⁷⁸ The districts of Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash are newly established districts.¹⁵⁷⁹ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Kunduz is estimated at 1 091 116 for 2018/19¹⁵⁸⁰ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, Hazara, Aymaq and Pashai.¹⁵⁸¹

A section of Asian Highway AH7 from Kabul passes through the provinces of Parwan and Baghlan and connects the national capital with Kunduz province and the border crossing to Tajikistan at the port of Sher Khan (also Sher Khan Bandar).¹⁵⁸² In the past, the Taliban have set up check-points on the highway section connecting Kunduz to Baghlan.¹⁵⁸³ Moreover, the Kunduz-Takhar highway runs east from

¹⁵⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁷ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunduz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁹ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁰ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁵⁸¹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunduz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸² Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; RFE/RL, Tajikistan/Afghanistan: Road Bridge Opens With Aim Of Strengthening Trade, 26 August 2007, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸³ Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

Kunduz city, passing through the district of Khanabad and connecting the province with Takhar and Badakhshan.¹⁵⁸⁴

In August 2018, Taliban militants kidnapped 170 passengers who were travelling to Kabul through Takhar, near Khanabad district, with the aim to identify members of the Afghan security forces.¹⁵⁸⁵ Moreover, the highway has occasionally been closed in the past because of fights between the Taliban and Afghan security forces,¹⁵⁸⁶ limiting mobility between Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan and affecting the whole north-eastern region.¹⁵⁸⁷ Furthermore, Taliban mined the road during parliamentary elections in October 2018, ruining parts of it, and destroying police check-points, as well as military vehicles.¹⁵⁸⁸ Another national highway connects Kunduz city with Balkh province to the west.¹⁵⁸⁹ The province has always been a strategic crossing-point. Being close to Tajikistan, it hosted the Tajikistan Islamic opposition during the Tajik civil war in the 1990s and it provided access to the main smuggling routes to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, located near a main road to Kabul, it connects the rest of Afghanistan with its northern region.¹⁵⁹⁰

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Kunduz maintained its poppy-free status, which it has held since 2007. Even though the cultivation rate has risen 'in recent years', it still remained under 100 hectares in 2018, which is the UNODC threshold for obtaining 'poppy-free status'.¹⁵⁹¹

2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz

The security situation of the province has purportedly been deteriorating over recent years.¹⁵⁹² The security situation in and around Kunduz city has also been reported to be getting worse, with 'fears the city could again fall into the hands of the Taliban as it did briefly on two occasions in recent years - in September 2015 and in October 2016'.¹⁵⁹³

Kunduz was the last Taliban stronghold before the Taliban's fall in 2001, when it was freed by U.S. led security forces.¹⁵⁹⁴ Kunduz city temporary fell to the Taliban in September 2015,¹⁵⁹⁵ and they almost recaptured it in October 2016 by encircling the city and cutting off the main supply and reinforcement routes. After these attempts by Taliban to capture Kunduz city, the Afghan security forces tried to regain control over the districts of Dasht-e-Archi, Qala-e-Zal, Emamsaheb and parts of Khanabad, which served as strategic strongholds for the Taliban offensive. The operations took long and control over the districts changed hands a few times, purportedly contributing to instability in the province.¹⁵⁹⁶ In 2017, renewed attempts by the Taliban to get closer to the provincial capital through attacking nearby Dasht-e-Archi took place, but these were repelled by Afghan security forces.¹⁵⁹⁷ According to a

¹⁵⁸⁴ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁵ CBS News, Taliban kidnaps more than 100 bus passengers in northern Afghanistan, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁶ Tolonews, 'Heavy Clashes' Close Kunduz-Takhar Highway To Traffic, 5 May 2017, [url](#); Middle East Press, Kunduz – Takhar Highway Blocked For Traffic, 17 August 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁷ Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁸ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁹ MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.6

¹⁵⁹⁰ DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁵⁹² Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹³ Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁴ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁵ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁶ Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁷ Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](#); Tolonews, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed In North, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

report by AAN in 2017, insurgents had been weakened by night-raids and airstrikes carried out by coalition forces, which killed key figures of the Taliban movement, like the Taliban shadow governor of the province, Mullah Salam. The appointment of his successor created tensions among the Taliban in Chardarah and Dasht-e-Archi, which weakened the coordination of the movement in the province.¹⁵⁹⁸

According to AAN, in 2018, the Taliban were active in Dasht-e-Archi and Chardarah districts, where government control was limited to small parts of the district centres and some neighbouring villages.¹⁵⁹⁹ Moreover, according to sources quoted by AAN, as of February 2019, the Taliban had established a parallel shadow government in Dasht-e-Archi which 'includes "a district governor, head of education, judicial, health, public outreach, military and the finance committees"'.¹⁶⁰⁰ These posts are held by 'young Pashtuns and Uzbeks from the district'.¹⁶⁰¹ In Aliabad, Emamsaheb and Khanabad the government's presence reached almost half of the districts, whilst the remaining parts were contested. Aqtash, Gulbad and Gultepa were largely or entirely under Taliban control.¹⁶⁰²

According to an April 2018 report by the Jamestown Foundation, a US-based institute for research and analysis, the Islamic State (IS) set up bases in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, including in Kunduz.¹⁶⁰³ In the past, the province had been hosting foreign fighters from Central Asia, such as members of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which were purportedly active along the 'porous' Afghan-Tajik border.¹⁶⁰⁴ Besides Uzbek and Tajik militants, fighters coming from Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Chechnya were also reported to have been active in the province.¹⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, an insurgent group called Jabha-ye Qariha ('the front of those who have memorised the Quran by heart', the *qaris*), which is known as the military wing of Jundullah, is purportedly active in Dasht-e-Archi district. Although Jundullah is an independent group, it is allied with the Taliban. Still, the two insurgent groups have different beliefs: Jundullah follows a radical ideology and almost completely ignores local culture, whereas the Taliban, who are mainly locals, respect and rely on elders and their system of traditional mediation.¹⁶⁰⁶

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kunduz province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.¹⁶⁰⁷

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kunduz province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁶⁰⁸ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁹ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁰ Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰¹ Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰² Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰³ Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁴ DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁵ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁶ Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁶⁰⁸ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

KUNDUZ	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁶⁰⁹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Aliabad	Open Taliban presence – low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Chardarah	Open Taliban Presence – high	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Dasht-e-Archi	Open Taliban Presence – high	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Emamsaheb	Open Taliban presence – Medium	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 75%; Gov control: 25%
Khanabad	Open Taliban presence – Medium	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Kunduz (capital)	Open Taliban presence – low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Qala-e-Zal	Open Taliban presence – low	INS activity	INS activity	Taliban control	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Aqtash ¹⁶¹⁰	/	/	/	Taliban control	TB control
Kalbad ¹⁶¹¹	/	/	/	Taliban control	TB control
Gul Tapa ¹⁶¹²	/	/	/	Taliban control	TB control

2.20.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.20.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 337 civilian casualties (105 deaths and 232 injured) in Kunduz province. This represents a decrease of 11 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground

¹⁶⁰⁹ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

¹⁶¹⁰ The Taliban mention Aqtash as a district they newly created. (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#))

¹⁶¹¹ The Taliban mention Kalbad as a district they newly created. (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#))

¹⁶¹² The Taliban mention Gul Tapa as a district they newly created. (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#))

engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.¹⁶¹³ The same source ‘also documented continued reductions in civilian casualties from ground engagements in Kunduz province and Laghman province, which joined the top five provinces that had a reduction of civilian casualties from such operations in 2018’.¹⁶¹⁴ For Kunduz province, it recorded 109 civilian casualties caused by ground engagements, which is a 31 % decrease compared to 2017.¹⁶¹⁵

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Emamsaheb, Dasht-e-Archi, Chardarah, and Kunduz in the highest category and Qala-e-Zal and Khanabad districts in the second highest category while Aliabad district falls into the category below.¹⁶¹⁶

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 167 incidents related to insurgents in Kunduz province.¹⁶¹⁷

An aerial operation carried out by international military forces in March 2019 in Telawka neighbourhood near Kunduz city ‘killed 13 civilians and injured three more’; 10 of the recorded fatalities were children. The attack was intended to support pro-Government forces on the ground.¹⁶¹⁸

Military operations by Afghan security forces took place in Khanabad district in late January 2019, killing insurgents.¹⁶¹⁹ Airstrikes were carried out by Afghan security forces in Chardarah in July 2018, killing civilians,¹⁶²⁰ and in April 2018, in Dasht-e-Archi, killing civilians, most of them being children.¹⁶²¹ The latter airstrike targeted a religious ceremony next to a *madrassa*, where ‘senior Taliban leaders present in the area, including members of the Quetta Shura, as well as members of a Taliban “Red Unit”’ had allegedly gathered ‘to launch an operation against Kunduz city’, according to the government. The Afghan Air Force released ‘multiple rockets’ and fired ‘heavy machineguns’, which caused 107 casualties (36 killed and 71 injured), of which 81 were children (30 killed and 51 injured).¹⁶²²

In September 2018, Taliban militants tried to storm the district centre of Dasht-e-Archi again and engaged in battles with Afghan security forces leading to casualties reported on both sides; reportedly more than 30 security forces members and nearly 30 Taliban fighters were killed and wounded.¹⁶²³ In October 2018 and in February 2019, sources reported fears that Taliban could overrun Kunduz city again.¹⁶²⁴

Kunduz was among the provinces with the highest level of Taliban violence during 2018 parliamentary elections: in Dasht-e-Archi and Qala-e-Zal districts ‘Taleban’s shadow district governors appeared in

¹⁶¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁶¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p.2

¹⁶¹⁷ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁶¹⁸ UNAMA, Kunduz airstrike kills 13 civilians, mostly children – UN initial findings, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁹ Tolonews, Taliban Commanders Killed In NDS Operation in Kunduz, 31 January 2019, [url](#); Xinhua News Agency, Afghan forces storm Taliban bastion in northern Kunduz province, killing 4 militants, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Fars News, 21 Afghan Security Forces Killed in Taliban Attack, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁰ Indian Express (The), Afghanistan: Air strike near Kunduz kills 14 civilians, 20 July 2018, [url](#); Stars and Stripes, US says Kunduz airstrike did not kill civilians, 10 August 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, MoD Confirms Civilian Deaths in Kunduz Operation, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²¹ Tolonews, Ghani Visits Dasht-e-Archi Victims in Kabul Hospital, 7 April 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report Airstrikes in Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz Province, 2 April 2018, May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶²² UNAMA, Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report Airstrikes in Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz Province, 2 April 2018, May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶²³ Tolonews, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed In North, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁴ Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN 7 November 2018, [url](#)

mosques during Friday prayers and announced the Taliban leadership's position on the elections'.¹⁶²⁵ In other Taliban-controlled areas of the province 'their fighters individually talked with local elders and mosque preachers, asking them to prevent people from taking part in the elections'.¹⁶²⁶ Shelling at polling centres was reported in most parts of the province, even inside the city, killing and injuring Independent Election Commission volunteers and voters.¹⁶²⁷ Voting did not take place in Qala-e-Zal, Gultepa and Gulbad, due to high security risks.¹⁶²⁸ Intense Taliban attacks were registered also in Khanabad and Emamsaheb districts, limiting voting.¹⁶²⁹ In April 2018, 400 schools that had been closed by the Taliban for one month in some areas of Kunduz province reopened thanks to tribal elders' mediation.¹⁶³⁰

2.20.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 46 312 persons displaced from Kunduz province, mainly within the province itself, and to neighbouring provinces Balkh and Takhar, in Kabul province and in other provinces like Kunar and Kandahar.¹⁶³¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 2 429 persons displaced from Khanabad district in Kunduz province, all within the province itself in Kunduz district.¹⁶³²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 43 638 persons displaced to Kunduz province (mainly to Kunduz district), all coming from within the province itself.¹⁶³³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 2 429 persons displaced to Kunduz district in Kunduz province, all coming from Khanabad district within the province itself.¹⁶³⁴

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Chardarah	20 321	1 085	/	/
Dasht-e-Archi	2 555	/	/	/
Emamsaheb	12 152	4 942	/	/
Khanabad	4 032	2 373	2 429	/
Qala-e-Zal	7 252	2 674	/	/
Kunduz	/	32 515	/	2 429
Aliabad	/	49	/	/

Ongoing military operations led by the International Military Forces and ANSF in Kunduz province have displaced thousands of people throughout 2018.¹⁶³⁵ According to humanitarian actors in Afghan civil

¹⁶²⁵ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁶ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁷ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Fearing violence, 80pc Kunduz voters stayed home, 27 October 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁹ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁰ Asia Plus, After a month closure, elders help reopen 400 schools in Kunduz, 24 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁵ ACBAR, Putting Protection at the Heart of the Peace Process, 29 October 2018, [url](#)

society, the scale of damage to civilian infrastructure and homes caused by airstrikes and the subsequent land mining of these areas by non-state armed groups prevents the possible return of displaced families, even after the airstrikes have ended.¹⁶³⁶

UNOCHA continuously reported conflict-induced displacement in and from Chardarah district, due to military clearing/search operations and airstrikes.¹⁶³⁷ A displacement peak was registered in mid-January 2018 when almost 7 000 people were displaced due to an operation codenamed 'Pamir 17' in 10 villages of the district.¹⁶³⁸ The IDPs mainly went to the provincial capital Kunduz city, others stayed within the district itself.¹⁶³⁹ According to UNOCHA, the majority of these displaced families returned back to their places of origin or neighbouring villages inside Chardarah district in February 2018, however a large number of them stayed in Kunduz city.¹⁶⁴⁰ Another peak was registered by UNOCHA in the summer of 2018, with more than 7 000 people from Chardarah district being displaced to Kunduz city in July,¹⁶⁴¹ more than 2 400 IDPs arriving in Kunduz city in August due to four concurrent military operations in Chardarah¹⁶⁴² and almost 5 000 people displaced to Kunduz city in September due to a military operation in Nahri Sofi and Dobandi villages of Chardarah.¹⁶⁴³

A military operation in Emamsaheb district in January 2018 reportedly displaced some 2 000 families to other areas, including the provincial capital Kunduz City.¹⁶⁴⁴ In the summer of 2018 UNOCHA registered thousands of IDPs from Emamsaheb reaching the district centre.¹⁶⁴⁵

In January 2018 UNOCHA registered more than 2 600 IDPs within Qala-e-Zal district.¹⁶⁴⁶ Fighting at the military frontline between ANSF and AGEs in Bazar Aqtepa of Qala-e-Zal district at the end of April - beginning of May 2018 caused thousands of people to be displaced to Kunduz city and a desert area close to the district center of Qala-e-Zal.¹⁶⁴⁷

Military operations (in Ehsan Toop village) and drought led to the displacement of more than 1 400 people from Khanabad district to Kunduz city in April 2018.¹⁶⁴⁸ In May 2018, UNOCHA registered more than 2 300 conflict-induced IDPs within the district of Khanabad itself.¹⁶⁴⁹ In January 2019, UNOCHA

¹⁶³⁶ ACBAR, Putting Protection at the Heart of the Peace Process, 29 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2,000 Families Flee Homes as Kunduz Raids Continue, 20 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 22 - 28 January, 28 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kandahar Trader Assists Chahar Darah War-Hit Families, 30 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) - North and Northeastern Afghanistan, 11 February 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

¹⁶³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2,000 Families Flee Homes as Kunduz Raids Continue, 20 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 22 - 28 January, 28 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kandahar Trader Assists Chahar Darah War-Hit Families, 30 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) - North and Northeastern Afghanistan, 11 February 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

¹⁶⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 6 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 - 8 July, 9 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 25 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁶⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July - 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 12 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁴³ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 25 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 30 September, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 Villages Cut Off as Taliban Dynamite Kunduz Bridge, 23 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 25 June - 1 July 2018, 1 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz Clashes Displace Hundreds of Families, 2 May 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Conflicts Displace Almost 1,000 Kunduz Families, 5 May 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April - 6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 7 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 8 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 - 29 April 2018, 30 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

reported more than 2 400 people displaced from remote villages in Khanabad district to the district centre and Kunduz city.¹⁶⁵⁰

In November 2018, AGEs coordinated attacks on ANSF bases in Qarluq, Tapa Haji Mohibullah and Hazarbagh areas of Dasht-e-Archi district which led to the displacement of 400 families to Khwajaghar district of neighbouring Takhar province in November 2018.¹⁶⁵¹

According to a research study from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) on the challenges of IDP protection in Afghanistan, Kunduz province has become increasingly significant as both a point of departure and destination.¹⁶⁵² The research data published in January 2018 reported 63 % of IDP movements are within the province itself, 18 % are to Kabul province and 15 % are to Nangarhar province.¹⁶⁵³ Furthermore, 97 % of NRC's IDP respondents from Kunduz reported fleeing areas under Taliban control.¹⁶⁵⁴ UNOCHA noted in November 2018 that Kunduz was one of the three provinces that experienced the highest numbers of conflict-related displacement.¹⁶⁵⁵

In June 2018, the UN Secretary-General reported particularly high levels of displacement in Kunduz province, with many displaced families having been moved multiple times and having no immediate prospect of returning to their areas of origin.¹⁶⁵⁶ UNOCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan of December 2018 classified Kunduz as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.¹⁶⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Afghanistan Protection Cluster mentioned Kunduz as one of the six top hosting provinces for IDPs in May, June and August 2018.¹⁶⁵⁸

IOM rated Chardarah district 20th out of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDP's in April - June 2018¹⁶⁵⁹ and Kunduz district as 24th out of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.¹⁶⁶⁰ Several sources described Kunduz as one of the main areas for returning registered refugees in 2018.¹⁶⁶¹ A January 2018 study by Oxfam stated that the fear that the arrival of large groups of returnees in Kunduz will increase competition and upset the ethnic and power configurations in the province.¹⁶⁶²

¹⁶⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 January 2019, 15 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁶⁵¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 13 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 19 November 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁶⁵² NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶⁵³ NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶⁵⁴ NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁶⁵⁶ UN Secretary-General, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 6 June 2018, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2019 Update to the 2018-2010 Humanitarian Response Plan, 21 December 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁶⁵⁸ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan May 2018, 14 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan June 2018, 23 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, August 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁵⁹ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

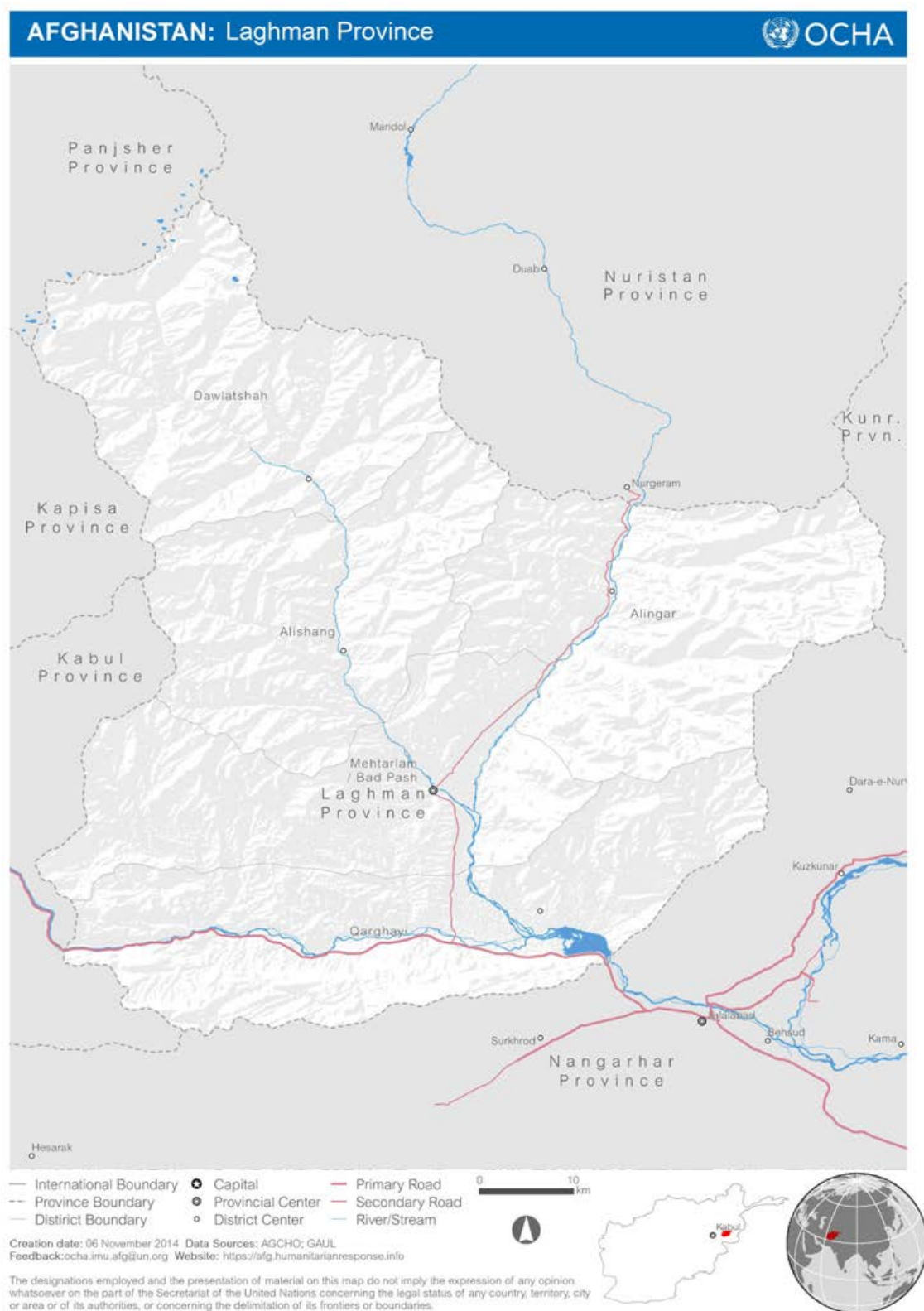
¹⁶⁶⁰ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶⁶¹ UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 June 2018, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Ahmad A., Refugees Return to Poverty, Unemployment and Despair: Afghanistan's Labor Market and the Status of Women, VIDC, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶⁶² Oxfam, Returning to Fragility: Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 25

2.21 Laghman

2.21.1 General description of the province



Laghman is located in eastern Afghanistan and it borders on the provinces of Panjshir and Nuristan to the north, Kunar to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Kabul and Kapisa to the west.¹⁶⁶³ The provincial capital of Laghman is Mehtarlam.¹⁶⁶⁴ The province is divided into the following districts: Alingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam, Qarghayi,¹⁶⁶⁵ and Bad Pash (also Bad Pakh); the latter became a district of its own in 2011.¹⁶⁶⁶ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Laghman is estimated at 476 537 for 2018/19¹⁶⁶⁷ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajik and Pashai tribes.¹⁶⁶⁸ The province is mostly mountainous, a fact that has favoured the insurgents in the past, who used to 'flee into remote mountain ranges', according to a report from 2014.¹⁶⁶⁹

The Kabul-Jalalabad section of Asian Highway AH-1 passes through Qarghayi district,¹⁶⁷⁰ where a secondary road branches off to connect to Nurgeram in Nuristan via the provincial capital Mehtarlam.¹⁶⁷¹ Bad Pash district has been a strategic crossing-point for Afghan and foreign insurgents coming from the border area and moving deeper into Afghanistan, especially to Kabul and Kapisa.¹⁶⁷²

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, opium-poppy cultivation levels in Laghman (2 092 hectares) remained similar to 2017 (2 257 hectares) with insignificant changes at district level.¹⁶⁷³

2.21.2 Conflict background and actors in Laghman

According to Khaama Press reporting in October 2018, Laghman, which was described as one of the 'relatively calm' provinces of Afghanistan, has seen a rise in activities by Taliban and ISKP militants in some remote districts of the province.¹⁶⁷⁴

Purportedly, Alingar district, which was mainly under the influence of the Taliban in the past, reportedly saw an increased presence of IS fighters, as reported in February 2018.¹⁶⁷⁵ As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Laghman as one of the IS 'strongholds' in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁷⁶

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Laghman province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.¹⁶⁷⁷

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Laghman province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁶⁷⁸ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes

¹⁶⁶³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Laghman, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁶ Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an 'insurgency corridor' in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁷ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁹ Stars and Stripes, Insurgents in Afghanistan's Laghman province may win by not losing, 15 November 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁰ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷² Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#); Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an 'insurgency corridor' in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁶⁷⁴ Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman province, 1 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁵ Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, [url](#); National (The), ISIS targets Taliban in fight for Afghanistan, 15 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁶ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁷⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁶⁷⁸ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019,

a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

LAGHMAN	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁶⁷⁹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Alingar	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 88%; Gov control: 12%
Alishang	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%
Dawlatshah	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Mehtarlam (Bad Pash) (capital)	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA control	Mehtarlam: GIROA control and Bad Pash: Contested	Gov control or undetermined	Mehtarlam: Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25% and Bad Pash: TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Qarghayi	Open Taliban presence - low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%

2.21.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.21.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 271 civilian casualties (93 deaths and 178 injured) in Laghman province. This represents a decrease of 23 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and UXO/landmines.¹⁶⁸⁰ The same source 'also documented continued reductions in civilian casualties from ground engagements in Kunduz province and Laghman province, which joined the top five provinces that had a reduction of civilian casualties from such operations in 2018'.¹⁶⁸¹ For Laghman province, it recorded 123 civilian casualties caused by ground engagements, which is a 53 % decrease compared to 2017.¹⁶⁸²

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Alishang, Mehtarlam, and Alingar in the highest category and Dawlatshah in the second highest category. Qarghayi falls in the fourth category.¹⁶⁸³

¹⁶⁷⁹ [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁰ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

¹⁶⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁶⁸² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 144 incidents related to insurgents in Laghman province.¹⁶⁸⁴

A Taliban attack on an army outpost in Qarghayi was foiled by Afghan security forces in January 2019.¹⁶⁸⁵ Also in Qarghayi district, IEDs, purportedly installed by anti-government militants, were defused by Afghan security forces in late December 2018.¹⁶⁸⁶ Airstrikes were carried out by foreign security forces in Alishang in November 2018, killing insurgents.¹⁶⁸⁷ Military operations against insurgents, Taliban and ISKP fighters, were carried out by Afghan security forces in Dawlatshah in October and in Alingar in September and February 2018, killing militants.¹⁶⁸⁸

Clashes between Taliban insurgents and ISKP fighters were reported in Alingar district throughout 2018.¹⁶⁸⁹ Battles between the two militant groups in Alingar district in February 2018 reportedly went on for more than a month killing as many as 40 militants and injuring dozens, according to local officials; Afghan special forces also conducted ground and air operations in the area. A local resident interviewed by the Salaam Times said that the fighting had reportedly caused the closure of schools, stoppages of vaccinations and the groups had been 'committing atrocities'.¹⁶⁹⁰

In August 2018 six girls were killed after the detonation of an unexploded ordnance in Alingar district.¹⁶⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News reported at least six civilians killed in a roadside bombing in Qarghayi district in February 2019.¹⁶⁹²

Election related violence was recorded in Laghman province by UNAMA, as the detonation of IEDs placed near a school serving as a polling centre in Mehtarlam injured civilians (12 men and two children).¹⁶⁹³

According to local sources quoted by IWPR, the Taliban have been threatening musicians and people listening to music for not conforming to their interpretation of Islam in some areas of Laghman province, including in Alishang and Mehtarlam districts.¹⁶⁹⁴

2.21.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 9 738 persons displaced from Laghman province almost all of whom (9 265) were displaced within the province.¹⁶⁹⁵

¹⁶⁸⁴ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁶⁸⁵ Khaama Press, Afghan forces foil Taliban attack on an army outpost in Laghman province, 22 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁶ Khaama Press, Afghan forces foil militants bid to detonate a bridge in Laghman, 23 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 2 children killed in Laghman, Kapisa airstrikes, 26 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 3 Daesh financiers held in Laghman, Nangarhar, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁸ Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman province, 1 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban, ISIS militants suffer heavy casualties in Laghman, Kunar provinces, 27 September 2018, [url](#); Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁹ National (The), ISIS targets Taliban in fight for Afghanistan, 15 July 2018, [url](#); 1TV News, Five killed in Taliban-Daesh clash in Laghman, 23 June 2018, [url](#); Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, [url](#); Frontier Post (The), Clashes erupt between Taliban, Daesh in Laghman, 14 February 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url](#); Huffington Post, Afghanistan un voto nel vuoto. E nel sangue, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁰ Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹¹ Tolonews, Six Girls Killed In Laghman Explosion, 15 August 2018, [url](#); Huffington Post, Una mattanza senza fine. Bandiera nera sul mattatoio-Afghanistan, 16 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Landmine kills 6 civilians in Laghman, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶⁹⁴ IWPR, Taleban Try to Silence Afghan Music Again, 20 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 14 persons displaced from Laghman province.¹⁶⁹⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 9 325 persons displaced to Laghman province.¹⁶⁹⁷

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Laghman province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹⁶⁹⁸

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Alingar	9 096	2 527	/	/
Alishang	177	3 500	/	/
Dawlatshah	139	/	14	/
Mehtarlam/Bad Pash	326	3 228	/	/
Qarghayi	/	70	/	/

In 2018, Laghman was considered as one of ‘the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities’.¹⁶⁹⁹ Insecurity is a factor in displacements in Laghman province.¹⁷⁰⁰ In at least seven Afghanistan Weekly Field Reports published between January 2018 and January 2019, UNOCHA stated that people have been displaced because of ‘threats and intimidation by Non State Armed Groups (NSAG)’.¹⁷⁰¹ Laghman districts affected by these causes of displacements are Alingar,¹⁷⁰² Alishang¹⁷⁰³ and Mehtarlam¹⁷⁰⁴ districts.

Clashes between non-state armed groups and sporadic conflicts were also a cause mentioned more than one time in UNOCHA weekly reports on displacements from Alingar district to Mehtarlam city¹⁷⁰⁵ and from Alishang district.¹⁷⁰⁶

In February 2018, an ANSF operation against non-state armed groups forced 4 200 people to find a shelter within Alingar district or in Mehtarlam City.¹⁷⁰⁷

¹⁶⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁷⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July – 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 – 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 February, 12 February 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018; [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April-6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 05 – 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 10-16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 01 January- 07 January 2019, 9 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April– 6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 – 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 05 – 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 01 January- 07 January 2019, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April-6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 01 January- 07 January 2019, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April– 6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, [url](#)

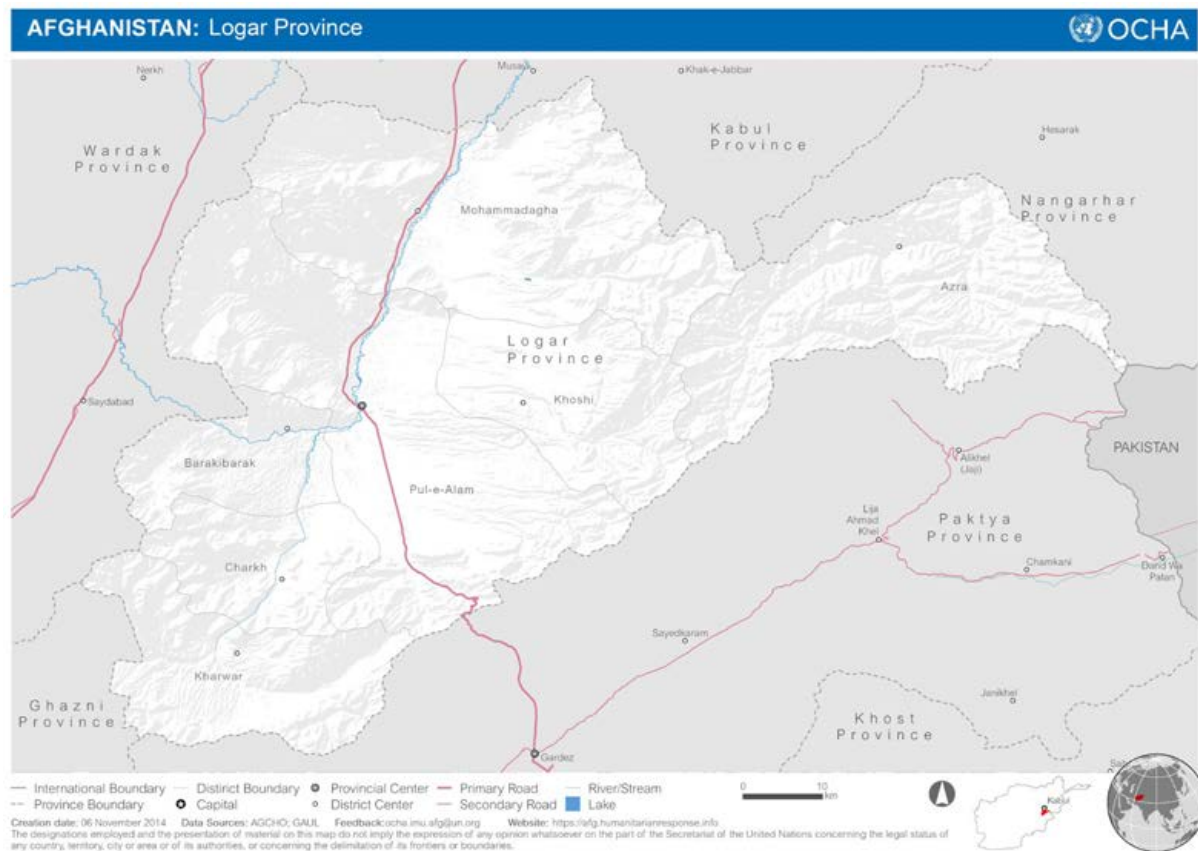
¹⁷⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 05 – 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 March – 1 April 2018, 9 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 – 8 April 2018, 9 April 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2019, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2019, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 19 - 25 February, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

2.22 Logar

2.22.1 General description of the province



Logar is located in central Afghanistan, about 65 kilometres south of Kabul.¹⁷⁰⁸ It borders on the provinces of Kabul to the north, Nangarhar to the north and east, Paktya to the south, and Ghazni and Maydan Wardak to the west.¹⁷⁰⁹ The provincial capital of Logar is Pul-e-Alam.¹⁷¹⁰ The province is divided into the following districts: Azra, Barakibarak, Charkh, Kharwar, Khoshi, Mohammad Agha, and Pul-e-Alam.¹⁷¹¹ According to the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, the population of Logar is estimated at 419 377 for 2018/19¹⁷¹² and is composed mainly of Tajiks, Pashtuns, and Hazara.¹⁷¹³ The province is rich in chromite ore, with deposits extracted illegally and smuggled to Pakistan.¹⁷¹⁴ The presence of natural resources in the province has often caused local rivalries over revenues coming from mineral deposits.¹⁷¹⁵

¹⁷⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Logar, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Logar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷¹² Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷¹³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Logar, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal extraction of Logar chromites goes on, 6 October 2015, [url](#); VoA, Report; Militant Groups in Afghanistan Get Rich Off Mineral Smuggling, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁵ Global Security Review, Are Afghanistan's Mineral Deposits the Answer to the Country's Economic Woes?, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

The Kabul-Gardez-Khost highway passes through the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e-Alam.¹⁷¹⁶ According to local sources quoted by the Afghanistan Times, Taliban militants stopped buses travelling on the highway section in Mohammad Agha and kidnapped government employees in November 2018. Security on the highway had purportedly been deteriorating and government officials could not travel on it.¹⁷¹⁷ The province served as a strategic crossing-point for Taliban fighters, not only due to its proximity to Kabul, but also because it provided easy access to insurgents' fronts in nearby provinces of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Khost, Wardak, and Ghazni; as well as in Pakistan.¹⁷¹⁸

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Logar has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.¹⁷¹⁹

2.22.2 Conflict background and actors in Logar

According to a 2014 report by AAN, the security situation in Logar province had been deteriorating since 2011. Taliban militants were seeking to control Azra, Khoshi, Barakibarak and Mohammadagha districts due to their strategic positions as bordering Nangarhar, Paktya, Maydan Wardak, and Kabul provinces. According to local sources quoted by AAN in December 2014, Taliban militants terrorised the population of Muhammad Agha by posting rules on mosque walls, sending death threats to people supposedly working for the government, extorting locals to spy for them and imposing curfews.¹⁷²⁰

According to local sources quoted by Tolonews, in April 2018, Taliban fighters and members of other insurgent groups have been active in parts of all of Logar's districts, including the provincial capital.¹⁷²¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Logar province is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps, which fall under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.¹⁷²²

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Logar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.¹⁷²³ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

LOGAR	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁷²⁴ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
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¹⁷¹⁶ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's struggle against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Logar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5

¹⁷¹⁷ Afghanistan Times, Taliban drag government servants out of buses along Kabul-Logar road, 16 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁸ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's struggle against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#); Gilles Dorronsoro, The Taliban's winning strategy for international peace, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009, [url](#), p. 22; Al Jazeera, Taliban attack in Afghanistan's Logar kills eight security forces, 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁷²⁰ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's struggle against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷²¹ Tolonews, Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, 27 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷²² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁷²³ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; Long War Journal, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁴ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Azra	Open Taliban presence – Medium	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Taliban control	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Barakibarak	Open Taliban Presence – high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Charkh	Open Taliban Presence – high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Kharwar	Open Taliban Presence – high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Khoshi	Open Taliban presence – low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 65%; Gov control: 35%
Mohammadagha	Open Taliban Presence – high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 55%; Gov control: 45%
Pul-e-Alam (capital)	Open Taliban Presence – high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Tsarkh	/	/	/	/	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

2.22.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.22.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 143 civilian victims (68 deaths and 75 injured) in Logar province. This represents a decrease of 3 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and complex attacks.¹⁷²⁵

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Charkh, Barakibarak, Pul-e Alam, and Mohammad Agha in the second highest category and Kharwar in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall in the lower category.¹⁷²⁶

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 151 incidents related to insurgents in Logar province.¹⁷²⁷

Logar is described by Khaama Press as 'among the relatively volatile provinces' with militants 'actively operating'; airstrikes carried out by coalition forces killed 8 Taliban militants in Mohammad Agha district in late December 2018.¹⁷²⁸ In August 2018, Taliban militants tried to storm the district centre of Azra. According to local sources, Afghan policemen, who had asked for air backup, were accidentally killed in airstrikes carried out by US forces.¹⁷²⁹ However, these claims were denied after an examination by pro-government security forces stating that the policemen were killed after a Taliban attack.¹⁷³⁰ In July 2018, an airstrike by the Afghan Air Force killed four civilians while targeting militants in Babos and Alowzai areas of Pul-e-Alam.¹⁷³¹

¹⁷²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁷²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷²⁷ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁷²⁸ Khaama Press, Drone strikes leaves [sic] 8 militants dead in Logar province, 26 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁹ APA and DPA, Dutzende Tote bei Gefechten und Explosionen in Afghanistan, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁰ Stars and Stripes, US says airstrike did not kill Afghan forces, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Protest as airstrike kills 4 civilians in Logar, 9 July 2018, [url](#)

Further military operations against insurgents were carried out in the form of ground engagements: in November 2018, Taliban militants were killed and some more were detained in Padkhab Shana area of Pul-e-Alam city during a night raid by NDS.¹⁷³² Also in November, ‘eight civilians, including women and children’, were killed during a night raid in Mohammad Agha district.¹⁷³³

In the first quarter of 2018, around 72 military operations against insurgents were purportedly carried out in the form of night raids and airstrikes, killing insurgents but also reportedly targeting civilian houses belonging to the civilian population in Barakibarak.¹⁷³⁴

In January 2019, a Taliban car bomb targeting the convoy of the Logar provincial governor exploded along this highway in Mohammad Agha district.¹⁷³⁵ In November 2018 a district chief and the NDS director for Barakibarak district were killed in a Taliban roadside bombing in Pul-e-Alam city.¹⁷³⁶ In late April 2018, Logar deputy governor Qamaruddin Shakib was killed in a Taliban attack in the district of Mohammad Agha.¹⁷³⁷

In August 2018, UNAMA verified threats by the Taliban against girls’ schools in Logar’s Barakibarak district that resulted in ‘the suspension of classes for girls above grade six in the district and the replacement of female teachers for younger girls with male teachers’.¹⁷³⁸ In July 2018 schools were purportedly closed in Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam due to threats by Taliban insurgents.¹⁷³⁹ A bomb explosion caused at least eight fatalities during a gathering of peace activists in late June 2018.¹⁷⁴⁰

2.22.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 2 471 persons displaced from Logar province, displaced to neighbouring provinces Kabul and Khost or within the province itself.¹⁷⁴¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 182 persons displaced from Barakibarak district in Logar province, to Kabul district in Kabul province.¹⁷⁴²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 217 persons displaced to Logar province, mainly coming from within the province itself (168 IDPs) or from neighbouring provinces of Kabul, Paktya and Khost.¹⁷⁴³

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Logar province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹⁷⁴⁴

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
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¹⁷³² Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 9 suspected detained in Logar, 25 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 civilians killed in Logar night raid, 21 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁴ Tolonews, Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, 27 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁵ Ariana News, Attack on Logar officials’ convoy leaves eight killed, 10 wounded, 20 January 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban attack in Afghanistan’s Logar kills eight security forces, 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, District chief, intelligence director killed in Logar roadside bombing, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁷ Tolonews, Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, 27 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁷³⁹ APA and DPA, Taliban bedrohen Lehrer in Afghanistan: Schulen geschlossen, 14 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁰ APA and DPA, Mindestens 29 Tote bei Kämpfen und Explosionen in Afghanistan, 28 Juni 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

Barakibarak	2 163	/	182	/
Charkh	259	/	/	/
Azra	14	/	/	/
Mohammadagha	35	28	/	/
Pul-e-Alam	/	189	/	/

According to UNOCHA, the main reasons for IDPs leaving the insecure districts of Barakibarak and Charkh in Logar province are military operations, insecurity, intimidation and economic problems.¹⁷⁴⁵ Many of the reported IDPs settled in the provincial capital Pul-e-Alam and in Mohammadagha district.¹⁷⁴⁶

In April and July 2018 UNOCHA reported respectively 1 000 and 900 IDPs arriving in Logar's provincial capital, Pul-e-Alam, coming from Chaparhar district of Nangarhar province.¹⁷⁴⁷ According to the authorities in Logar another 500 displaced people arrived in Pul-e-Alam in July 2018 coming from different locations within the province itself and from neighbouring Paktya province.¹⁷⁴⁸

After Kabul, Logar province is mentioned by UNHCR as one of the main areas of return in the central region in 2018.¹⁷⁴⁹ According to IOM's Afghanistan's Displacement Tracking Matrix Baseline Mobility Assessment in 2018, 1-in-6 people is a returnee and 1-in-4 people is an IDP in Logar province.¹⁷⁵⁰ IOM ranked provincial capital Pul-e-Alam as 9th out of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs from January to June 2018,¹⁷⁵¹ and ranked 16th out of the top 25 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.¹⁷⁵²

¹⁷⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Logar Province - Meeting Summary, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 January - 4 February, 5 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁴⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 100 IDP Families Get Cash, Food in Aid, 15 January 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Logar Province - Meeting Summary, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 January - 4 February, 5 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 - 29 April 2018, 30 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 - 22 July 2018, 22 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 25 June - 1 July 2018, 1 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁴⁹ UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

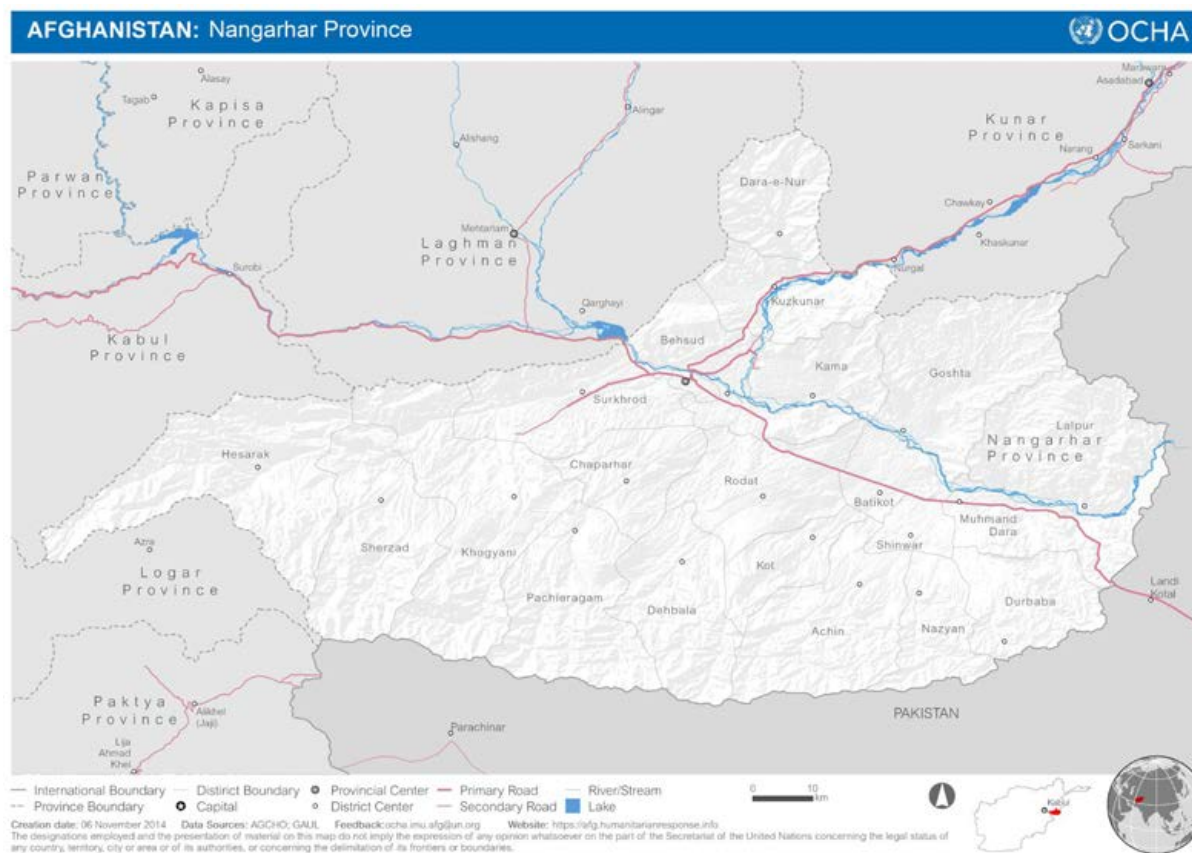
¹⁷⁵⁰ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; IOM, Displacement Survey Shows 3.5 Million Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad in 15 Afghan Provinces, 8 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵¹ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷⁵² IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

2.23 Nangarhar

2.23.1 General description of the province



Nangarhar is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Laghman and Kunar to the north, Pakistan to the east and south, and Logar and Kabul to the west.¹⁷⁵³ The provincial capital of Nangarhar is Jalalabad.¹⁷⁵⁴ The province is divided into the following districts: Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Chaparhar, Dara-e-Nur, Dehbala, Durbaba, Goshta, Hesarak, Jalalabad, Kama, Khogyani, Kot, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam, Rodat, Sherzad, Shinwar and Surkhrod.¹⁷⁵⁵ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Nangarhar is estimated at 1 635 872 for 2018/19¹⁷⁵⁶ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai, Arabs and Tajiks.¹⁷⁵⁷ Members of the Sikh and Hindu community lived in Nangarhar province, particularly in and nearby Jalalabad.¹⁷⁵⁸ According to the Afghan radio network Salam Watandar, many of them have been leaving Afghanistan due to insecurity and government's indifference. In late September 2018 only 60 families of the community still lived in Nangarhar.¹⁷⁵⁹

¹⁷⁵³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁴ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nangarhar, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁶ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁵⁷ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁸ Foschini, F., The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs, AAN, 23 September 2013, [url](#); Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁹ Salam Watandar, Sikhs and Hindus of Nangarhar leaving Afghanistan, 23 September 2018, [url](#)

Asian Highway AH-1 passes through the districts of Surkhrod, Jalalabad, Behsud, Rodat, Batikot, Shinwar, Muhmand Dara and reaches the Afghan-Pakistani border at Torkham.¹⁷⁶⁰ The province, which borders the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan¹⁷⁶¹ (now merged with Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province),¹⁷⁶² has served as an unofficial crossing-point for local and foreign militants.¹⁷⁶³

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Nangarhar was the leading poppy-cultivating province in the eastern region, even though the cultivation rate had decreased by 9 %, compared to 2017. The decrease applied to the districts of Khogyani, Chaparhar and Lalpur, whereas an increase was observed in Kot, Shinwari and Achin. Most of the national eradication procedures also took place in Nangarhar province.¹⁷⁶⁴

2.23.2 Conflict background and actors in Nangarhar

Nangarhar has been observing a deterioration of its political and security situation since 2011.¹⁷⁶⁵ According to a 2016 report by the AAN, the political and military vacuum that had been affecting the province for years, and paved the way for the rise of the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, the Islamic State Khorasan Province.

First, the gap between the provincial political elites and Nangarhar's population grew deeper, as corruption, local struggles for power and the failure to provide effective services undermined the people's trust in the Afghan government and left the population unprotected against insurgents. Moreover, the decrease in international combat forces in the province, starting from 2013, led to a considerable loss of territorial control by the Afghan government, mainly in the districts along the Spin Ghar mountain range in the south and the east of the province.

Second, the fragmented insurgency in Nangarhar, undermined by internal power struggles, undisciplined commanders and fighters involved in criminal activities, could never totally consolidate and stabilize its power within the province. Furthermore, different militant groups, Afghan and foreign, as well as Salafi fighters within the Taliban ranks, contributed to destabilising Nangarhar's Taliban movement even more, ending with many of them joining the Afghan branch of IS.¹⁷⁶⁶ In February 2019 Andrew Quilty from AAN noted that 'it has been almost four years since the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) captured territory in southern Nangrahar province, where it ruled with extreme brutality' and that whilst the ISKP 'has been driven back', it 'still holds some territory – and the "battle" goes on, with ISKP mainly now targeting civilians in large-scale, urban, terrorist attacks'.¹⁷⁶⁷

According to AAN, the following Afghan militant groups were operating in the province in 2016: the mainstream Taliban under the Quetta Shura's (or Rahbari Shura) command; the Tora Bora Jihadi Front, mostly active in Khogyani, Sherzad and Pachieragam, which was integrated into the mainstream Taliban movement in October 2015; Hezb-e Islami, mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Sherzad; the abovementioned Salafi groups, whose influence within the eastern provinces was significant, and who were mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Batikot; Fedaiy Karwan, a semi-autonomous group

¹⁷⁶⁰ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶¹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶² International Crisis Group, Shaping a New Peace in Pakistan's Tribal Areas, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶³ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷⁶⁵ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); TBIJ, Nangarhar: Descent into chaos, 30 July 2018, [url](#); New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁶ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁷ Quilty, A., "Faint lights twinkling against the dark": Reportage from the fight against ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

within the Taliban movement, mostly operating in Khogiani and Sherzad districts; and the Siahpushan ('plural: black-clad and masked'), whose alliance was not clear and who were active in Khogyani, Pachieragam and Sherzad.¹⁷⁶⁸

Additionally, foreign militant groups were: Al Qaeda, mostly operating around the former Khyber Agency in Pakistan and Kunar; the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, mostly operating in southern and eastern districts; Lashkar-e Islam operating mainly in Nazyan and Achin and which cooperated with the IS; Jamaat ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of TTP mostly operating in Lalpur, Goshta and Muhmand Dara; Junud-e Khorasan, another splinter group of TTP, also operating mainly in the latter districts; the Salafi oriented group Amr bil ma'ruf Wa Nahi An Al-Munkar, active in Nazyan and Achin and the Ansar ul-Islam, a Pakistani pro-government group sometimes present in Nazyan and Achin.¹⁷⁶⁹

As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Nangarhar as one of the ISKP 'strongholds' in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁷⁰ UNAMA's 2018 annual report noted that 'Daesh/ISKP is present in the east of Afghanistan, with an estimated 3,000 fighters currently active, primarily in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces'.¹⁷⁷¹

Differences in social-tribal solidarity among the Shinwari tribe, which is prevailing in many districts of Nangarhar, were another factor that led to the rise of IS in the province. Whilst the Shaikhan tribesmen, a Shinwari sub-tribe predominant in Durbaba, showed cohesion and were able to push back the insurgency in their district, the Shinwari tribal communities in other districts were fragmented and characterised by power struggles and was therefore unable to serve as an opposition to the insurgency. As a consequence, intra-tribal fighting eroded the strength of social structures and made the communities vulnerable to pressure from local and foreign insurgents.¹⁷⁷²

Furthermore, the involvement of external actors like Pakistan, Iran, India, China, Russia and the United States complicated the already tense intra-provincial relations among warlords, strongmen, criminals, local officials, businessmen and Taliban militants.¹⁷⁷³

Pro-government military special units, also referred to as counter-terrorism pursuit teams, are reportedly operating in Nangarhar and Khost provinces. These forces, which are unofficially trained and overseen by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and in charge of combating the insurgency, have also reportedly been responsible for killing and torturing civilians.¹⁷⁷⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nangarhar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.¹⁷⁷⁵

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Nangarhar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁷⁷⁶ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes

¹⁷⁶⁸ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); See also: EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report, Pakistan, Security Situation, October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁰ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷⁷¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 60

¹⁷⁷² Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷³ New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁴ New York Times (The), C.I.A.'s Afghan Forces Leave a Trail of Abuse and Anger, 31 December 2018, [url](#); Die Presse, Afghanistan vor dramatischer Wende, 28 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁷⁷⁶ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

NANGARHAR	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁷⁷⁷ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Achin	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Batikot	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Control	Contested	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%
Behsud	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Chaparhar	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Dara-e-Nur	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Dehbala (Hasqa Mina)	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control
Durbaba	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%
Goshta	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Hesarak	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Jalalabad (capital)	Open Taliban Presence - medium/low	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Kama	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Control	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 85%; TB control: 15%
Khogyani	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 65%; Gov control: 35%
Kot	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 67%; TB control: 33%
Kuzkunar	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/

¹⁷⁷⁷ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Lalpur	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 77%; Gov control: 23%
Muhmand Dara	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Nazyan	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 85%; TB control: 15%
Pachieragam	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Rodat	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 87%; TB control: 13%
Shinwar	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	/
Surkhrod	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 55%; Gov control: 45%
Sherzad	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Ghani Khel	/	/	/	/	TB control: 65%; Gov control: 35%
Khewa	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Spin Ghar	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%

2.23.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.23.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 1 815 civilian casualties (681 deaths and 1 134 injured) in Nangarhar province. This represents an increase of 111 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were suicide/complex attacks, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and ground engagements. The number of civilian casualties due to IEDs (mostly non-suicide) 'increased four-fold' and 'nearly reached the same levels as Kabul for the first time'.¹⁷⁷⁸

In 2018, UNAMA recorded 17 suicide and complex attacks in Nangarhar attributed to ISKP, which caused 738 civilian casualties (222 deaths and 516 injuries).¹⁷⁷⁹

In mid-June 2018, ISKP 'conducted two large attacks in Nangarhar against Taliban and civilian gatherings [...], resulting in 181 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 133 injured)'.¹⁷⁸⁰

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Khogyani, Chaparhar, Dehbal, Batkot and Rodat in the highest category and Jalalabad, Hesarak, Surkhrod, Pachieragam, Achin, Shinwar and Muhmand Dara districts in the second highest category. Behsud, Kot,

¹⁷⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁷⁷⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁷⁸⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 9

Goshta, Lalpur, Sherzad and Nazyan are in the third highest category while Kama is in the category below. The remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.¹⁷⁸¹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 754 incidents related to insurgents in Nangarhar province.¹⁷⁸²

Airstrikes against ISKP were carried out by pro-government forces in Achin in January 2019,¹⁷⁸³ in Nazyan in November 2018,¹⁷⁸⁴ and in Deh Bala in March 2018,¹⁷⁸⁵ killing ISKP fighters;¹⁷⁸⁶ as well as in Khogyani and Chaparhar districts.¹⁷⁸⁷ In January 2019, airstrikes were also carried out against Taliban militants in Hesarak and 'along a road in Nangarhar', killing several insurgents.¹⁷⁸⁸ Moreover, airstrikes killed high ranking ISKP fighters in the province throughout 2018: Qari Riaz, one of the leaders of ISKP, in Chaparhar district¹⁷⁸⁹ and the ISKP spokesman for Afghanistan, Sultan Aziz Azam, in Pachieragam district in late December 2018¹⁷⁹⁰ as well as Saad Arhabi, another top leader of ISKP, in Khogyani in August 2018.¹⁷⁹¹ A night raid carried out by Afghan forces in Chaparhar district in late May 2018 purportedly caused casualties among the civilian population.¹⁷⁹² Clashes between Taliban militants and ISKP were reported in Nangarhar province.¹⁷⁹³

Suicide attacks and other acts of aggression were carried out in Nangarhar province throughout 2018: in early October 2018 an ISKP suicide attack during an election-campaign rally in Kama district killed 13 civilians and wounded 30 people.¹⁷⁹⁴ Also in early October 2018, a bomb detonation took place near a cricket pitch in Batikot, wounding at least children.¹⁷⁹⁵ In September 2018, a suicide attack targeted a protest in Mohmand Dara district, near the Jalalabad-Torkham highway¹⁷⁹⁶ and caused casualties among the civilian population (at least 68 killed and 165 injured).¹⁷⁹⁷ Moreover, also in September 2018, bombs exploded in front of girls' schools in Jalalabad, killing one pupil and wounding 4 others, and in Behsud district.¹⁷⁹⁸

In late July 2018, casualties were recorded after insurgents stormed a government building and took people hostage.¹⁷⁹⁹ In early July 2018 a suicide bombing in Jalalabad claimed by the IS killed members

¹⁷⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁸² Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁷⁸³ Khaama Press, Coalition forces carry out drone strikes against ISIS-K hideouts in Nangarhar, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 Taliban, Daesh rebels killed in Laghman, Nangarhar airstrikes, 4 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁵ Tolonews, 14 Insurgents Killed in Kunduz, Nangarhar Airstrikes, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁶ Khaama Press, Coalition forces carry out drone strikes against ISIS-K hideouts in Nangarhar, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 Taliban, Daesh rebels killed in Laghman, Nangarhar airstrikes, 4 November 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, 14 Insurgents Killed in Kunduz, Nangarhar Airstrikes, 26 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷⁸⁸ Khaama Press, Coalition airstrike target Taliban IED planters in Nangarhar leaving 5 dead, 18 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁹ Khaama Press, Top ISIS-K leader Qari Riaz killed in coalition airstrike in Nangarhar, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁰ Ariana News, U.S. Airstrike kills Daesh spokesman in Afghanistan, 27 December 2018, [url](#); VoA, Islamic State-Afghanistan Spokesman Killed in US Airstrike, 27 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹¹ National (The), ISIS leader in Afghanistan killed in strike, spy agency says, 26 August 2018, [url](#); News International (The), Daesh Afghan chief killed by airstrikes in Nangarhar, 27 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹² Al Jazeera, Afghan forces night raid kills civilians in Nangarhar, 29 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹³ TBIJ, Nangarhar: Descent into chaos, 30 July 2018, [url](#); UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷⁹⁴ RFE/RL, At Least 13 Dead, Dozens Injured In Apparent Suicide Attack At Afghan Campaign Rally, 2 October 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Carnage at Afghan election rally as suicide bomber strikes, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁵ Reuters, Carnage at Afghan election rally as suicide bomber strikes, 2 October 2018, [url](#); AP, At least 14 killed in suicide bombing at Afghan election rally, 2 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁶ Tolonews, Death Toll Rises To 32 In Nangarhar Explosion, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁷ RFE/RL, Death Toll In Suicide Attack In Eastern Afghanistan Soars To 68, 12 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁸ AFP, Student killed in twin bomb attack near Afghan girls' school: officials, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁹ Guardian (The), Afghanistan: gunmen storm government building in eastern city, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

of the Sikh and Hindu community, among them the only Sikh candidate for parliamentary elections.¹⁸⁰⁰ During an attack on a boys' school in Khogyani district, ISKP militants beheaded three employees and set the school building on fire in late June 2018.¹⁸⁰¹ Due to threats by ISKP, more than 80 girls' schools were closed in Jalalabad and its neighbouring districts in June 2018.¹⁸⁰² According to UNAMA in June 'ISKP expressly declared its intention to target schools, particularly girls' schools [...]. Alleging that aerial operations by international and Afghan national security forces of residential areas in Deh Balah district [...] over the previous three days had killed approximately one hundred women and children, the group warned that all girls' schools in Nangarhar province would be targets for attack thereafter'.¹⁸⁰³

In May 2018 explosions during a cricket match in Jalalabad killed at least eight spectators.¹⁸⁰⁴ In January 2018 a suicide attack targeting the Save the Children office in Jalalabad and claimed by the IS, killed and injured security forces and civilians.¹⁸⁰⁵

2.23.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 12 236 persons displaced from Nangarhar, almost all of which (10 461) found refuge within the province itself and in neighbouring provinces like Kabul, Laghman, or in other provinces more distant like Khost, Paktya and Wardak.¹⁸⁰⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 154 persons displaced from Nangarhar province, with all of them displaced within the province.¹⁸⁰⁷

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 11 274 persons displaced to Nangarhar province.¹⁸⁰⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 154 persons displaced to Nangarhar province, from Hesarak district to Jalalabad.¹⁸⁰⁹

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Achin	52	/	/	/
Batikot	406	392	/	/
Behsud	/	1 461	/	/
Chaparhar	1 900	146	/	/
Dara-e-Nur	/	133	/	/
Dehbala	5 221	3 708	/	/
Hesarak	392	/	154	/

¹⁸⁰⁰ BBC News, Afghanistan blast: Sikhs among the 19 dead in Jalalabad suicide attack, 1 July 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), Sikhs and Hindus Bear Brunt of Latest Afghanistan Suicide Attack, 1 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰¹ New York Times (The), Sikhs and Hindus Bear Brunt of Latest Afghanistan Suicide Attack, 1 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰² Telegraph (The), Eighty Afghan girls' schools close over Islamic State threat, 6 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁸⁰⁴ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Jalalabad cricket match bomb attack kills eight, 19 May 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), Rare Attack on Cricket Match in Afghanistan Kills at Least 8, 19 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁵ BBC News, Save the Children offices attacked in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, 24 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

Jalalabad	/	2 286	/	154
Kama	/	50	/	/
Khogyani	1 749	473	/	/
Kot	81	/	/	/
Kuzkunar	/	111	/	/
Muhmand Dara	7	/	/	/
Nazyan	77	/	/	/
Pachieragam	1 730	350	/	/
Rodat	98	213	/	/
Sherzad	460	/	/	/
Shinwar	28	/	/	/
Surkhrod	35	1 951	/	/

In 2018, Nangarhar province was considered as one of 'the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities'.¹⁸¹⁰

In at least seven UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Field Reports published between January 2018 and January 2019, it is reported that people have been displaced in Nangarhar because of 'threats and intimidation' by 'Non State Armed Groups (NSAG) or Armed Opposition groups (AOG)'.¹⁸¹¹ For example, in February 2018, 2 114 people were displaced for these reasons during one week within the province.¹⁸¹² In June 2018, UNOCHA recorded 3 000 people¹⁸¹³ and in September 3 400 people displaced for these reasons.¹⁸¹⁴

Armed clashes have also resulted in displacements: armed clashes between armed groups have resulted in the displacement of 300 people from Batikot district to Jalalabad city and other areas in May 2018.¹⁸¹⁵ ANSF operations in June 2018 in Dehbala district led to the displacement of 3 500 people within the district.¹⁸¹⁶

¹⁸¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁸¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 February, 12 February 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12 - 18 February, 19 February 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 19 - 25 February, 26 February 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 - 21 May 2018, 22 May 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 18 - 24 June 2018, 25 June 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 3 - 9 September 2018, 10 September 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 10-16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12 - 18 February, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 18 - 24 June 2018, 25 June 2018, [url](#)

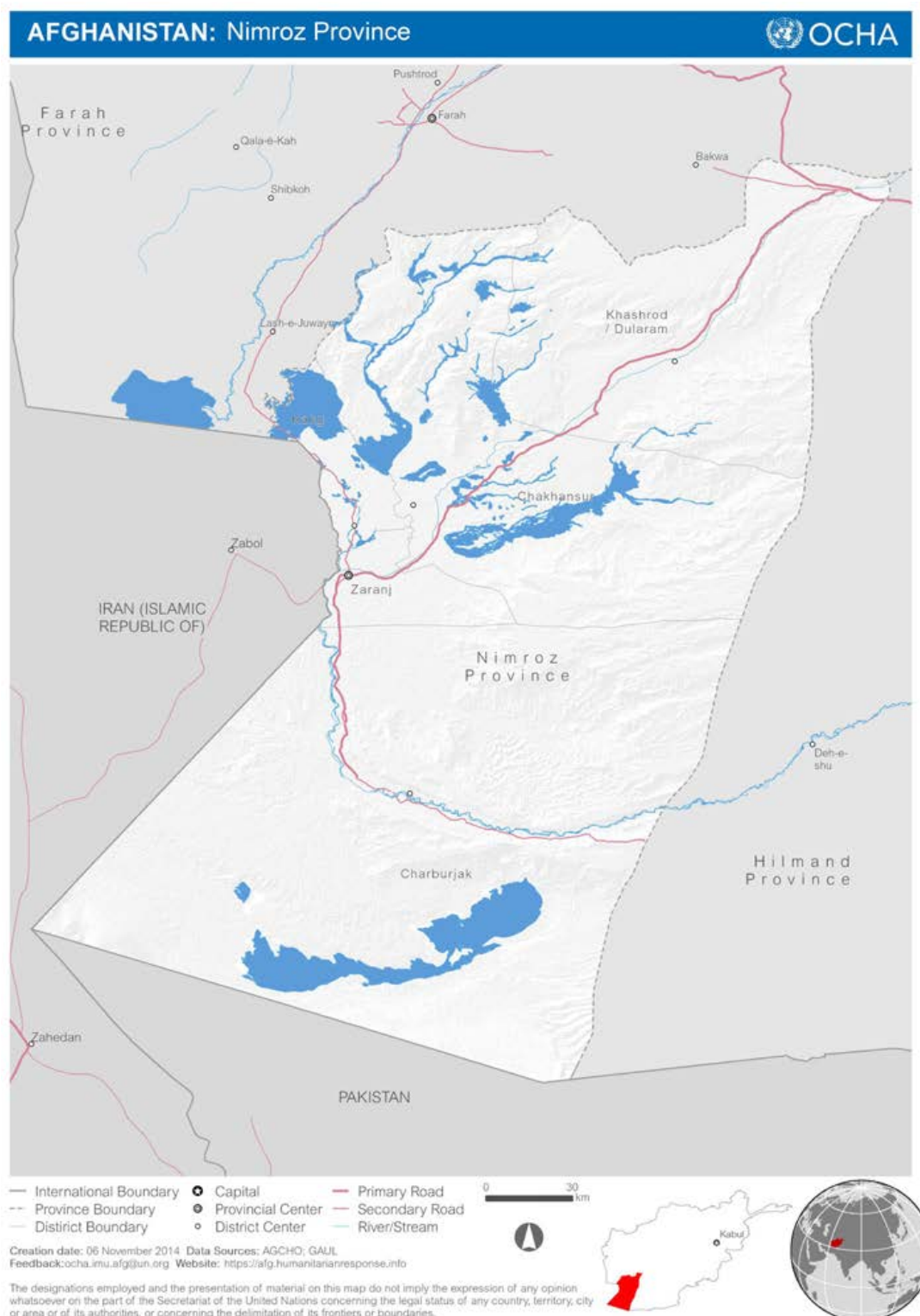
¹⁸¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 3-9 September 2018, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 21 - 27 May 2018, 28 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 10 June 2018, 11 June 2018, [url](#)

2.24 Nimroz

2.24.1 General description of the province



Nimroz province is located in the south-west of Afghanistan, alongside the border with Iran and Pakistan.¹⁸¹⁷ The province borders Farah to the north, Helmand to the east, Pakistan to the south and

¹⁸¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

Iran to the west. The provincial capital is Zaranj.¹⁸¹⁸ Nimroz is divided into the following districts: Chakhansur, Charburjak, Kang, Khashrod and Zaranj.¹⁸¹⁹ Dularam, which became part of Farah province in 2009, went back under Nimroz' jurisdiction in 2013 and became a district on its own.¹⁸²⁰

According to the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, the population of Nimroz is estimated at 176 898 for 2018/19,¹⁸²¹ and is composed mainly of Balochs, followed by Pashtuns, Tajiks¹⁸²² and Uzbeks.¹⁸²³ The province's topography consists of flat and mostly desert terrain.¹⁸²⁴ In January 2019 Pajhwok Afghan News reported about the negative impact of 'the worst drought in living memory' in Nimroz province, as many farmers lost significant amounts of livestock.¹⁸²⁵ The Afghan government had plans to construct water dams on major Afghan rivers flowing towards Iran; one of the projects involved the Kamal Khan dam in Charburjak,¹⁸²⁶ which was targeted by a Taliban attack in November 2018, that caused the deaths of 12 guards and one insurgent.¹⁸²⁷ According to sources quoted by Foreign Policy magazine, Iran was trying to sabotage the dam project by supporting the local Taliban.¹⁸²⁸

A national highway, starting from Delaram and intersecting Highway One, passes through the districts of Khashrod, Chakhansur and Zaranj; it leads to Zaranj city, at the Afghan-Iranian border.¹⁸²⁹ Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the Zaranj-Dularam highway and charged taxes on vehicles carrying goods, as reported in January 2018.¹⁸³⁰ The city of Zaranj hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.¹⁸³¹

The province is of strategic position for smuggling because of its proximity to Iran, Pakistan and Helmand. Moreover, the Zaranj – Dularam road and the south-western highways have been used as transit routes for drugs trafficking.¹⁸³² Furthermore, the province of Nimroz was identified as a 'key human trafficking route' by a Tolo News investigation from September 2018, as many Afghan migrants who intend to leave the country get to Iran by passing through Nimroz.¹⁸³³

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Nimroz province decreased by 21 % compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Khashrod and Charburjak.¹⁸³⁴

According to an IWPR report from February 2018, the province was facing a significant drug problem due to a growing local rate of addiction. The high addiction rate was attributed to the large numbers

¹⁸¹⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸²⁰ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013, November 2013, [url](#), p. 14; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nimroz, 1 February 2017, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸²¹ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸²³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸²⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz farmers in despair as drought kills livestock, 2 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁶ Diplomat (The), Iran's Support for the Taliban Brings It to a Crossroads With Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 Kamal Khan Dam guards killed in Taliban attack, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁸ Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁹ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, [url](#), p. 5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban running 'customs check-point' on Nimroz road, 20 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸³¹ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

¹⁸³² IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸³³ Tolonews, Nimroz Identified As Key Human Trafficking Route, 13 September 2018, [url](#); Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 33

of returnees from Iran, who started using drugs while working there.¹⁸³⁵ According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News, 70 % of Afghans working in Iran were addicted before returning to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the number of drug addicts in Nimroz tripled in 2018, as a result of high levels of deportations of Afghan refugees from Iran and easy access to drugs.¹⁸³⁶ According to Foreign Policy magazine, Nimroz province, which was considered ‘Afghanistan’s drug-smuggling hub’, served as a ‘financial artery’ for the Taliban. Zaranj city was described as ‘Afghanistan’s smuggling capital’.¹⁸³⁷

2.24.2 Conflict background and actors in Nimroz

Nimroz belongs to the ‘forgotten’ provinces of Afghanistan.¹⁸³⁸ According to sources quoted by Foreign Policy magazine, the province has been among the most problematic areas of the country, partly because it has been marginal and unimportant to the government.¹⁸³⁹ It has maintained this reputation even after the implementation of investments to strengthen state institutions in the post-2001 years which is perceived to have increased the influence of local strongmen, criminals and insurgents due to corruption.¹⁸⁴⁰ Moreover, constant disputes with Iran over water sources have characterized relations for centuries.¹⁸⁴¹ During the last years, the tensions worsened due to supposedly surreptitious support of the Taliban movement by Iran.¹⁸⁴²

According to sources quoted by the French newspaper, Le Figaro, Iran has been supporting the Taliban financially, militarily and also by providing them with training units organised by the Qods Force, a branch of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. In return, Taliban fighters had to intensify their operations against ISKP and US troops.¹⁸⁴³ Purportedly, Iran’s influence over the province was so high, that even Afghan governmental officials were said to be spying for Iran.¹⁸⁴⁴

Taliban fighters loyal to Mullah Rasul, the leader of a Taliban splinter group active in western Afghanistan, have been operating in Nimroz province, perceived to be fighting against the main Taliban faction for control of drug-trafficking route.¹⁸⁴⁵

Even though Al Qaeda has not announced its presence in Nimroz, a US soldier was killed during a firefight with the group in late November 2018. Not announcing its presence is purportedly ‘consistent with the [Al Qaeda’s] strategy inside Afghanistan’.¹⁸⁴⁶

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nimroz province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.¹⁸⁴⁷

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Nimroz province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the

¹⁸³⁵ IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, [url](#); Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Drug addicts’ population triples in Nimroz this year, 9 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁷ Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁸ Diplomat (The), Afghanistan’s Forgotten Province, 1 December 2010, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁹ Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁰ Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴¹ Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#); Foschini, F., On the borders: Where do the attacks in Nimroz come from?, AAN, 18 August 2012, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴² Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Iran’s Support for the Taliban Brings It to a Crossroads With Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴³ Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l’Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, [url](#), p. 31; Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁴ Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l’Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁸⁴⁵ RFE/RL, Taliban Infighting Leaves Dozens Of Militants Dead In Afghanistan, 30 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁶ LWJ, Taliban continues to host foreign terrorist groups, despite assurances to the contrary, 7 February 2019, [url](#); LWJ, US service member killed during a battle with al Qaeda in Afghanistan, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁷ NATO, RS Afghanistan, Task Force Southwest, n.d., [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

Taliban.¹⁸⁴⁸ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

NIMROZ	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁸⁴⁹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Zaranj (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA control	GIRoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Charburjak	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Chakhansur	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Kang	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Khashrod (Dularam)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

2.24.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.24.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 82 civilian casualties (18 deaths and 64 injured) in Nimroz province. This represents a decrease of 17 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by UXO/landmines and aerial attacks.¹⁸⁵⁰

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Khashrod in the second highest category and Zaranj in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.¹⁸⁵¹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 65 incidents related to insurgents in Nimroz province.¹⁸⁵²

¹⁸⁴⁸ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁹ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

¹⁸⁵⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁸⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁵² Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

Pro-government security forces carried out military operations against Al Qaeda in Nimroz province in November 2018; one US soldier died.¹⁸⁵³ Moreover in November and December 2018, airstrikes were carried out in Khashrod district, killing and wounding Taliban militants.¹⁸⁵⁴ In July 2018, insurgents attacked an Afghan police check-post in Khashrod district, killing Afghan security personnel.¹⁸⁵⁵ US airstrikes targeting Taliban narcotic production factories were carried out in April 2018.¹⁸⁵⁶ Clashes between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban took place in Dil Aram¹⁸⁵⁷ and in Charburjak,¹⁸⁵⁸ causing fatalities among Taliban militants and Afghan security forces.¹⁸⁵⁹

In November 2018, Taliban militants shot dead a supposed ‘uprising commander’ from Jawzjan province in the district of Khashrod, after having dragged him out of a passenger vehicle travelling on the Dularam-Khashrud highway.¹⁸⁶⁰ In October 2018 a community elder known for his tribal and Taliban mediation efforts was assassinated in Delaram.¹⁸⁶¹ Also in October 2018, an Imam was shot by unidentified gunmen on his way home Chakhansor district.¹⁸⁶²

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, road blockades were set up in Nimroz by insurgents during the two days of elections in October 2018 to keep locals from voting and to delay the transport of electoral material.¹⁸⁶³

2.24.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 74 persons displaced from Nimroz province. All of them were displaced within the province itself from Khashrod/Dularam district to Zaranj.¹⁸⁶⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 12 persons displaced from Nimroz. They were displaced to Herat.¹⁸⁶⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 617 persons displaced to Nimroz province mainly from other provinces, they all settled in Zaranj district.¹⁸⁶⁶

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Nimroz province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.¹⁸⁶⁷

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Khashrod / Dularam	74	/	12	/

¹⁸⁵³ Guardian (The), Three members of US military killed in Afghanistan explosion, 27 November 2018, [url](#); LWJ, US service member killed during battle with al Qaeda in Afghanistan, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Airstrikes kill 15 Taliban in Farah, Nimroz, 6 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 militants killed in Nimroz airstrike, 23 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz: Taliban kill 6 policemen, snatch weapons, 14 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁶ VoA, IS Leader in Afghanistan Killed; Taliban Drug Factories Targeted, 9 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 ALP personnel killed in Kunduz, Nimroz clashes, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁸ New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Nov. 9-15, 15 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁹ New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Nov. 9-15, 15 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 ALP personnel killed in Kunduz, Nimroz clashes, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Man's body found with Taliban letter in Nimroz, 16 November 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, [url](#), p. 5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶¹ TBIJ, One day in Afghanistan, 7 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Unknown gunmen kill Imam in Nimroz, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

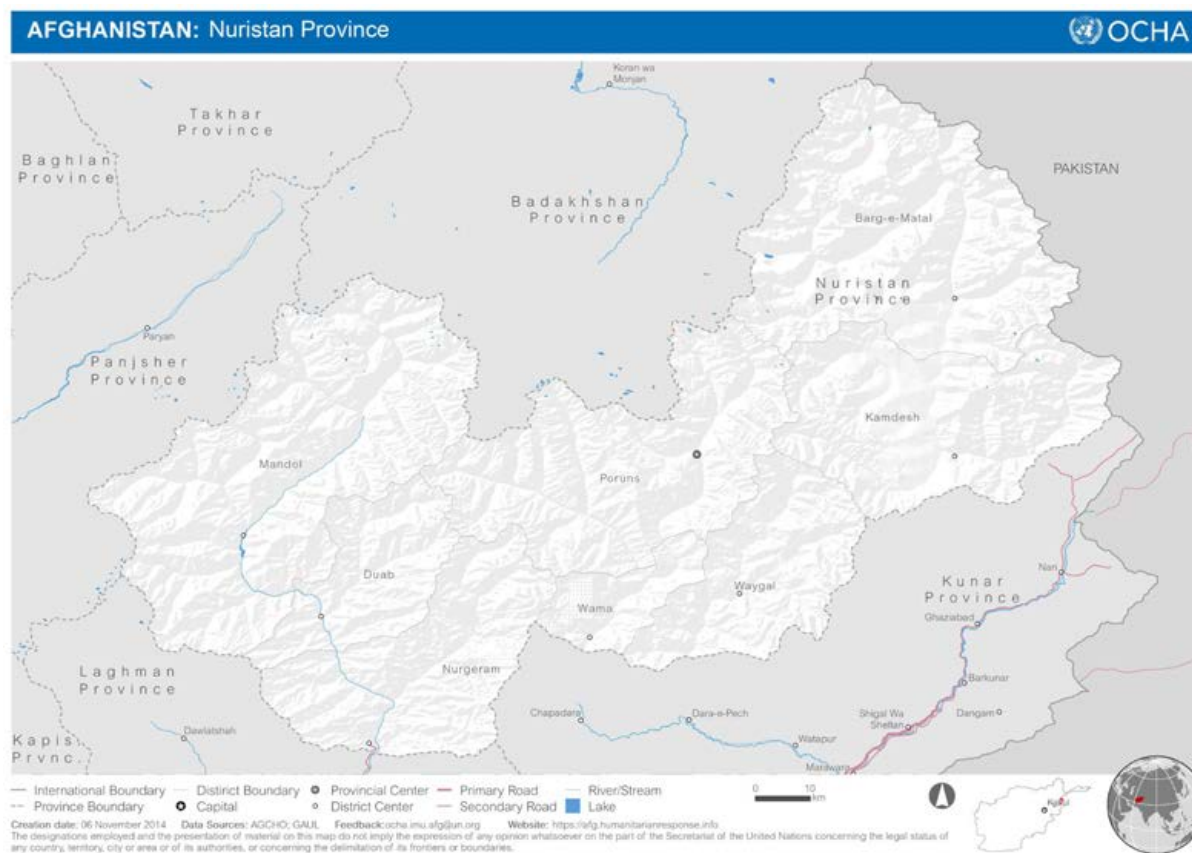
¹⁸⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

Zaranj	/	617	/	/
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2.25 Nuristan

2.25.1 General description of the province



Nuristan is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Badakhshan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Kunar and Laghman to the south and Panjshir to the west.¹⁸⁶⁸ The provincial capital of Nuristan is Parun. The province is divided into the following districts: Barg-e-Matal, Duab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgeram, Parun, Wama and Waygal.¹⁸⁶⁹ Nuristan is mostly mountainous and belongs to 'the most remote, under-served and unknown provinces' of Afghanistan.¹⁸⁷⁰ It is divided into three isolated valleys: the Alingar River valley in the west, the Pech River valley in the centre and the Landay Sin River valley in the east. Because its inhabitants were non-Muslim, the province was called Kafiristan (land of the infidels) until the mid-1890s, when its population converted to Islam and it was renamed Nuristan (land of light).¹⁸⁷¹

According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Nuristan is estimated at 158 211 for 2018/19¹⁸⁷² and it is composed mainly of Nuristani, followed by Pashai, Pashtuns, Gujars and Tajiks.¹⁸⁷³ Although the Nuristani people are mostly considered as a single ethnic group, de facto they comprise numerous

¹⁸⁶⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nuristan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nuristan, 1 February 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁰ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷¹ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷² Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁷³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d., [url](#)

ethnic and sub-ethnic communities that speak different Indo-European languages, sometimes subsumed under the Dardic languages branch.¹⁸⁷⁴

Most of the province's roads used to be travelable only by pack animals. Even so, Nuristan became a key support route from Pakistan for mujahideen groups in the past and remains so for the numerous insurgents active in the area today. Moreover, it connects Kabul and the Panjshir valley in the central region through the provinces of Kapisa and Laghman. Given its strategic position, road building projects were already carried out during mujahideen-times and continued by the US forces and the Afghan government after 2001 in order to fight the insurgency. However, in November 2018, in some areas of the province the road conditions remained poor.¹⁸⁷⁵

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Nuristan has maintained poppy-free status since 2013, with the exception of 2017, when 121 hectares were cultivated.¹⁸⁷⁶

2.25.2 Conflict background and actors in Nuristan

Conservative religious groups, such as Wahabis and Salafis, have been active in the province for centuries. The Afghan-Soviet war saw a particular consolidation of the power of these groups in Nuristan.¹⁸⁷⁷ Before the communist regime, religious leaders were respected and influenced politics. However, in areas of the province like the Landay Sin valley, power was shared through community democracy, with a body of elders and a body of policemen were appointed annually in order to define policies and enforce community law.¹⁸⁷⁸

The Islamic clergy started to mobilize in the province after 1978, when the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) failed to establish its rule. In this regard, the Daulat-e Inqilabiye Islam-ye Nuristan (Islamic Revolutionary State of Nuristan) emerged in northern Nuristan under the leadership of the religious scholar Mawlawi Muhammad Afzar, who also supported the Taliban movement and was therefore given the freedom to rule over the province. After the escalation of hostilities with Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami in 1997, his control started to decline and Hezb-e Islami became more influential in the province.¹⁸⁷⁹

After 2001, various counter-insurgency operations were carried out throughout the province by the US military and coalition forces, until the US withdrew their troops in 2009, following some defeats. Subsequently, the Taliban again expanded their control over large areas of the province due to the neglect by the Afghan government.¹⁸⁸⁰ Moreover, some areas of the province, like Kamdesh's district centre and Mandol district, were under the rule of a Hezb-e Islami commander and a security commander, respectively, both appointed by the Afghan government.¹⁸⁸¹

According to an AAN report, in November 2018 almost all the districts of Nuristan province were somehow under control or influence of the Taliban. Villages were reported to be isolated from each other, as well as from the district centres, where governmental presence has often been defined as

¹⁸⁷⁴ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁵ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); Foschini, F., New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁸⁷⁷ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); Middle East Institute, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, December 2009, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁸ Middle East Institute, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, December 2009, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁹ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁰ Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸¹ Foschini, F., New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012, [url](#)

‘token’. The community elders still play an important role, as they take most of the decisions. The police’s presence is limited to district centres.¹⁸⁸²

ISKP has been reported to be active in Nuristan since 2016, when many of its fighters came to the province, following the loss of large parts of their territory in neighbouring Nangarhar.¹⁸⁸³ Most of them were purportedly foreign fighters.¹⁸⁸⁴ In June 2017, a governmental source quoted by AAN reported ISKP presence in the districts of Mandol, Duab, Nurgeram, Waygal and Wama.¹⁸⁸⁵ As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Nuristan as one of the ISKP ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁸⁶ The relations between Taliban and ISKP militants were reportedly conflict-ridden, as Taliban fighters tried to clear some Afghan provinces from IS presence, including Nuristan.¹⁸⁸⁷ Moreover, whilst the Taliban movement follows the Hanafi School of Islamic law, ISKP fighters belong to the Salafi movement. The ISKP could therefore count on the support of Salafi enclaves in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan. Furthermore, ISKP also recruited its fighters among dissident Taliban.¹⁸⁸⁸

According to Khaama Press, Al Qaeda fighters have also been active in Nuristan province and operated camps there.¹⁸⁸⁹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nuristan province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.¹⁸⁹⁰

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Nuristan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁸⁹¹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong -as a region- to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

¹⁸⁸² Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸³ Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); Dawn, ISKP: another emerging giant?, 16 October 2017, [url](#); LWJ, Islamic State’s emir for its Khorasan province killed, 26 August 2018, [url](#); VoA, Afghans Dispute Russia’s Islamic State Claims, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁴ VoA, Islamic State Seeks Foothold in Eastern Afghan Provinces, 7 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁵ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁶ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁸⁸⁷ Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url](#); National (The), Taliban prepare ‘decisive’ anti-ISIS operation in eastern Afghanistan, 5 August 2018, [url](#); Difesa & Sicurezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangarhar, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁸ taz, „Islamischer Staat“ und Taliban, Der afghanische Terrorwettbewerb, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban militants killed in U.S. drone strike in Nuristan province, 24 October 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban promotes training camp for ‘Commando Mujahidin’, 22 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁸⁹¹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

NURISTAN	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁸⁹² April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Barg-e-Matal	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; gov control: 40%
Duab	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Kamdesh	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Mandol	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control (completely)
Nurgeram	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; gov control: 40%
Poruns (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%
Wama	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 60%; gov control: 40%
Waygal	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

2.25.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.25.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 25 civilian casualties (9 deaths and 15 injured) in Nuristan province. This represents an increase of 41 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and aerial attacks.¹⁸⁹³

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Barg-e-Matal, Kamdesh and Waygal in the third highest category and Nurgeram and Duab in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.¹⁸⁹⁴

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 82 incidents related to insurgents in Nuristan province.¹⁸⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹² LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

¹⁸⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁸⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p.2

¹⁸⁹⁵ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

Airstrikes against ISKP were carried out by international forces in January 2018 in Waygal killing fighters,¹⁸⁹⁶ as well as against the Taliban in late October 2018 in Nurgeram, when six insurgents were killed,¹⁸⁹⁷ and in late June 2018 in Waygal, killing 10, six of whom civilians.¹⁸⁹⁸

In August 2018, fighting between Taliban militants and ISKP has been reported in Nuristan province.¹⁸⁹⁹

Four members of the Afghan security forces were killed after the explosion of a roadside bomb in Nurgeram district in late October 2018.¹⁹⁰⁰

In December 2018 unidentified gunmen stormed a local radio station in Nurgeram district and reportedly took one of the workers hostage.¹⁹⁰¹ During the October 2018 parliamentary elections, Taliban mortar attacks against polling stations were reported in Wama, Barg-e-Matal, Kamdesh and Nurgeram districts, wounding civilians and preventing others from voting.¹⁹⁰²

2.25.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 628 persons displaced from Nuristan. A large proportion of them (561) were displaced within the province.¹⁹⁰³

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Nuristan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.¹⁹⁰⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reported 902 persons displaced to Nuristan province.¹⁹⁰⁵

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Nuristan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.¹⁹⁰⁶

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Barg-e-Matal	107	/	/	/
Kamdesh	152	/	/	/
Mandol	92	/	/	/
Nurgeram	61	16	/	/
Poruns	/	511	/	/
Wama	32	375	/	/
Waygal	184	/	/	/

¹⁸⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh fighters killed in Nuristan, Kunar airstrikes, 15 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁷ Salaam Times, Coalition air strike kills 6 Taliban militants in Nuristan, 24 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants killed in U.S. drone strike in Nuristan province, 24 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁸ Afghanistan Times, Six civilians, five Taliban killed in Nuristan airstrike, 26 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁹ Difesa & Sicurezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangarhar, 8 August 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁰ New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Oct. 19-25, 26 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen attack, vandalize Nuristan radio station, 23 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰² Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

According to UNOCHA, threats and intimidation by armed groups have caused displacements in 2018,¹⁹⁰⁷ for example, 200 people from four Nuristan districts moved to Poruns district in March 2018 for this reason.¹⁹⁰⁸ Insecurity is also a reason for displacement.¹⁹⁰⁹

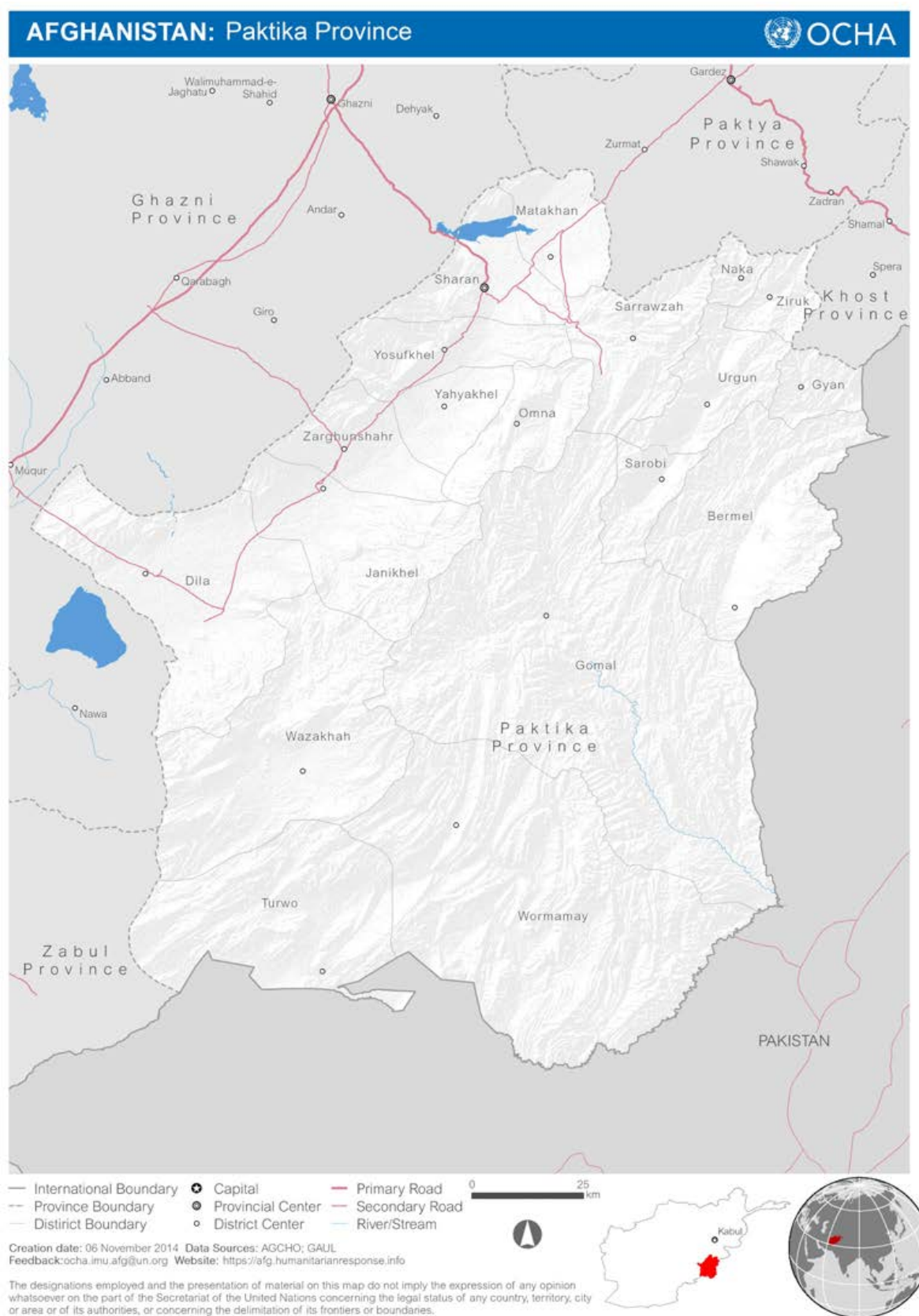
¹⁹⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 19 March 2018 – 25 March 2018, 25 March 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 21 – 27 May 2018, 28 May 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 – 10 June 2018, 11 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 6 March 2018 – 1 April 2018, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 – 10 June 2018, 11 June 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July – 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 6 – 12 August 2018, 14 August 2018, [url](#)

2.26 Paktika

2.26.1 General description of the province



Paktika is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Ghazni to the north-west, Paktya and Khost to the north, Pakistan to the south and east and Zabul to the south-west.¹⁹¹⁰ The provincial capital of Paktika is Sharana. The province is divided into the following districts: Bermel, Dila (also Khushamand), Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhan, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakhah, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel, Zarghunshahr (also Khairkot) and Ziruk.¹⁹¹¹ As reported by the official website of the Office of the Afghan President, the province also has the following four non-official districts: Shakeen, Bak Khil, Charbaran and Shakhil Abad.¹⁹¹²

The province is composed of three sub-regions: the northern-central sub-region, the south-east sub-region along the Afghan-Pakistani border and the south-west sub-region, called Katawaz, which was previously part of Ghazni. Paktika became a separate province under President Daud's rule (1973-1978), and there is still a strong sense of belonging to one of the three sub-regions among the population. Moreover, local tribal relations still play an important role in the province.¹⁹¹³

According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Paktika is estimated at 748 910 for 2018/19.¹⁹¹⁴ The province is composed mainly of Pashtuns, with a Tajik minority in the cities of Sharana and Urgun.¹⁹¹⁵

A national highway connects the provinces of Ghazni and Paktika and continues to the Afghan-Pakistani border.¹⁹¹⁶ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, in December 2018 the Ghazni-Paktika highway had been closed for six months, following Taliban attacks in Ghazni province.¹⁹¹⁷ Moreover, according to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok, two highways connecting Paktika province to the central region faced security problems.¹⁹¹⁸ The security situation on the Urgun highway, which connects many districts of Paktika, had also purportedly deteriorated in late August 2018, with checkpoints, set up in parts of Sarrawzah district, often attacked by insurgents.¹⁹¹⁹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktika has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.¹⁹²⁰

2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika

According to an AAN analysis from December 2018, the Taliban have been predominant in many areas of Paktika province. Some districts were either fully under Taliban control or contested.¹⁹²¹ The districts of Naka and Omna were fully under Taliban control, whereas their presence in the other districts varied, particularly in the Katawaz region. The government's presence was strong around the provincial capital and in Matakhan, Yosufkhel, Khairkot, Urgun and Yahyakhel.¹⁹²² The latter district, where Taliban militants re-emerged from 2004 until 2011, was reported in 2018 to be mostly under

¹⁹¹⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktika Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktika Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Back ground Profile of Paktika, n.d., [url](#); Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹² Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Paktika, 1 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹³ Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a 'Good ALP': The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹¹⁵ Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁶ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 months on, Ghazni-Paktika highway remains closed, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 months on, Ghazni-Paktika highway remains closed, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Offensive soon to drive rebels from Gardez-Paktika road, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban threatening to close important road in Paktia [sic], 20 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁹²¹ Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a 'Good ALP': The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹²² Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

the control of the ALP which enjoys support from the local community. Yahyakhel was described in the same source as being among the most peaceful districts in Paktika.¹⁹²³

According to local sources quoted by AAN, in 2018 the Taliban adopted a ‘softer’ policy towards the electoral campaign and the election itself in Paktika province: whilst in the past campaigning and coverage of elections was limited, the situation was more relaxed in 2018. Even though the Taliban did not threaten any dwellers of Paktika province during the pre-election period – according to local sources quoted by AAN – they did try to oppose voting during election day in some areas by launching shells. Moreover, Paktika was among the few provinces where the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) did not request a second day of voting.¹⁹²⁴

The Haqqani network started to expand in Loya Paktya, an area composed of Khost, Paktya and Paktika, some years before 2011;¹⁹²⁵ its main area of operations was the Zadran valley between Paktya, Paktika and Khost, which served as a corridor from Pakistan to Ghazni and Logar through the districts of Spera in Khost, Gyan in Paktika and Zurmat in Paktya.¹⁹²⁶ According to an article by Long War Journal from September 2012 reporting about an assault on a base in Paktika’s Charbaran Valley, some foreign fighters linked to Al Qaeda were active in eastern Afghanistan and were known to be fighting alongside the Haqqani network in the region. Some of these groups were the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as its splinter group the Islamic Jihadi Union (IJU), the Caucasus Mujahedin Khorasan, Jund al Khilafah and the Turkistan Islamic Party.¹⁹²⁷ According to the New York Times in October 2011, Charbaran had ‘become one of the main routes for Haqqani fighters to enter Afghanistan’, and they generally entered the province on foot, stayed ‘overnight in safe houses and tent camps’ and proceeded ‘toward Kabul or other areas’ where they had been sent to fight. Also, ‘[m]id-level Haqqani leaders’ used to meet in the valley’s villages, ‘including near an abandoned school and the ruins of a government center [...] that local fighters had destroyed by 2008’.¹⁹²⁸

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Paktika province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.¹⁹²⁹

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Paktika province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.¹⁹³⁰ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

¹⁹²³ Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁴ Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁵ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁶ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁷ LWJ, ‘Al Mujahir Jihadi Studio’ releases video of attack on base in Paktika, 7 September 2012, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁸ New York Times (The), Americans Raid Byways of Haqqani Insurgents in Afghanistan, 2 October 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁹³⁰ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

PAKTIKA	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁹³¹ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Bermel	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Dila	Taliban control	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Gomal	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control
Gyan	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Janikhel	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Mata Khan	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Naka	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control
Omna	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control
Sarobi	Open Taliban Presence - high	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Sarrawzah	Open Taliban Presence - high	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%
Sharan (capital)	Open Taliban Presence - high	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Turwo	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%
Urgun	Open Taliban Presence - high	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Wazakhah	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	/
Wormamay	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%

¹⁹³¹ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Yahyakhel	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Yosufkhel	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Contested	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Zarghunshahr	Open Taliban presence - low	GI RoA Influence	GI RoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Ziruk	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15 % or Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Chahrbaran	/	/	/	/	TB control
Khushamand	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Khair Kot	/	/	/	/	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Shakin	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%

2.26.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.26.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 150 civilian casualties (67 deaths and 83 injured) in Paktika province. This represents a decrease of 6 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by targeted killings and ground engagements.¹⁹³²

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Urgun district in the second highest category and Gomal in the category below. Sharan, Mata Khan, Yahya Khel, Sar Rawzah, Zarghun Shahr, Jani Khel, Surobi, Nika, Barmal, Giyan and Wazakhah fall into the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.¹⁹³³

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 92 incidents related to insurgents in Paktika province.¹⁹³⁴

As reported by a local source to AAN in November 2018, the Taliban had not been very active in carrying out attacks against pro-government forces in Paktika. Furthermore, 'the most recent attack had been on Khushamand (also known as Dela) district, a week before the election. Besides that, there had not been any major attack by Taleban fighters in the province since August 2017, when they carried one out on Gomal district'.¹⁹³⁵ During the parliamentary elections in October 2018 there were some security incidents in parts of Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Matakhan and Sharana, which caused 'relatively few' casualties.¹⁹³⁶

¹⁹³² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁹³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹³⁴ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁹³⁵ Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁶ Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

In late December 2018 Afghan security forces carried out airstrikes in Bermel district, which killed the military commission chief of the Haqqani network. According to the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) quoted by Khaama Press, the senior Haqqani network leader was active in planning and coordinating attacks in Paktika and the provinces nearby.¹⁹³⁷ Moreover, US security forces carried out airstrikes in Gomal district in December 2018, killing militants¹⁹³⁸ and in Gyan district in November 2018, killing two Taliban militants and four civilians and wounding five others.¹⁹³⁹

In its annual 2018 report, UNAMA expressed concern over the increase in incidents of pro-Government armed groups deliberately targeting and killing civilians during search operations. Most of the casualties were caused by the Khost Protection Force in Khost, Paktya and Paktika.¹⁹⁴⁰

In May 2018, an Afghan National Police member shot and killed a 12-year-old boy who refused to carry water in Omna district. In retaliation, a member of the Afghan Local Police killed two members of the Police involved in the killing.¹⁹⁴¹

In early January 2019, at least 5 civilians were killed and 7 others wounded, after an unexploded ordnance detonated in Janikhel district.¹⁹⁴² In October 2018 three children were killed by an unexploded ordinance in Urgun district.¹⁹⁴³

In December 2018, clashes between security forces and armed insurgents closed at least 35 schools in Paktika province, most of them in Khoshamand district;¹⁹⁴⁴ also in Urgun district, a middle school was torched.¹⁹⁴⁵ In April 2018, a tribal elder and brother of a lawmaker was killed by Taliban insurgents in Sharan district.¹⁹⁴⁶

2.26.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 4 052 persons displaced from Paktika, most of them (3 737) displaced within the province; the others went to Khost province.¹⁹⁴⁷

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019 reporting 1393 persons displaced from Paktika province, all within the province.¹⁹⁴⁸

No conflict-induced internal displacement was reported by UNOCHA to this province for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018.¹⁹⁴⁹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019 reporting 1 393 persons displaced to Paktika, from Naka and Bermel districts to Sharan and Urgun within the province.¹⁹⁵⁰

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
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¹⁹³⁷ Khaama Press, Senior Haqqani Network leader killed in Paktika airstrike, 25 December 2018, [url](#); Salaam Times, Afghan air strike kills Haqqani Network leader in Paktika, 26 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁸ Khaama Press, Drone strikes leave at least 15 militants dead in Ghazni and Paktika, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 civilians killed & wounded in Paktika airstrike, 6 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 35

¹⁹⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 43-44

¹⁹⁴² Tolonews, Explosion in Paktika Leaves Six Civilians Dead, 7 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 civilians killed, 7 wounded in Paktika bomb blast, 7 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Leftover bomb kills 3 children in Paktika, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 35 Paktika schools closed over insecurity: official, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen set on fire a middle school in Paktika, 29 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down lawmaker's brother in Paktika, 3 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement in 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

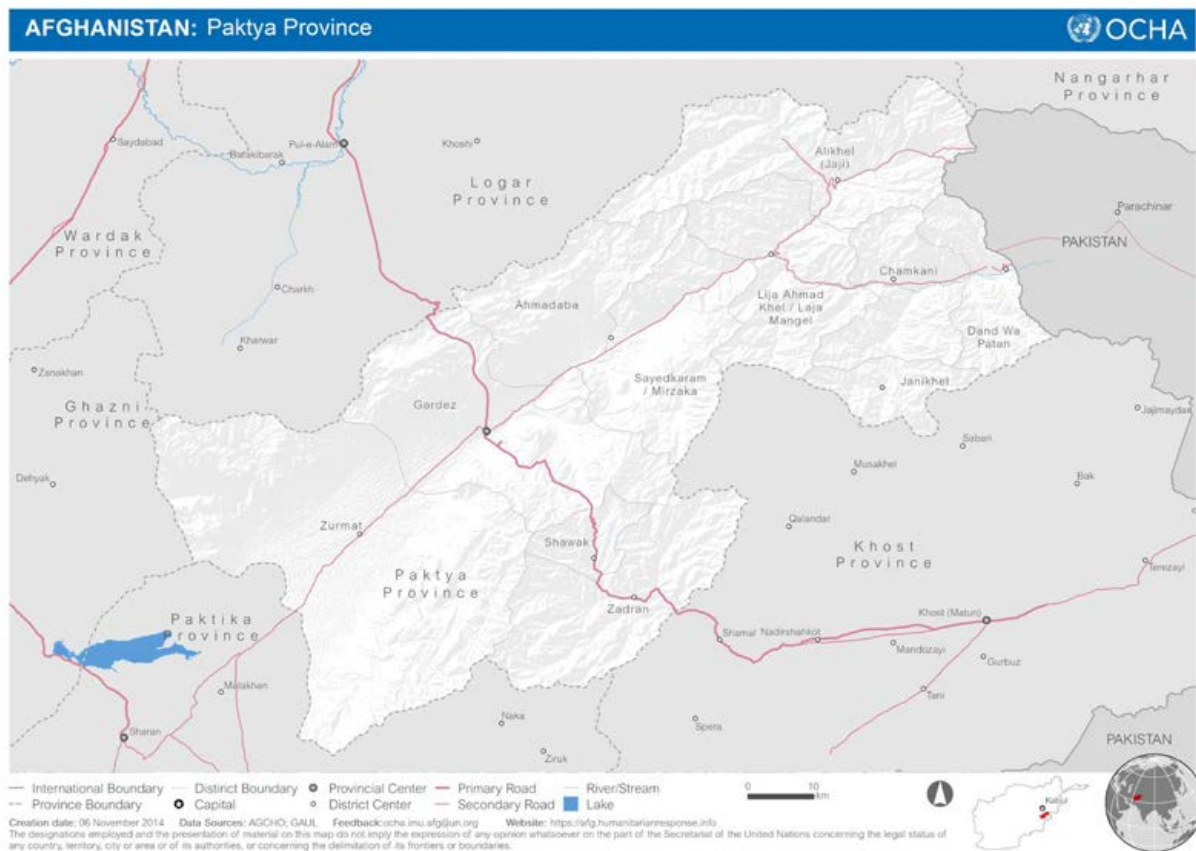
¹⁹⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement in 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

Bermel	/	/	770	/
Dila	539	/	/	/
Gyan	706	/	/	/
Janikhel	735	/	/	/
Naka	210	/	623	/
Sharan	/	1 735	/	623
Urgun	1 862	2 002	/	770

2.27 Paktya

2.27.1 General description of the province



Paktya is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.¹⁹⁵¹ It borders Logar to the north, Pakistan to the east, Khost to the south-east, Paktika to the south and Ghazni to the west.¹⁹⁵² The provincial capital of Paktya is Gardez. The province is divided into the following districts: Ahmadaba, Alikhel (or Jaji), Chamkani, Dand Wa Patan, Gardez, Janikhel, Lija Ahmad Khel (or Laja Mangel), Sayedkaram (or Mirzaka), Shawak, Zadrar and Zurmat.¹⁹⁵³ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Paktya is estimated at 590 668 for 2018/19¹⁹⁵⁴ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks.¹⁹⁵⁵

The Kabul-Gardez highway connects the provincial capital to Kabul city crossing through Logar.¹⁹⁵⁶ Another highway, called the 'G-K' or Gardez-Khost highway, passes through the districts of Shawak and Zadrar as well as through Khost province, and reaches Ghulam Khan at the Afghan-Pakistani border.¹⁹⁵⁷ Taliban militants are reported to search vehicles and look for government employees on the Gardez-Kabul highway,¹⁹⁵⁸ and according to Khaama Press, they kidnapped 22 passengers on the Kabul-Gardez

¹⁹⁵¹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile Paktia Province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁵⁵ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Paktia, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#); Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, 18 August 2018, AAN, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Reconstructed Gardez-Khost highway inaugurated, 15 December 2015, [url](#); US, USAID, Gardez-Khost National Highway, November 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#)

highway in late July 2018.¹⁹⁵⁹ Also in July 2018 and on the same highway, the Taliban purportedly attacked the convoy of Paktya's governor and the vehicles of the provincial prosecutor.¹⁹⁶⁰ Moreover, the Ghazni-Paktya highway was closed by Taliban militants after fights with the Afghan security forces in Ghazni province, in May 2018.¹⁹⁶¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktya has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.¹⁹⁶²

2.27.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktya

Paktya, a conservative province, mainly inhabited by Pashtuns, played a significant role during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, the civil war and Taliban rule in the 1990s, as well as during the post-2001 years.¹⁹⁶³ The province is home to many ex-mujahideen commanders who were members of the Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami-e Afghanistan (The Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan), a Sunni *tanzim*, or mujahideen-party, founded in 1979-1980 in Peshawar and operating mainly in Paktya and Logar provinces. Established as an umbrella organisation of the anti-Soviet movement, the Harakat started to operate its own armed resistance after Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami left the organization. Harakat differed from these two mainly Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups, as it was founded on a strong *ulema* base and had arisen as a local, rural and traditional Islamist movement. After 1993, following a change in the power structure of the mujahideen government, Nabi Muhammadi, the then leader of Harakat, dissolved the party and exhorted its members to join the Taliban, which many of them did.¹⁹⁶⁴ As of December 2015, the Harakat party has returned to the political scene as a more moderate movement among different *tanzims*. It has thus been seen by many as a 'bridge' for peace talks with the Taliban, due to its 'special relationship' with them.¹⁹⁶⁵

According to AAN, even though Loya Paktya, composed of Khost, Paktya and Paktika, 'had not been Taliban heartland, [...] the Taliban had dealt with it reasonably well'.¹⁹⁶⁶ Important senior Taliban members, like Jalaluddin Haqqani, also came from Paktya Province. Even so, in the first stage after 2001, the people from Loya Paktya overthrew the Taliban through tribal councils and supported the Afghan government. However, this mind-set changed after the tribal elders of the region were excluded from the state-building process, which was mainly controlled by the new politicians in Kabul and Northern Alliance members.¹⁹⁶⁷ In June 2018 Gardez city hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khost provinces who asked the Taliban to extend the ceasefire of Eid ul-Fitr. Moreover, many dwellers of Paktya province have been said to have pleaded for the creation of safe areas for peace talks with Taliban militants.¹⁹⁶⁸

Paktya province is witnessing an active insurgency, nevertheless, it is constrained however by robust tribal affiliation and united local communities on which it has to rely in order to coordinate its operations, according to an AAN report from August 2018.¹⁹⁶⁹ The fact that the hostility of 'even a minor community' would be counterproductive for the insurgents 'discourages acts that would

¹⁹⁵⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 22 passengers from Kabul-Gardez highway, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶¹ LWJ, Taliban blockade of Ghazni-Paktia highway enters second month, 9 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁹⁶³ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#); Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁴ Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#); Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁵ Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁶ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁷ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁸ Salaam Times, Hundreds of Taliban refuse to return to battlefield following ceasefire, 3 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁹ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

antagonize whole communities'.¹⁹⁷⁰ In October 2018 Thomas Ruttig described Paktya province as a 'Taliban stronghold'.¹⁹⁷¹

The Haqqani network started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011¹⁹⁷² and has now become powerful in Paktya province.¹⁹⁷³ According to some sources quoted by AAN, the network had tried to expand into Zurmat district; five years ago it purportedly armed and supported Kuchi nomads who claimed governmental land in the district. Moreover, the Haqqanis allegedly demanded transit rights through Zurmat valley for them and their allies, Al Qaeda foreign fighters coming from the former Soviet Union, in order to reach Gardez city and potentially Kabul.¹⁹⁷⁴

As reported by AAN, a small Shia community of mostly bilingual (Dari as a first language and Pashtu as a second) residents lives in Khwajah Hassan, in the north-east of the provincial capital. Most of the Dari speaking population of Paktya are Sunni Tajiks, whereas the Shia minority among them belongs to a separate group called Sadat (singular Sayyed). The Sadat from Khwajah Hassan are said to have been living in the area without conflict with the Sunni (Tajik and Pashtun) communities of the province. Actually, according to sources quoted by AAN, both religious communities have cooperated and fought alongside to defend Gardez, since the Soviet invasion. After the ISKP attack on the Shia mosque in Khwajah Hassan in August 2018, many members of Gardez Sunni community took part in the funerals of the victims and mourned for the dead.¹⁹⁷⁵

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Paktya province is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.¹⁹⁷⁶

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Paktya province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.¹⁹⁷⁷ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

PAKTYA	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ¹⁹⁷⁸ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Ahmadaba	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%
Alikhel (Jaji)	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%

¹⁹⁷⁰ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷¹ taz, Nicht nur die Taliban als Problem, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷² Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷³ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁴ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁵ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁹⁷⁷ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁸ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Chamkani	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%
Dand Wa Patan	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Gardez (capital)	Open Taliban Presence - high	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Lija Ahmad Khel (Laja Mangel)	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%
Janikhel	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	/
Sayedkaram (Mirzaka)	Open Taliban presence - low	Sayedkaram: contested and Mirzaka: GIRoA Influence	Sayedkaram: contested and Mirzaka: GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%
Shawak	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Zadran	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Zurmat	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Arma	/	/	/	/	TB control
Gerda Tserhi	/	/	/	/	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%

2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.27.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 428 civilian casualties (152 deaths and 276 injured) in Paktya province. This represents a decrease of 13 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were suicide/complex attacks, followed by ground engagements and aerial attacks.¹⁹⁷⁹

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Gardez district in the highest category and Zurmat and Jani Khel districts in the second highest category. Sayed Karam, Jaji and Dand Wa Patan are in the third highest category and Ahmadaba, Zadran, Lija Ahmad Khel and Chamkani are in the fourth highest category. The remaining district falls into the lower category.¹⁹⁸⁰

¹⁹⁷⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁹⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 108 incidents related to insurgents in Paktya province.¹⁹⁸¹

Throughout 2018, Afghan and foreign security forces carried out operations and airstrikes against insurgents in Chamkani in September 2018, killing 3 civilians and injuring 10, including women and children,¹⁹⁸² in July 2018, in Ahmadabad, killing Taliban militants,¹⁹⁸³ and in Zurmat, killing at least 10 civilians,¹⁹⁸⁴ and in Sayedkaram in May 2018, killing insurgents.¹⁹⁸⁵ In December 2018, an airstrike that killed around 10 civilians and the deaths caused protests among the inhabitants of the area.¹⁹⁸⁶

UNAMA expressed concern over the increase in incidents of pro-Government armed groups deliberately targeting and killing civilians during search operations. Most of the casualties were caused by the Khost Protection Force in Khost, Paktya and Paktika.¹⁹⁸⁷ In late December 2018, militants allegedly belonging to the Khost Protection Force executed six civilians, suspected of having links with the Taliban in Zurmat district.¹⁹⁸⁸ Similar episodes had already affected the province, when KPF members conducted a military operation in Zurmat, killing 12 civilians in December 2018,¹⁹⁸⁹ or when US soldiers killed 7 members of one family, among them 2 pregnant women in October 2018.¹⁹⁹⁰

In August 2018, ISKP attacked a Shia mosque in Khwajah Hassan, Gardez city, killing at least 38 worshippers and wounding around 80 others. It was the first attack directed against the Shia minority in the province.¹⁹⁹¹

The Taliban were reported to have planted landmines on the Janikhel-Samkani highway in August 2018 and forcing civilians to surrender to them in Janikhel district.¹⁹⁹²

In the districts of Zurmat, Sayedkaram and Ahmadabad Taliban have allegedly closed schools, in protest against the poor state of school buildings.¹⁹⁹³ According to Thomas Rutting, Taliban insurgents hindered the dwellers of Zurmat district to cast their vote during parliamentary elections in late October 2018.¹⁹⁹⁴

2.27.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 829 persons displaced from Paktya, most of them (1 358) displaced within the province¹⁹⁹⁵ and the others went to Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Khost and Logar provinces.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 554 persons displaced to Paktya province.¹⁹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁸¹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

¹⁹⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians killed, 10 hurt in Paktia airstrike, 20 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸³ Tolonews, Over 100 Militants Killed In Paktia Operations, 13 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 civilians, 26 Taliban killed in Paktia's Zurmat operation, 13 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁵ Tolonews, Six Taliban insurgents Killed in Paktia Airstrike, 28 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁶ AP, Airstrike kills 10 civilians in eastern Afghanistan, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 35

¹⁹⁸⁸ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁹ New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Nov. 30-Dec. 6, 7 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁰ Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Razzien in Afghanistan: Wenn Soldaten die Falschen töten, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹¹ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Islamic State says it carried out Afghan Shi'ite mosque bombing, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia's Janikhel residents concerned over ongoing unrest, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹³ Ariana News, Taliban closes over 20 schools in Paktia, 5 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁴ taz, Nicht nur die Taliban als Problem, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Paktya province and to this province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.¹⁹⁹⁷

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Alikhel (Jaji)	567	/	/	/
Dand Wa Patan	42	/	/	/
Gardez	/	1 554	/	/
Janikhel	364	/	/	/
Lija Ahmad Khel / Laja Mangel	42	/	/	/
Sayedkaram / Mirzaka	282	/	/	/
Zadran	210	/	/	/
Zurmat	322	/	/	/

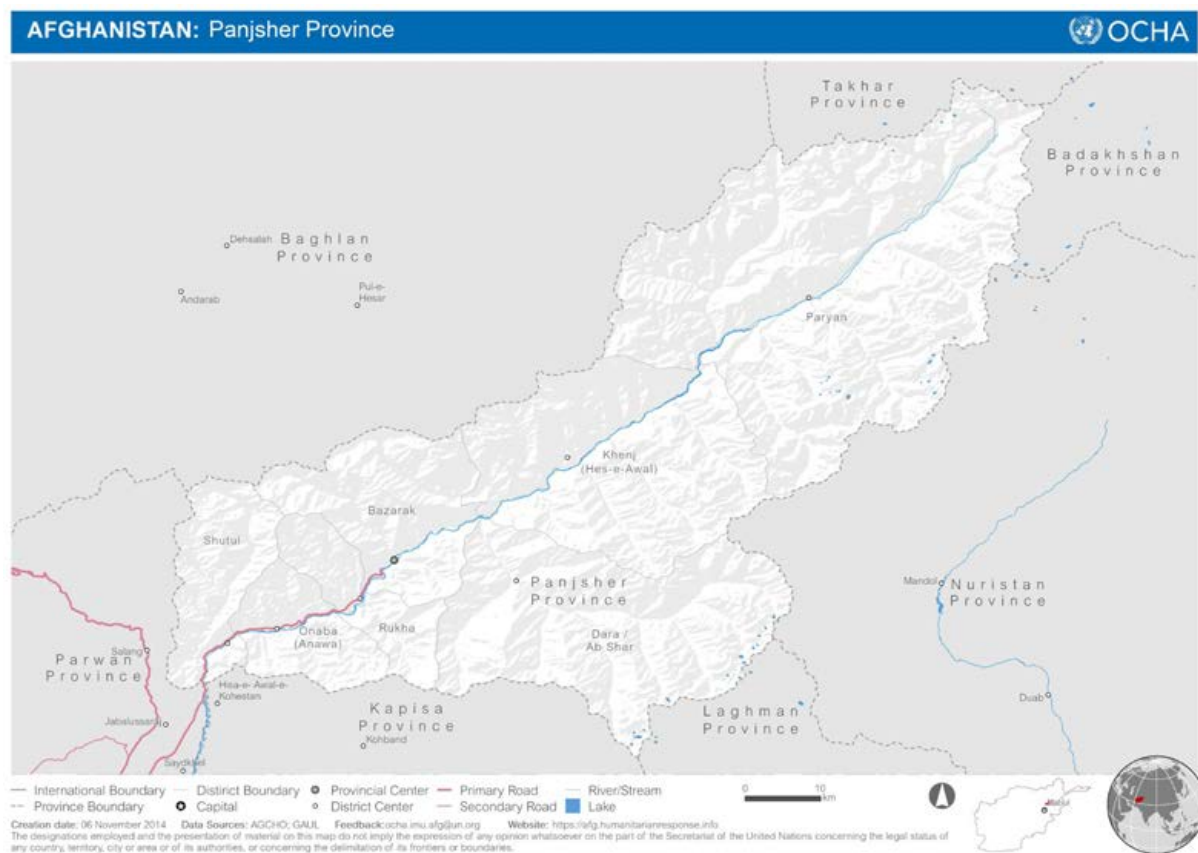
According to UNOCHA, 'insecurity' and 'conflict' are the reasons of displacements from Paktya districts to its provincial capital.¹⁹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 28 May – 3 June 2018, 4 June 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 –8 July 2018, 9 July 2018, [url](#)

2.28 Panjsher

2.28.1 General description of the province



Panjsher is located in central Afghanistan and borders the provinces of Baghlan and Takhar to the north, Badakhshan to the north-east, Nuristan to the east, Laghman and Kapisa to the south, and Parwan to the west.¹⁹⁹⁹ The provincial capital of Panjsher is Bazarak. The province is divided into the following districts: Bazarak, Dara (or Ab Shar or Hes-e-Duwumi), Khenj (Hes-e-Awal), Onaba (or Anawa), Paryan, Rukha and Shutul.²⁰⁰⁰ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Parwan is estimated at 164 115 for 2018/19²⁰⁰¹ and is composed mainly of Tajiks,²⁰⁰² followed by Hazara, Pashai, Nuristani and Ghilzai Pashtuns.²⁰⁰³

Panjsher province is connected to Kabul through a local road which passes through the district of Bagram in Parwan Province.²⁰⁰⁴ The distance between Kabul and Bazarak is 150 kilometres.²⁰⁰⁵ A deep and narrow gorge at the beginning of Panjsher Valley, which is said to be 'tailor-made for obstruction and ambush', has kept the province isolated and difficult to access.²⁰⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Panjsher Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

²⁰⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Panjsher Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Panjsher background profile, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Panjsher Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁰¹ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁰² New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁰³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Panjsher Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Panjsher background profile, n.d., [url](#); Reuters, The Taliban in Afghanistan's once impregnable Panjshir Valley, 15 October 2011, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁴ Fox News, Afghanistan's beautiful 'Green Zone' offers emeralds, peace, 23 May 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁵ Der Tagesspiegel, Das Panjshir in Afghanistan: Mit dem Stolz der Löwen, 4 March 2015, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁶ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Panjshir has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.²⁰⁰⁷

2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher

Panjsher province led the resistance against the Soviets and the Taliban insurgency during the 1980s and the 1990s. The province is home to the Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud, the ‘Lion of Panjshir’, who fought against the Soviets and headed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban.²⁰⁰⁸ His grave, which is located in the province, has attracted many visitors over the years, among these also prominent politicians like Afghanistan’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah.²⁰⁰⁹

The Panjshiris, the Tajik dwellers of the province, are known for their historical opposition to the Taliban and were therefore recruited by the first CIA operatives in Afghanistan after the 2001 attacks.²⁰¹⁰ In 2012, about 70% of NDS personnel originated from Panjsher or was connected to the Northern Alliance.²⁰¹¹ Furthermore, in 2014 new and reinforced Afghan police checkpoints, which were mainly controlled by agents of the NDS, were set up across the road into Panjsher.²⁰¹²

Many Panjshiris have been members of the Afghan political and military elite, like CEO Abdullah Abdullah or former NDS chief and now vice-presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh.²⁰¹³

According to the Afghan news agency Pasbanan, ISKP was recruiting fighters in Panjsher province as of March 2018. Purportedly, 15 ISKP-affiliated individuals belonged to two Iraqi families, and they were operating under the shield of the pan-Islamic Tahrir Party. Moreover, they allegedly spoke Arabic as well as Persian, and they entered Panjsher province through Nangarhar and Laghman. Living in Ab Shar district, the families were purportedly interested in getting control over the emerald and Azure mines of the province.²⁰¹⁴

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Panjsher province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.²⁰¹⁵ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

²⁰⁰⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

²⁰⁰⁸ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); Washington Post (The), ‘The Lion of Kandahar’: Was slain commander a hero or part of the problem?, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, President, CEO arrive in Panjshir province, 1 January 2016, [url](#); Stars and Stripes, As Afghan war escalates, security fears grow in peaceful valley, 7 November 2016, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁰ Christian Science Monitor (The), Why Afghanistan’s intelligence agency has a major blind spot, 23 April 2012, [url](#)

²⁰¹¹ Christian Science Monitor (The), Why Afghanistan’s intelligence agency has a major blind spot, 23 April 2012, [url](#)

²⁰¹² New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); Washington Post (The), ‘The Lion of Kandahar’: Was slain commander a hero or part of the problem?, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁰¹³ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); Reuters, Afghanistan’s Ghani launches bid for second presidential term, 20 January 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Afghanistan’s former spy chief: ‘Never trust the Taliban’, 13 August 2011, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁴ Pasbanan, Panjshir, Is threatened by ISIS recruitment, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁵ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

PANJSHER	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²⁰¹⁶ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Bazarak (capital)	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Dara (Ab Shar)	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 87%; TB control: 13%
Khenj (Hes-e-Awal)	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Onaba (Anawa)	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	/
Paryan	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 85%; TB control: 15%
Rukha	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Shutul	Gov control	GI RoA control	GI RoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Dara Abdulla	/	/	/	/	Gov control: 77%; TB control: 23%

2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.28.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented no civilian casualties in Panjsher province.²⁰¹⁷

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the entire province Panjshir into the lowest category.²⁰¹⁸

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 2 incidents related to insurgents in Panjsher province.²⁰¹⁹

The number of Taliban attacks in Panjsher has been relatively low compared to other areas of the country.²⁰²⁰ The most prominent assaults date back several years ago. In 2015 Taliban insurgents detonated suicide vests in front of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) office;²⁰²¹ in 2014 a Taliban suicide-attack took place at a check-point and killed at least 12 Afghan security forces and civilians and injured 35 more;²⁰²² in 2013 the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan assaulted the governor's

²⁰¹⁶ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

²⁰¹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²⁰¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰¹⁹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²⁰²⁰ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

²⁰²¹ SBS News, Panjshir attacks shows all Afghanistan 'unsafe', 26 February 2015, [url](#)

²⁰²² LWJ, Taliban claim suicide assault in Panjshir Valley, 2 May 2014, [url](#); BBC News, Taliban in deadly Afghanistan Panjshir suicide bombing, 1 May 2014, [url](#)

compound.²⁰²³ According to the US-military news website Stars and Stripes, inhabitants from Panjsher began to fear a growth of Taliban presence in their lands in 2016, as fighting in neighbouring Baghlan and nearby Kunduz provinces was ongoing.²⁰²⁴

2.28.3.2 Displacement

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018.²⁰²⁵

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.²⁰²⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 189 persons displaced to Panjsher province, coming from neighbouring provinces Laghman, Nuristan, Badakhshan and Baghlan.²⁰²⁷ These 189 IDPs were registered in the first six months of 2018.²⁰²⁸ In July and December 2018, UNOCHA's Weekly Field Reports respectively reported 600 and 840 individuals displaced to Panjsher from the four above mentioned provinces.²⁰²⁹

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.²⁰³⁰

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Bazarak	/	63	/	/
Onaba (Anawa)	/	28	/	/
Khenj (Hes-e-Awal)	/	63	/	/
Rukha	/	35	/	/

According to UNOCHA the main reasons for the displacement of IDPs arriving in Panjsher province were insecurity, threat, military operations, intimidation and frequent fighting in their places of origin.²⁰³¹

According to UNHCR, Panjsher is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but 'choose to live somewhere else once they return'.²⁰³²

²⁰²³ LWJ, IMU, Taliban launched joint suicide assault in Panjshir, 1 June 2013, [url](#)

²⁰²⁴ Stars and Stripes, As Afghan war escalates, security fears grow in peaceful valley, 7 November 2016, [url](#)

²⁰²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 3 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 - 8 April 2018, 8 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 15 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 - 22 July 2018, 22 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 31 December 2018, 31 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 - 22 July 2018, 22 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 31 December 2018, 31 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

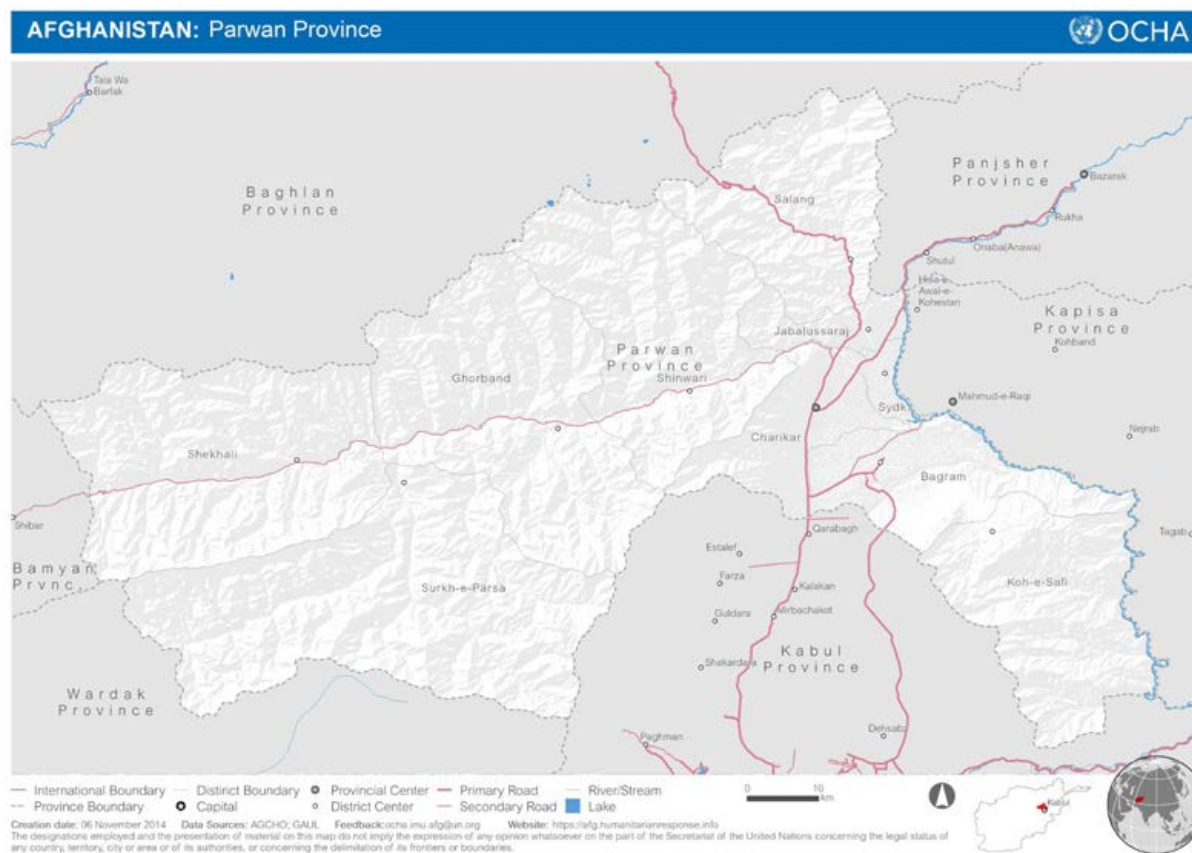
²⁰³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 3 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 15 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰³² UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.29 Parwan

2.29.1 General description of the province



Parwan is located in the central part of Afghanistan. It borders Baghlan in the north, Panjshir and Kapisa in the east, Kabul and Wardak in the south and south-east and Bamiyan in the west.²⁰³³ Its provincial capital is Charikar. The province is divided into the following districts: Bagram, Charikar, Ghorband (or Siya Gird), Jabalussaraj, Koh-e-Safi, Salang, Saydkhel, Shekhali, Shinwari and Surkh-e-Parsa.²⁰³⁴ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Parwan is estimated at 711 621 for 2018/19²⁰³⁵ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Qizilbash, Kuchi and Hazara.²⁰³⁶

The Salang Pass Tunnel, which is located between Parwan and Baghlan provinces, connects Kabul to northern Afghanistan.²⁰³⁷ A highway from Kabul runs through the districts of Charikar, Jabalussaraj and Salang to Kunduz province; moreover, another highway connecting Parwan and Bamiyan provinces runs through Charikar, Shinwari, Ghorband, Shekhali and the Shibar Pass.²⁰³⁸ The Parwan-Bamiyan highway has occasionally been closed due to clashes between Taliban militants and Afghan security

²⁰³³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Parwan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Parwan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Parwan, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁰³⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰³⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Parwan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰³⁷ Tolonews, Road Works Underway On Salang Pass, 1 September 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Corruption at 13,000 feet: Afghanistan struggles to maintain a treacherous mountain trade route, 22 January 2018, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

²⁰³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Parwan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, [url](#), p. 5 ; Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

forces.²⁰³⁹ An abduction perpetrated by the Taliban took place along the Kabul-Bamyan route in Shekhali district in August 2018.²⁰⁴⁰ Parwan province hosts Bagram Air Base, the largest NATO military base in Afghanistan.²⁰⁴¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Parwan has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.²⁰⁴²

2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan

According to Khaama Press, Parwan was considered ‘relatively calm’,²⁰⁴³ until the security situation started deteriorating in some of the province’s districts.²⁰⁴⁴ In 2011, the insurgency started to expand its activities into Siya Gird, Shinwari, which are Pashtun majority districts, and Surkh-e-Parsa, where the Sunni Hazara majority sympathized with Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin forces due to the fact that it was ‘at odds’ with the Shia Hazara in neighbouring Bamyan province. Moreover, the Pashtun areas of Ghorband valley supported HIG-forces during the civil war. Some of these forces were absorbed by the Taliban during their subsequent rule.²⁰⁴⁵

In 2011, the Taliban started their spring offensive and appointed shadow district governors for Shinwari, Siya Gird and even Also Koh-e-Safi, which was traditionally a bastion of HIG. The province has also been affected by a long-established rivalry between Jamiat-e Islami and HIG, as Tajik ethnic groups affiliated with Jamiat were powerful strongmen and had important networks throughout the area. Many of them were in control of Parwan’s administration. The Taliban also appointed Tajiks into their ranks to avoid limiting the insurgency exclusively to the Pashtun ethnicity.²⁰⁴⁶

As reported by LWJ in August 2018, Taliban insurgents have been active in Koh-e-Safi, Saydkhel, Shinwari, Siya Gird Ghorband and Surkh-e-Parsa, from where they planned attacks on Charikar and Bagram Air Base.²⁰⁴⁷ Moreover, in the past Taliban militants collaborated with Al Qaeda in order to attack the NATO facility in Bagram also in 2018.²⁰⁴⁸

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Parwan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.²⁰⁴⁹ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

²⁰³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban suffer heavy casualties in Parwan, 25 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan-Bamyan highway closed amid fierce clash, 27 July 2017, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Violent Clash: Bamyan-Parwan Highway Closed, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁰ Killid Group (The), Taliban Kidnap 9 Passengers in Parwan, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴¹ LWJ, Taliban suicide bomber kills 3 Czech soldiers, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

²⁰⁴³ Khaama Press, Taliban’s military chief for Parwan province has been killed in an infighting, 22 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁴ Khaama Press, Taliban’s military chief for Parwan province has been killed in an infighting, 22 December 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁵ Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁶ Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁷ LWJ, Taliban suicide bomber kills 3 Czech soldiers, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁸ LWJ, Taliban suicide bomber kills 3 Czech soldiers, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁹ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

PARWAN	BBC (reporting period: August- November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of: October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²⁰⁵⁰ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Bagram	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA control	GIRoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Charikar (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%
Ghorband (Siagherd)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Jabalussuraj	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Koh-e-Safi	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Salang	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA Control	GIRoA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Shekhali	Gov control	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Shinwari	Open Taliban presence - low	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Surkh-e-Parsa	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control
Saydkhel	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control

2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.29.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 41 civilian casualties (20 deaths and 21 injured) in Parwan province. This represents a decrease of 47 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagement, followed by suicide/complex attacks and ground engagements [sic].²⁰⁵¹

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements – UNOCHA places Ghorband district in the second highest category and Bagram and Shinwari in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.²⁰⁵²

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 49 incidents related to insurgents in Parwan province.²⁰⁵³

²⁰⁵⁰ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

²⁰⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²⁰⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p.2

²⁰⁵³ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

Afghan and foreign forces carried out a night raid in Jabalussaraj district in November 2018, killing three civilians.²⁰⁵⁴ In September 2018 US forces carried out an airstrike targeting Taliban insurgents who were allegedly trying to attack Bagram airbase, killing four of them.²⁰⁵⁵

Fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces took place in several districts of Parwan province in 2018, such as Siya Gird, Shinwari and Shekhali, causing casualties mostly among the insurgents.²⁰⁵⁶ In late December 2018, the Taliban shadow military chief for Parwan province was killed in Jabalussaraj district after a supposed fight among the insurgents themselves.²⁰⁵⁷ Taliban fighters were attacking Afghan and international security forces, killing NATO soldiers near the provincial capital in August 2018.²⁰⁵⁸ In early January 2019 unidentified militants kidnapped the district court chief of Shinwari district.²⁰⁵⁹

In mid-February 2019, unidentified gunmen shot dead an appellant court employee in Charikar district.²⁰⁶⁰ In January 2019, suspected militants kidnapped the court chief of Shinwari district.²⁰⁶¹ Also in January 2019, the Taliban seized 45 schoolteachers in Siya Gird district.²⁰⁶² Moreover, the Taliban abducted nine people along the Kabul-Bamyan route in Shekhali district in August 2018.²⁰⁶³

A 16-year-old boy was shot and killed by an unidentified gunman in Sayedkhel in April 2018. According to the district administrative chief, the teenager had been threatened before on the phone by ISKP militants for not assisting them.²⁰⁶⁴

A December 2018 study on Charikar municipality found that around 100 businessmen, heads of government institutions, law makers and NGOs had left Parwan province due to insecurity, extortion and armed robberies.²⁰⁶⁵

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, road blockades were set up in Parwan by insurgents during the two days of elections in October 2018 to keep locals from voting and to delay the transport of electoral material.²⁰⁶⁶

2.29.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 84 persons displaced from Parwan province, displaced within the province itself or to the neighbouring province of Kapisa.²⁰⁶⁷

²⁰⁵⁴ RAWA News, Residents Protest Joint Military Operation In Parwan That Killed Three Civilians, 23 November 2018, [url](#); Xinhua News Agency, Afghan airstrikes kill 2 militants in Parwan province, 13 October 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians killed, 4 injured in Parwan overnight raid, 23 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁵ Khaama Press, 4 Taliban militants killed an attempt to attack Bagram airbase with rockets, 2 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁶ 1TV News, Afghan commando kill 12 Taliban in Parwan raid, 6 November 2018, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Attack Repulsed in Parwan, 30 July 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Security Check Posts In Parwan, 26 April 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban suffer heavy casualties in Parwan, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban's military chief for Parwan province has been killed in an infighting, 22 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁸ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Taliban suicide bomber kills NATO troops in Parwan, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap district's court chief in Parwan, 17 January 2019, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Three troops under U.S. command, dozens of Afghan soldiers die in separate attacks, 5 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Appellant court worker gunned down in Parwan, 17 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap district's court chief in Parwan, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Seized 2 days ago, Taliban release Parwan teachers, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶³ Killid Group (The), Taliban Kidnap 9 Passengers in Parwan, 30 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Unidentified armed man kill teenage boy in Parwan, 21 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Feeling unsafe, traders & well-off persons flee Parwan, 1 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Parwan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.²⁰⁶⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 1 113 persons displaced to Parwan province, mainly coming from Kapisa, Kunar and Laghman provinces, from Baghlan province and a small number from within the province itself.²⁰⁶⁹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019 reporting 105 persons displaced to Parwan province coming from Kapisa and Laghman provinces.²⁰⁷⁰

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Shinwari	49	/	/	/
Ghorband	35	/	/	/
Bagram	/	364	/	/
Charikar	/	595	/	105
Jabalussaraj	/	154	/	/

According to UNOCHA the main reasons for the displacement of IDPs arriving in Parwan were insecurity, threats, military operations and armed conflict in their places of origin.²⁰⁷¹

In March and October 2018, UNOCHA reported on ongoing military operations by ANSF in Tagab and Alasay districts of Kapisa province leading to the displacement of a significant number of civilians to secure districts of nearby provinces, including Parwan.²⁰⁷² Another group of IDPs coming from Shigal Wal Sheltan and Dangam districts of Kunar province arrived in Parwan in October 2018, due to being continuously under the attack of heavy artillery fire from ANSF.²⁰⁷³

In March and July 2018 UNOCHA's Weekly Field Reports and OCT Meeting Summaries reported on IDP's from Nuristan, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul province arriving in Parwan.²⁰⁷⁴ According to the Afghan authorities a group of more than 900 displaced individuals arrived in Parwan province in October 2018, coming from insecure districts in Kabul, Kapisa and Kunar provinces.²⁰⁷⁵

At the end of February 2019, the head of Directorate of Refugees and Repatriations reported during an OCT meeting in Parwan that 180 displaced families that arrived in different districts in the province in the past two to three months, coming from insecure areas in Laghman, Kunar, Nangarhar, Kapisa, Baghlan and Takhar provinces.²⁰⁷⁶

²⁰⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁷¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 11 March 2018, 11 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 4 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 3 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁷² UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 11 March 2018, 11 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 3 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁷³ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 3 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

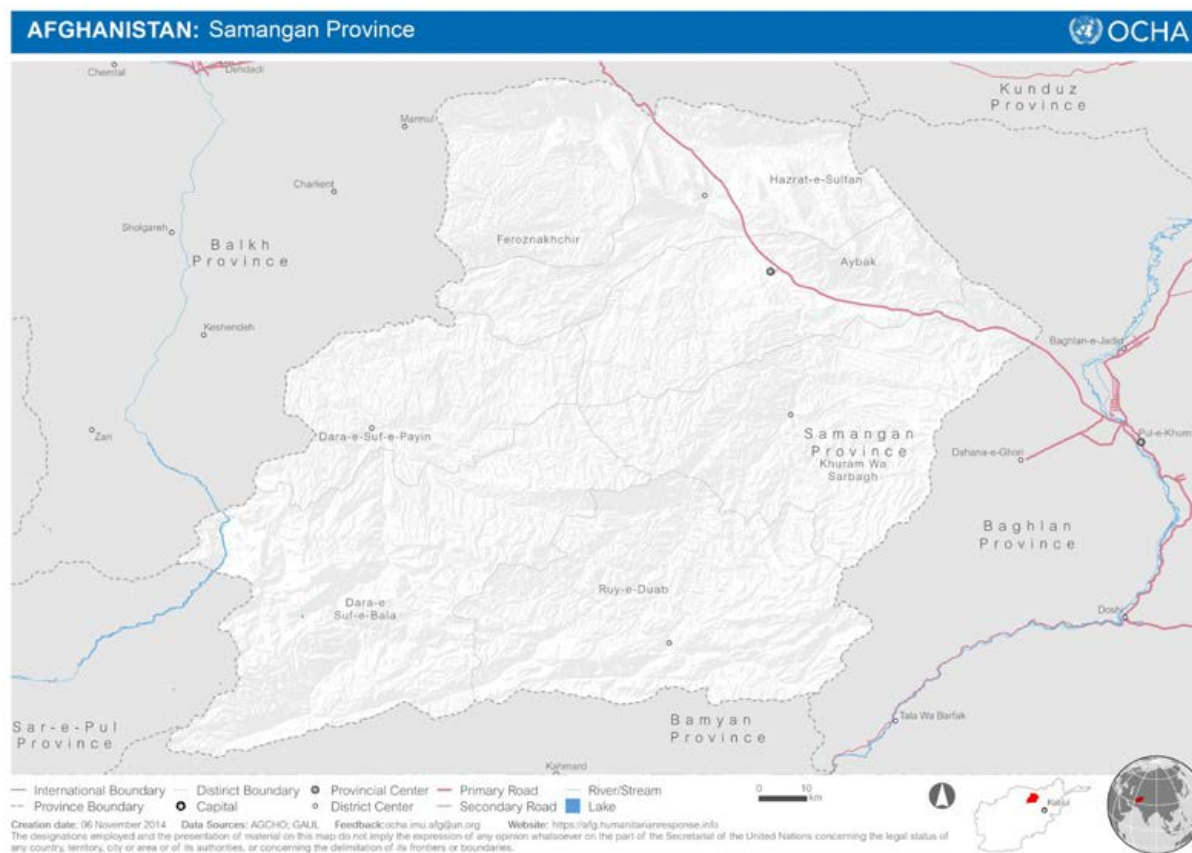
²⁰⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 11 March 2018, 11 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 4 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 October 2018, 8 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 26 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

2.30 Samangan

2.30.1 General description of the province



The northern province Samangan borders Balkh to the north and the north-east, Baghlan to the east, Bamyan to the south and Sar-e Pul to the west.²⁰⁷⁷ The provincial capital of Samangan is Awbak. The province is divided into the following districts: Awbak, Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin (Lower Dara-e-Suf), Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala (Upper Dara-e-Suf), Feroznakhchir, Hazrat-e-Sultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh and Ruy-e-Duab.²⁰⁷⁸ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Samangan is estimated at 415 343 for 2018/19²⁰⁷⁹ and composed of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs, Tatars²⁰⁸⁰ and Aimaq.²⁰⁸¹

The province lies strategically, to the north of the Hindu Kush.²⁰⁸² A section of Highway One from Kabul to Mazar-e Sharif crosses Samangan's districts of Khuram wa Sarbagh, Awbak and Hazrat-e-Sultan and connects Samangan to the northern provinces until Herat.²⁰⁸³ Taliban militants attacked check points along the road which connects Dara-e-Suf to Mazar-e Sharif in January 2019²⁰⁸⁴ and kidnapped

²⁰⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Samangan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Samangan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Samangan, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁹ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²⁰⁸⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Samangan Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁸¹ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Samangan, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁸² RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁸³ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Samangan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁴ Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed In Samangan Clash, 6 January 2019, [url](#)

passengers travelling on the road running through Upper Dara-e-Suf district, which connects the district's mines with local Afghan markets in December 2018.²⁰⁸⁵

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Samangan province lost its poppy-free status in 2017. Opium-poppy-cultivation decreased by 2 % and therefore remained stable compared to 2017. The main opium-poppy-cultivating districts were Lower Dara-e-Suf and Upper Dara-e-Suf.²⁰⁸⁶

2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan

According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in April 2018, 'dozens' of illegal armed groups were active in Samangan,²⁰⁸⁷ as were pro-government militias.²⁰⁸⁸

Moreover, Taliban insurgents have been operating in the province throughout 2018.²⁰⁸⁹

As reported by the United States Institute of Peace, ISKP used to recruit militants in Samangan province in 2016.²⁰⁹⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Samangan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.²⁰⁹¹

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Samangan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.²⁰⁹² When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

SAMANGAN	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²⁰⁹³ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Aybak (capital)	Open Taliban presence – low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala	Open Taliban presence – low	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%

²⁰⁸⁵ Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 40 Passengers In Samangan, 2 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral resources of Samangan province, 23 July 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 25

²⁰⁸⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dozens of illegal armed group active in Samangan, 8 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban closing in on Dara-i-Sauf Payeen district, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed In Samangan Clash, 6 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Samangan's Security chief, several soldiers killed in Taliban attack, 16 October 2018, [url](#); AP News, Taliban attack Afghan security forces in north, killing 52, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁰ USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁹¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

²⁰⁹² BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁹³ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin	Open Taliban presence – low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Feroznakhchir	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Hazrat-e-Sultan	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Khuram Wa Sarbagh	Open Taliban presence – low	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Ruy-e-Duab	Open Taliban presence – low	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control
Khulm	/	/	/	/	Gov control

2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.30.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 46 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 27 injured) in Samangan province. This represents an increase of 21 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and ground engagements.²⁰⁹⁴

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Aybak district in the third highest category and Lower Dara-e-Suf, Upper Dara-e-Suf and Khuram Wa Sarbagh in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.²⁰⁹⁵

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 43 incidents related to insurgents in Samangan province.²⁰⁹⁶

The Taliban attacked a pro-government militia in Dara-e-Suf district, killing and wounding militants as well as civilians in February 2019. According to local sources quoted by Al Jazeera, the Taliban targeted local villagers, among them women and children; since Dara-e-Suf is a remote area there is no police presence in some villages,²⁰⁹⁷ and residents have their own local militia to enhance security.²⁰⁹⁸

Moreover, Taliban insurgents attacked Afghan security force posts in Lower Dara-e-Suf district throughout 2018, killing, among other soldiers, Samangan's security chief in October;²⁰⁹⁹ the Taliban also suffered casualties among their own ranks.²¹⁰⁰

At least ten civilian casualties were reported in Lower Dara-e-Suf in February 2019, as a result of clashes with the Taliban who were attempting to get *usher* and *zakat* (taxes) from them.²¹⁰¹ In

²⁰⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²⁰⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁹⁶ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²⁰⁹⁷ Tolonews, 10 Civilians Killed In Samangan Clash, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban closing in on Dara-i-Sauf Payeen district, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed In Samangan Clash, 6 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Samangan's Security chief, several soldiers killed in Taliban attack, 16 October 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Police retake 40 Samangan villages from Taliban, 15 October 2018, [url](#); AP News, Taliban attack Afghan security forces in north, killing 52, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police retake 40 Samangan villages from Taliban, 15 October 2018, [url](#); AP News, Taliban attack Afghan security forces in north, killing 52, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰¹ Tolonews, 10 Civilians Killed In Samangan Clash, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

December 2018, 60 drivers of coal-supplying trucks in Dara-i-Suf Payan district were abducted by Taliban militants. The Taliban demanded tax from drivers who refused to make the payment. The truck conductors were also abducted, but were released soon afterwards.²¹⁰² In late April 2018, in Aybak district, the Taliban shot dead a mullah who was known for preaching against the Taliban, while he was at a wedding party, as well as another woman, and injured two more.²¹⁰³ In February 2018, four employees of a construction firm were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen, allegedly by the Taliban in Aibak, the provincial capital.²¹⁰⁴

2.30.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3997 persons displaced from Samangan province, mainly within the province itself, but also to Kabul province.²¹⁰⁵

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Samangan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.²¹⁰⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 836 persons displaced to Samangan province, coming mainly from within the province itself.²¹⁰⁷

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Samangan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.²¹⁰⁸

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Aybak	2 884	3 584	/	/
Dara-e Suf-e-Bala	252	252	/	/
Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin	665	/	/	/
Khuram Wa Sarbagh	140	/	/	/
Ruy-e-Duab	56	/	/	/

In February 2019, around 50 families were displaced from Faryab to Aibak city owing to conflict between the Taliban and security forces.²¹⁰⁹

²¹⁰² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct 60 coal truck drivers in Samangan, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

²¹⁰⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 construction firm workers kidnapped in Samangan, 25 February 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 50 families displaced in Samanga due to conflict, 23 February 2019, [url](#)

2.31 Sar-e Pul

2.31.1 General description of the province



Sar-e Pul is located in the northern part of Afghanistan. It became province of its own in 1988, when Jawzjan ceded it.²¹¹⁰ Sar-e Pul borders Jawzjan in the north, Balkh in the north-east, Samangan in the east, Bamiyan and Ghor in the south and Faryab in the west.²¹¹¹ The provincial capital is Sar-e Pul.²¹¹² The province is divided into the following districts: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sancharak, Sar-e Pul, Sayad and Sozmaqala.²¹¹³ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Sar-e-Pul is estimated at 599 137 for 2018/19²¹¹⁴ and is composed mainly of Uzbeks²¹¹⁵, followed by Hazaras, Tajiks, Pashtun, Arabs, Aimaq and Balochs.²¹¹⁶

A Highway from Sheberghan, Jawzjan province, connects the provincial capital of Sar-e Pul with the Mazar-e Sharif– Herat section of Highway One.²¹¹⁷ Taliban militants purportedly attacked multiple checkpoints in the outskirts of Sar-e Pul city from Highway One in early January 2019.²¹¹⁸ An abduction of passengers travelling to Mazar-e-Sharif perpetrated by Taliban militants in Balkhab district was reported in late November 2018.²¹¹⁹ In September 2018, the Sar-e Pul–Jawzjan highway was occasionally closed due to clashes between the insurgents and the Afghan security forces;²¹²⁰ Taliban militants had set up check points along it.²¹²¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Sar-e Pul province decreased by 81 % in 2018, compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Sayad, Sancharak and the Sar-e Pul provincial centre. Moreover, the 2018 drought affected the rain-fed agricultural area.²¹²²

As reported by Reuters in January 2019, oil wells near Sar-e Pul city are an important source of income for the province, and the Taliban try to either control or destroy them.²¹²³

2.31.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul

As reported by AAN in mid-2018, Taliban militants controlled half of the province: mostly the western and southern parts and some parts of Sayad, Balkhab and Sancharak districts.²¹²⁴ Since 2012 the province has become a ‘Taliban stronghold’. The administration as well as military structure of the Taliban network in Sar-e Pul has consisted mainly of non-Pashtun locals, reflecting the multi-ethnic character of the province. The insurgency used to get its fighters from the prevailing ethnic groups in

²¹¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Sar-i-Pul province, n.d., [url](#)

²¹¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e-Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹¹² Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²¹¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e-Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²¹¹⁴ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²¹¹⁵ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Sar-i-Pul Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#); Ali. O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

²¹¹⁶ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²¹¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e-Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, [url](#), p. 5

²¹¹⁸ Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, [url](#); MENAFN, Afghanistan- Taliban attacks in Sar-e Pul kill at least 21 security forces, 2 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹⁹ Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 40 Passengers In Samangan, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

²¹²⁰ LWJ, Taliban threatens Sar-i-Pul City, captures district in Jawzjan, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹²¹ LWJ, Taliban threatens Sar-i-Pul City, captures district in Jawzjan, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Center of Sar-e Pul on Verge of Collapse, Heavy Clashes Ongoing, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Dozens killed in heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹²² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 26

²¹²³ Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹²⁴ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#); Ali. O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

the districts. For instance, in Kohestanat, the movement was mainly led by Aimaq and Tajiks, whereas in Sozmaqala it was mostly controlled by Uzbeks.²¹²⁵

According to AAN, Central Asian militants from the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) have been active in Sar-e Pul province and operating alongside the Taliban since 2015. IJU militants are mainly Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, who have settled in Kohestanat district. Their main activity in the province has consisted in offering military training to new Taliban recruits.²¹²⁶

According to several sources including an April 2018 Jamestown Foundation report,²¹²⁷ Long War Journal report of July 2018,²¹²⁸ TASS Russian News Agency reporting in August 2018²¹²⁹ and BBC research between August and November 2017, fighters of the Islamic State were active in parts of the province.²¹³⁰ Contravening these declarations, AAN found no evidence of the presence of militants affiliated with the IS or the ISKP in Sar-e Pul province, as of September 2018; noting that existing reporting and locals may have confused IS with the IJU.²¹³¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Sar-e Pul province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.²¹³²

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Sar-e Pul province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.²¹³³ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

SAR-E PUL	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²¹³⁴ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Balkhab	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Gosfandi	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Kohestanat	Taliban control	High INS Activity	High INS Activity	Taliban control	TB control

²¹²⁵ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

²¹²⁶ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹²⁷ Jamestown Foundation, Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 16 Issue: 7, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

²¹²⁸ LWJ, Taliban, Islamic State continue battle in northern Afghanistan, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹²⁹ TASS Russian News Agency, Russia records unidentified helicopters delivering weapons to Taliban, IS in Afghanistan, 23 August 2018, [url](#)

²¹³⁰ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#)

²¹³¹ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹³² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

²¹³³ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

²¹³⁴ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Sancharak	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Sar-e-Pul (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Sayad	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Sozmaqala	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 75%; Gov control: 25%
Al Badr	/	/	/	/	TB control
Al Fath	/	/	/	/	TB control
Sheram	/	/	/	/	TB control
Sayedabad	/	/	/	/	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Andkhoy	/	/	/	/	Gov control

2.31.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.31.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 101 civilian casualties (22 deaths and 79 injured) in Sar-e Pul province. This represents a decrease of 6 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by UXO/landmines and (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted or deliberate killings.²¹³⁵

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Sar-e Pul, Sayad, and Sancharak in the second highest category and Sozmaqala in the fourth highest category, while the remaining districts fall into the category below.²¹³⁶

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 71 incidents related to insurgents in Sar-e Pul province.²¹³⁷

In 2018, security conditions in Sar-e Pul province were considered 'serious'²¹³⁸ and the province was described as 'contested'.²¹³⁹ Insurgents were active in the districts of Kohestanat²¹⁴⁰ - which fell under Taliban's rule in 2015,²¹⁴¹ and districts of Sayad and Sozmaqala.²¹⁴² During the 2018 electoral process, people did not register in Kohestanat and some registration centres were closed in Sayad and Sozmaqala.²¹⁴³

The provincial capital of Sar-e Pul nearly fell to Taliban insurgents in September 2018²¹⁴⁴ and its outskirts were attacked in January 2019,²¹⁴⁵ resulting in casualties, mostly among Afghan security

²¹³⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²¹³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²¹³⁷ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²¹³⁸ Reportedly, The Dilemma of Voters in Sar-e-Pul: Lax Security, Ethnic issues, and Fear in the Minds, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

²¹³⁹ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁰ Reportedly, The Dilemma of Voters in Sar-e-Pul: Lax Security, Ethnic issues, and Fear in the Minds, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴¹ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴² Reportedly, The Dilemma of Voters in Sar-e-Pul: Lax Security, Ethnic issues, and Fear in the Minds, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴³ Reportedly, The Dilemma of Voters in Sar-e-Pul: Lax Security, Ethnic issues, and Fear in the Minds, 11 October 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁴ Tolonews, Center of Sar-e Pul on Verge of Collapse, Heavy Clashes Ongoing, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Dozens killed in heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁵ Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, [url](#); MENAFN, Afghanistan- Taliban attacks in Sar-e Pul kill at least 21 security forces, 2 January 2019, [url](#)

forces,²¹⁴⁶ but also among the militants themselves, according to Afghan government officials.²¹⁴⁷ The attack in early January 2019 was purportedly aimed at securing an oil-rich area near the provincial capital.²¹⁴⁸

In February 2019, Taliban militants gunned down the executive director of Gosfandi district in Qalqola locality.²¹⁴⁹ In December 2018 the district police chief of Sayad was killed following clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in the area.²¹⁵⁰

According to Tolonews, the Taliban kidnapped 25 people travelling from Balkhab district to Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, in late November 2018.²¹⁵¹ In July 2018, 15 civilians and seven Taliban militants were killed in a suicide blast at a *fateha* service for a deceased in Sayyad district. No group had claimed the attack, however, some sources held ISKP responsible for the suicide bombing.²¹⁵² Also in July 2018, three members of a farmer's family were killed and one was injured when the Taliban attacked his house in Sancharak district.²¹⁵³

2.31.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 12 033 persons displaced from Sar-e Pul province. Most of them were displaced within the province itself (10 207), while 1 610 persons were displaced to Balkh province, and 266 persons to Jawzjan.²¹⁵⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 590 persons displaced from Sar-e Pul province. They were mainly (9 548) displaced within the province itself.²¹⁵⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 10 073 persons displaced to Sar-e Pul province.²¹⁵⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 548 persons displaced to Sar-e Pul province and all of them originated from the province itself.²¹⁵⁷

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Balkhab	70	/	/	/
Kohestanat	231	/	/	/
Sancharak	4 998	1 477	8 890	/
Sar-e-Pul	2 219	8 596	/	9 548
Sayad	4 515	/	700	/

²¹⁴⁶ Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, [url](#); MENAFN, Afghanistan - Taliban attacks in Sar-e Pul kill at least 21 security forces, 2 January 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Dozens killed in heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁷ Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁸ Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Sar-e-Pul Oil Reservoirs Under Taliban Threat: Officials, 3 January 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down district's executive head in Sar-i-Pul, 3 February 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁰ Tolonews, District Police Chief Killed In Taliban Attack In Sar-e-Pul, 4 December 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁵¹ Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 40 Passengers In Samangan, 2 December 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 dead, many injured in Sar-i-Pul suicide attack, 17 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Three Members Of One Family Killed In Taliban Attack In Sar-e-Pul, 7 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

In November²¹⁵⁸ and December²¹⁵⁹ 2018, around 2 000 families were displaced from Sancharak to Sar-e Pul and Balkh province due to clashes between security forces and Taliban in their home district.

²¹⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1,500 Sar-i-Pul families flee fresh violence to Balkh, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds flee Sar-i-Pul's Tabar area, clash continues, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

2.32 Takhar

2.32.1 General description of the province



Takhar province is located in the north-east of Afghanistan. Its provincial capital is Taloqan.²¹⁶⁰ Takhar borders on Tajikistan to the north, Badakhshan to the east, Panjshir and Baghlan to the south and south-west and Kunduz to the west.²¹⁶¹ The province is divided into the following districts: Baharak, Bangi, Chahab, Chal, Darqad, Dasht-e-Qala, Eshkamesh, Farkhar, Hazar Sumuch, Kalafgan, Khwajabahawuddin (Khwaja Bahawuddin), Khwajaghar (also Khwaja Ghar), Namakab, Rostaq, Taloqan, Warsaj and Yangi Qala.²¹⁶² According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Takhar is estimated at 1 053 852 for 2018/19²¹⁶³ and is composed mainly of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Hazaras²¹⁶⁴ and Arabs²¹⁶⁵.

The Kunduz-Takhar Highway runs through the districts of Kalafgan, Taloqan and Bangi.²¹⁶⁶ In August 2018, Taliban militants were reported to have abducted passengers travelling through Takhar.²¹⁶⁷ In the past, the highway has been closed occasionally because of clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces.²¹⁶⁸

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Takhar was poppy-free from 2008 until 2017. In 2018 the province lost its poppy-free status, as 251 hectares of opium poppy were cultivated in Rostaq, Kalafgan and Farkhar districts.²¹⁶⁹ Drug smuggling routes leading into Central Asia run through some districts of Takhar province.²¹⁷⁰

2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar

According to Tajik authorities' estimates, the 1 360 kilometre-long border with Tajikistan includes at least 300 kilometres that are not controlled by Afghan government forces. The number of Taliban militants near Tajikistan accounts to around 7 000, according to Tajik border troops.²¹⁷¹

Besides the Taliban, militants from ISKP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, drug runners and criminals are active along the Tajik border,²¹⁷² as well as members of the terrorist movement Jundullah, a splinter group of IMU, mainly composed of non-Pashtun²¹⁷³ Afghans.²¹⁷⁴ Purportedly, a small number of Islamic Jihad Union fighters, a movement mainly composed of Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, are active in parts of the province. These fighters are part of an independent front called Imom Buxoriy Katiba (Imam Bukhari's Battalion), which operates in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan.²¹⁷⁵

²¹⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶³ Afghanistan, CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²¹⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Takhar Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶⁵ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Takhar, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁸ Tolonews, 'Heavy Clashes' Close Kunduz-Takhar Highway To Traffic, 5 May 2017, [url](#); Middle East Press, Kunduz – Takhar Highway Blocked For Traffic, 17 August 2016, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²¹⁷⁰ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁷¹ RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁷² RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁷³ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁴ Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat's IS-affiliated 'island' survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁵ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

As reported by AAN in 2017, the Taliban have been unable to ‘establish a stronger foothold’ in Takhar, despite some territorial gains starting in 2014. This has prevented them from ‘connecting their fronts in [...] the west and southwest on the one hand, and [...] the east on the other’.²¹⁷⁶

Former mujahideen commanders used to have significant influence over Takhar province following the fall of the Taliban regime.²¹⁷⁷ The major ethnic groups in the province are Uzbeks and Tajiks, many of whom were connected to the local Jombesh and Jamiat-e Islami parties, which were led by strongmen with political ties to the Afghan government. Furthermore, the insurgents’ network was fragmented, as non-Pashtun militants, mainly Uzbeks, refused to fight under Pashtun commanders.²¹⁷⁸

Taliban insurgents started to emerge in 2010 in Darqad, a Pashtun dominated district, and spread first to the provinces bordering Kunduz and Baghlan, until they also expanded their territorial control to other districts. Militants affiliated to IMU, Jundullah and the Taliban fought alongside each other against the Afghan security forces until the end of 2014. In mid-2015, the IMU allied with the IS. Consequently, the already precarious relations between the Pashtun and the non-Pashtun insurgents worsened and the Taliban ordered the disarmament and even the killing of some Uzbek Jundullah fighters in order to prevent them from allying with the IS, as IMU did.²¹⁷⁹

Throughout the years the Taliban appointed more local Uzbek and Tajik commanders to key positions in order to broaden their base in the ‘largely non-Pashtun’ province and to prevent it from becoming an IS stronghold.²¹⁸⁰ This policy was interrupted with the replacement of the former Uzbek shadow governor of the province by a Pashtun, which led to a further deterioration of the relations between the two ethnic groups. Although the situation improved after an Uzbek, the former Taliban commander Mawlawi Nurullah, was appointed as the new shadow governor of Takhar in 2017, insurgents affiliated with IMU and Jundullah continued to fight autonomously from the Taliban. Although the three groups share the same religious views, as they all follow the Hanafi school of law, the IMU and Jundullah ignore local culture, such as the role of elders in conflict resolution and in other important issues.²¹⁸¹

In 2017 Taliban militants were mostly active in a region called Mawara-ye Kokcha, which includes the districts Khwaja Bahawuddin, Dasht-e-Qala, Darqad, Yangi Qala, Chahab and Rostaq. As most of the districts, apart from Rostaq, border on Tajikistan, there were concerns about a possible infiltration of insurgents into Central Asia and Russia.²¹⁸² According to different sources, in 2018 Taliban militants have been active in Darqad, Khwaja Ghar, Khwaja Bahawuddin, Yangi Qala, Eshkamesh²¹⁸³ and Chahab²¹⁸⁴ districts.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Takhar province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.²¹⁸⁵

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Takhar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the

²¹⁷⁶ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁷ Hewad, G., Ethnic Revolt or Mujahedin Solidarity? A look at the power shuffle in Takhar (amended), AAN, 17 July 2013, [url](#); Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁸ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁰ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁸¹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁸² Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁸³ 1TV News, Taliban closes 27 schools in Takhar, 29 May 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁴ Ariana News, 16 policemen killed in Taliban raid in Takhar, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

Taliban.²¹⁸⁶ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

TAKHAR	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military quoted by SIGAR (assessment as of July 2018)	US military quoted by SIGAR (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²¹⁸⁷ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Baharak	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Bangi	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Chahab	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%
Chal	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Darqad	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Dasht-e-Qala	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Eshkashem	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Farkhar	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Hazarsumuch	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Khwajabahawuddin	Gov control	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Khwajaghar	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%
Kalafgan	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Namakab	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%
Rostaq	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Taloqan (capital)	Gov control	GIRoA Influence	GIRoA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	Gov control: 95%; TB control: 5%

²¹⁸⁶ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; Long War Journal, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁷ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Warsaj	Gov control	GIROA Influence	GIROA Influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Yangi Qala	Open Taliban presence - low	INS activity	INS activity	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%

2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.32.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 113 civilian casualties (26 deaths and 87 injured) in Takhar province. This represents an increase of 15 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and threat/intimidation/harassment.²¹⁸⁸

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Darqad in the second highest category and Dasht-e-Qala district in the third highest category. Eshkamesh, Khwaja Ghar and Farkhar are in the fourth highest category while the remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.²¹⁸⁹

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 88 incidents related to insurgents in Takhar province.²¹⁹⁰

In January 2019, battles between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces were ongoing in Takhar, in an attempt by the insurgents to gain territory.²¹⁹¹ For instance, eight policemen and 10 fighters were killed after clashes occurred in Khwaja Ghar district.²¹⁹² Taliban have attacked a security post in Khwaja Ghar in September 2018, killing and setting on fire eight policemen.²¹⁹³ In June 2018 Taliban insurgents attacked a security post in Chahab district and killed at least 16 members of the border police.²¹⁹⁴

In late October, the Taliban fired mortars towards a polling centre located at a school in Eshkamish district. One mortar missed the polling centre and landed on a home, killing three girls, one boy and a woman, and injuring a girl and a woman.²¹⁹⁵ In mid-October 2018 in Rostaq district, a bomb explosion targeted an election rally killing 22 people and injuring 36 others.²¹⁹⁶ In June 2018 the Taliban captured a female potential candidate in the forthcoming elections along with her brother in Darqad district.²¹⁹⁷

In February 2019, two radio station employees, a presenter and a journalist, were killed in Taliqan city, the capital of Takhar province by unknown gunmen who entered the station and opened fire on the staff.²¹⁹⁸ In February 2019, 11 people were injured and three were killed when a mortar shell hit their home in Dasht-e-Qala district.²¹⁹⁹ Still in Dasht-e-Qala, 5 members of a family were killed and 5 others were injured when a mortar shell landed on their home in August 2018.²²⁰⁰ In May 2018, the Taliban were accused by the Afghan government of having 'attacked civilians, burned down their houses, then

²¹⁸⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²¹⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁹⁰ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²¹⁹¹ Bloomberg, Afghan Taliban Mounts Fresh Attacks Amid Ongoing Peace Talks, 13 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹² Xinhua News Agency, Gun Battle kills 18 including 8 police in Afghan northern Takhar province, 10 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹³ 1TV News, Eight Afghan police killed, set on fire by Taliban in Takhar, 6 September 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁴ Ariana News, 16 policemen killed in Taliban raid in Takhar, 28 June 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 48

²¹⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 dead, 36 injured in blast at Takhar election rally, 13 October 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture female potential candidate in Takhar, 6 June 2016, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁸ Tolonews, Two Radio Station Employees Gunned Down in Takhar, 6 February 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 of a family killed, 11 wounded in Takhar mortar strike, 12 February 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family killed in Takhar mortar strike, 13 August 2018, [url](#)

looted their stores' in Takhar province,²²⁰¹ targeting them for cooperating with the government. The killing of three nurses in a clinic, which had been reported by government officials, was denied by the Taliban.²²⁰²

In August 2018, Taliban militants kidnapped 170 passengers travelling to Kabul through Takhar, near Khan Abad district, in Kunduz.²²⁰³ Moreover, Taliban insurgents purportedly closed schools in Darqad, Yangi Qala, Khwaja Bahawuddin and Khwaja Ghar, as of late May 2018.²²⁰⁴

2.32.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data, for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 21 532 persons displaced from Takhar province, all within the province itself.²²⁰⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 562 persons displaced from Dasht-e-Qala district in Takhar province, all within the province itself.²²⁰⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 22 995 persons displaced to Takhar province. 21 532 of these IDPs came from within the province itself and mainly went to Taloqan city and Khwajabahawuddin and Darqad districts.²²⁰⁷ In November 2018, UNOCHA registered 1 463 IDPs in Khwajaghar district, all coming from Dasht-e-Archi district in Kunduz province.²²⁰⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 562 persons displaced to Takhar province, all coming from within the province itself from Dasht-e-Qala district.²²⁰⁹

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Baharak	2 226	/	/	/
Darqad	6 944	4 270	/	/
Dasht-e-Qala	1 974	903	9 562	5 586
Eshkashem	119	119	/	/
Farkhar	224	/	/	/
Khwajaghar	10 045	1 463	/	/
Khwajabahawuddin	/	2 072	/	/
Rostaq	/	588	/	1 001
Taloqan	/	13 580	/	2 975

Due to military operations in Darqad district during the first months of 2018 UNOCHA reported displacements from Darqad and Yangi Qala districts to the provincial capital Taloqan and to Khwajabahawuddin district, with peaks of 5 200 displaced people in March 2018 and 1 100 families in

²²⁰¹ VoA, Afghan Special Forces Free Scores From Taliban Prisons, 31 May 2018, [url](#)

²²⁰² VoA, Afghan Special Forces Free Scores From Taliban Prisons, 31 May 2018, [url](#)

²²⁰³ Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

²²⁰⁴ 1TV News, Taliban closes 27 schools in Takhar, 29 May 2018, [url](#)

²²⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

April 2018.²²¹⁰ According to reporting of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) of Takhar province in December 2018 the Taliban forced young people in Darqad district to join them, which caused displacement from the district to Taloqan city and neighbouring districts.²²¹¹

At the end of May 2018 UNOCHA reported that almost 2 000 people were displaced due to fighting over the control of Dasht-e-Qala district centre which was taken over by the Taliban for one day.²²¹² The IDPs were displaced within the district itself, in Rostaq and Khwajaghar districts and in the provincial capital Taloqan.²²¹³ In September 2018, UNOCHA registered another 84 families displaced from Dasht-e-Qala district to Taloqan city.²²¹⁴

In August 2018, UNOCHA appointed Baharak, Dasht-e-Qala and Khwajaghar districts as conflict areas with a daily increase of the number of displaced families.²²¹⁵ In September 2018 380 families were reported displaced from Juda Bulaq village of Anbar Koh area of Baharak district to neighbouring village Qush Bulaq.²²¹⁶

In November and December 2018, UNOCHA registered 572 families (4 004 individuals) displaced from different parts of Takhar province to the provincial capital Taloqan city.²²¹⁷

In the Humanitarian Response Plan of December 2018, UNOCHA classified Takhar as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.²²¹⁸ The Afghanistan Protection Cluster mentioned Takhar as one of the six top hosting provinces for IDPs in August 2018.²²¹⁹ IOM ranked Khwajaghar 13th (January - March 2018) and 18th place (April - June 2018) of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs up to June 2018.²²²⁰

²²¹⁰ UNOCHA Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 13 February 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12 - 18 March 2018, 19 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 15 April 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²²¹¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 17 December 2018, [url](#), p. 4

²²¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 28 May - 3 June 2018, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²²¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 28 May - 3 June 2018, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²²¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 31 December 2018, 31 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²²¹⁵ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 7 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²²¹⁶ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 10 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²²¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ongoing Clashes Displace 1,500 Families in Takhar, 4 November 2018, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 November - 3 December 2018, 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 9 December 2018, 9 December 2018, [url](#), p. 1

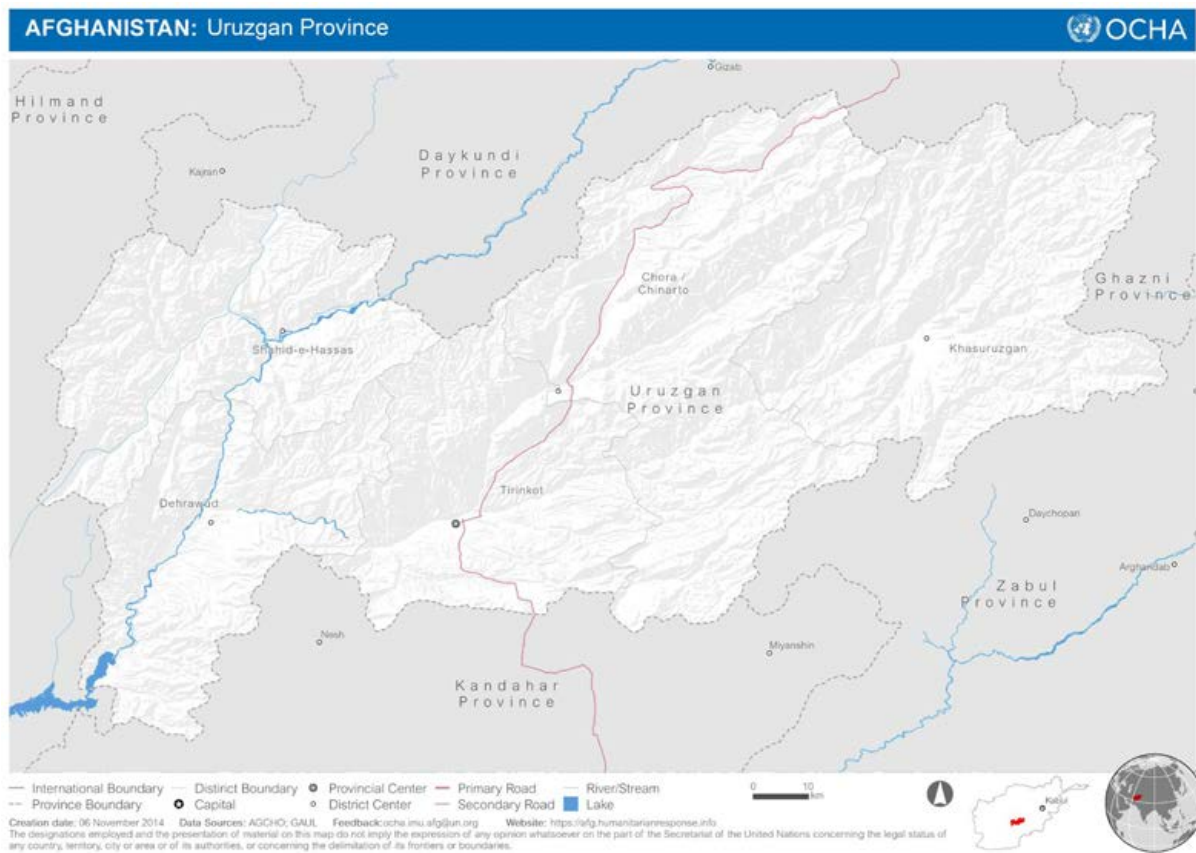
²²¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2019 Update to the 2018-2010 Humanitarian Response Plan, 21 December 2018, [url](#), p. 33

²²¹⁹ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan August 2018, 3 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²²²⁰ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5

2.33 Uruzgan

2.33.1 General description of the province



Uruzgan province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is also known by the name 'Rozgan' or 'Uruzganis'.²²²¹ Uruzgan borders on Daykundi in the north, Ghazni in the east, Zabul and Kandahar in the south and Helmand in the west. The provincial capital is Tirinkot (also known as Tarinkot). Uruzgan is divided into the following districts: Chora (also Chinarto), Dehrawud, Khasuruzgan (also Khas Uruzgan), Shahid-e-Hassas, and Tirinkot.²²²² The district of Gizab, which was formerly part of Daykundi province, now falls within the administration of Uruzgan.²²²³ Chinarto and Surab are two new districts of the province; their status has not been officially recognised yet.²²²⁴ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Uruzgan is estimated at 420 964 for 2018/19²²²⁵ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, as well as Hazaras and Kuchi nomads.²²²⁶

The Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway runs through the districts of Chora and Tarinkot.²²²⁷ Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the highway and searched or abducted travellers.²²²⁸ Moreover,

²²²¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

²²²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Uruzgan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

²²²³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²²²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

²²²⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²²²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

²²²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Uruzgan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 19 Bus Passengers and Police On Uruzgan Highway, 28 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

²²²⁸ Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 19 Bus Passengers and Police On Uruzgan Highway, 28 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Lecturer among 5 passengers killed on Uruzgan-Kandahar highway, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

passengers complained about the 'shabby condition' of the road, which extended the travel time and had a negative impact on vehicles and security.²²²⁹ Military operations were ongoing in February 2019, in order to clear the road from Taliban insurgents.²²³⁰ The city of Tirinkot hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.²²³¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Uruzgan province decreased by 13 % in 2018, compared to 2017,²²³² but it remains the country's third leading opium-cultivating province.²²³³ The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Tarinkot, Dehrawud, and Shahid-e-Hassas.²²³⁴ According to the Jordanian news website Al Bawaba, the illegal crop was very common in the province in 2017; many dwellers relied economically on poppy-cultivation and the number of addicts, including women and children, reached up to 15 000.²²³⁵

2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan

Uruzgan is home to Pashtuns and Hazaras and, according to the news agency Reuters, the two ethnic groups have had an 'uneasy co-existence' for a long time.²²³⁶ In some districts of the province, like Khas Uruzgan, Hazaras have lived in self-governed enclaves under local agreements with the Taliban, which so far have ensured stability.²²³⁷

The precarious relations between the two ethnic groups date back to the 1980s, when an intense conflict arose in the district. After one year of fighting, peace was negotiated through external mediation and was ensured by continuous efforts on the part of the village elders. As the communities took opposite sides in the post-2001 counterinsurgency campaigns, the preservation of the status quo became harder. The creation of counterinsurgency groups like the Afghan Security Guards (ASG), which were mainly composed of Hazaras, and the Afghan Local Police, in which many former Taliban commanders participated, fostered the already existing hostilities between the ethnic groups. Moreover, many Pashtuns were affiliated with Taliban insurgents through kinship and other ties, which caused distrust among the Hazara. On the other hand, the appointment of the ethnic Hazara Abdul Hakim Shujai from the ASG into the Pashtun dominated ALP in 2011 agitated the tense inter-ethnic relations even more.²²³⁸ During his activities as ASG member and ALP commander, Shujai was accused of many abuses and extrajudicial killings of Pashtuns in the area.²²³⁹

As reported by multiple sources, the increased violence against the Shia community in Afghanistan risks triggering sectarian conflicts.²²⁴⁰ The battles that affected Uruzgan and Ghazni in October and November 2018 outraged many Hazara, as well as Afghan citizens from other ethnic groups, and caused protests in Kabul City.²²⁴¹

²²²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

²²³⁰ Khaama Press, Militants suffer heavy casualties in ANDSF operations in Kandahar and Zabul, 7 February 2019, [url](#)

²²³¹ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

²²³² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 30

²²³³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²²³⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 30

²²³⁵ Al Bawaba, In Uruzgan, Afghan Mothers Feed Their Children Opium to Make Them Sleep, 2 November 2017, [url](#)

²²³⁶ Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

²²³⁷ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taliban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

²²³⁸ van Bijlert, M., Security at the Fringes: the case of Shujai in Khas Uruzgan, AAN, 6 April 2013, [url](#)

²²³⁹ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taliban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴⁰ Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, [url](#); Jamestown Foundation (The), How Islamic State-Khorasan is Driving Afghanistan Toward Sectarian Conflict, 12 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴¹ Tolonews, Hundreds Protest In Kabul Over Ghazni, Uruzgan Insecurity, 12 November 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Protesters gather near Presidential Palace in Kabul over recent wave of violence, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, ISKP has been active in the province, particularly in Chora district, recruiting new supporters, even among women. Purportedly, ISKP fighters in the province have been former Taliban militants.²²⁴²

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Uruzgan province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-South (TAAC-S), led by US forces.²²⁴³

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Uruzgan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.²²⁴⁴ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

URUZGAN	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²²⁴⁵ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Dehrawud	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Chora (Chinarto)	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS Activity	INS Activity	Taliban control	Chora: TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5% and Chinarto: TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Shahid-e-Hassas	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control
Khasuruzgan	Open Taliban Presence - high	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
Tirinkot (capital)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	GIRoA Influence	Contested	TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%
Chahr Chino	/	/	/	/	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%

2.33.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.33.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 173 civilian casualties (46 deaths and 127 injured) in Uruzgan province. This represents a decrease of 70 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground

²²⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan: 3 women from Chora district join Daesh, 18 April 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

²²⁴⁴ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴⁵ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and aerial attacks.²²⁴⁶ Further, the same source recorded 126 civilian casualties caused by ground engagements in Uruzgan province which is a 62 % decrease compared to 2017.²²⁴⁷

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018 combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Tirinkot in the highest category and Dehrawud, Chora and Khas Uruzgan in the second highest category. Shahid-e-Hassas is placed in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.²²⁴⁸

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 220 incidents related to insurgents in Uruzgan province.²²⁴⁹

Throughout 2018, Taliban militants were active in the province.²²⁵⁰ They extended their operations to areas which until then had been spared, like the district of Khas Uruzgan, fomenting intense battles between Shujai's militiamen and the Taliban.²²⁵¹ The fighting, accounting for many casualties and internally displaced people, mostly among the Hazara civilian population, went on for almost one month until late November.²²⁵² There are many theories about the reasons for the Taliban expansion into new areas: some point to their desire to gain more territory to improve their position in the peace talks, others point to their move to expand their influence among all ethnic groups and, third, some believe that the Taliban want to establish their own administration and collect taxes.²²⁵³

Airstrikes were reported in Uruzgan throughout 2018, mainly causing Taliban casualties, including in the outskirts of Tirinkot²²⁵⁴ in Chinarto district²²⁵⁵ and in Khas Uruzgan.²²⁵⁶ Two children were killed, their father and another child were injured by a mortar shell landing on their house during a security operation in Tirinkot, in March 2018.²²⁵⁷

Five passengers were kidnapped and later killed by gunmen in the Urdo-Balagh locality of the Uruzgan-Kandahar highway in April 2018.²²⁵⁸ In the same locality the Taliban intercepted a vehicle and kidnapped 30 passengers, after closing the Uruzgan-Kandahar highway in February 2018.²²⁵⁹

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, the Taliban tried to discourage the inhabitants of Gizab district from voting by transmitting threats through loudspeakers in local mosques.²²⁶⁰ Moreover, according to a dataset from August 2018 quoted by UNOCHA, 95 percent of

²²⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²²⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 47

²²⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁴⁹ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²²⁵⁰ LWJ, Afghan forces withdraw from district center in Uruzgan as the Taliban attacks, 29 May 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵¹ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#); Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵² Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵³ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁴ Tolonews, Eight Taliban Killed In Uruzgan Airstrike, 12 December 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Nine Insurgents Killed In Afghan Airstrikes, 11 February 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Key Taliban Commander Killed In Uruzgan Airstrike, 16 February 2019, [url](#); Pajhok Afghan News, Notorious Taliban commander among 10 rebels killed in Uruzgan airstrike, 23 February 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵⁵ Tolonews, 11 Taliban Fighters Killed In Uruzgan Airstrike, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁶ Tolonews, 42 Daesh And Taliban Fighters Killed In Afghan Airstrikes, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁷ Pajhok Afghan News, Mortar shells kills 2 children in Uruzgan, 22 March 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁸ Pajhok Afghan News, Lecturer among 5 passengers killed on Uruzgan-Kandahar highway, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁹ Pajhok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 30 passengers on Uruzgan-Kandahar highway, 28 February 2018, [url](#)

²²⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5

the male population in Uruzgan did not feel safe when travelling to work, the mosque, health and education facilities or the market.²²⁶¹

2.33.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 8 459 persons displaced from Uruzgan province. Among these IDPs, 7 367 were displaced within the province itself. The major part of the rest of the IDPs was displaced to Kandahar.²²⁶²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 161 persons displaced from Uruzgan province and all of them were originating from Dehrawud district.²²⁶³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 7 410 persons originating from Uruzgan and settled in Tirinkot district of the province itself.²²⁶⁴

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Uruzgan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.²²⁶⁵

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Chora / Chinarto	749	/	/	/
Dehrawud	368	/	161	/
Khasuruzgan	1 597	/	/	/
Shahid-e-Hassas	72	/	/	/
Tirinkot	5 673	7 410	/	/

According to UNOCHA, villagers were forced to flee their places of origin for improved safety. As of April 2018, more than 1 700 IDPs arrived to Tirinkot City due to military operations in Chora/Chinarto, Khasuruzgan and Tirinkot district.²²⁶⁶ In June 2018, IDPs continued to arrive individually or in small groups to the areas around of Tirinkot City because of fighting across the southern region provinces.²²⁶⁷ Around 2 660 persons were displaced, following armed conflict in Khasuruzgan district, to Ghazni province, according to the November 4th 2018 UNOCHA Weekly Field Report.²²⁶⁸

²²⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 9

²²⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

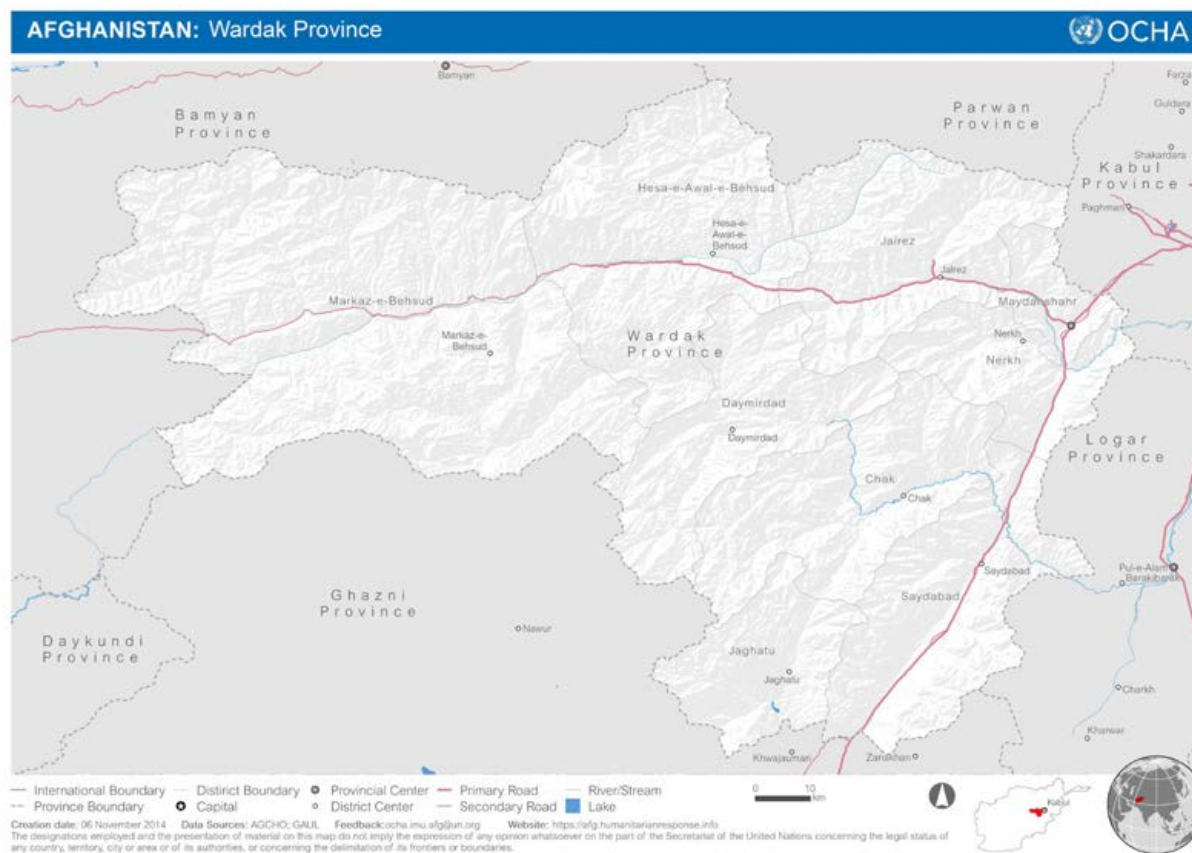
²²⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report (26 March – 1 April 2018), 1 April 2018, [url](#)

²²⁶⁷ ERM, Household Assessment Report, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

²²⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 October - 4 November 2018, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

2.34 Wardak

2.34.1 General description of the province



Wardak province, also known as Maidan Wardak, borders Parwan and Bamyan to the north, Kabul and Logar to the east and Ghazni to the south and west. The province is divided into the following districts: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesa-e-Awal-e-Behsud, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Markaz-e-Behsud, Maydanshahr (also Maidan Shahr), Nerkh, Saydabad.²²⁶⁹ The capital city is Maidan Shahr, which is located approximately 40 kilometres south-west of Kabul.²²⁷⁰ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Wardak is estimated at 637 634 for 2018/19²²⁷¹ and is composed of Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras.²²⁷²

The Kabul-Kandahar highway crosses the province's districts of Maidan Shahr, Narkh and Saydabad. A provincial road runs west from Maidan Shahr to Bamyan through the districts of Jalrez, Hesa-e-Awal-e-Behsud, Markaz-e-Behsud and the Hajigak pass;²²⁷³ the Taliban purportedly set up check-points on this road.²²⁷⁴ Afghanistan National Army soldiers have also been reported to harass and beat up locals.²²⁷⁵ The Taliban also collect *ushr* on local roads in the province.²²⁷⁶ Furthermore, as reported by the UN Secretary-General in December 2018, Taliban insurgents temporarily captured strategic posts

²²⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Wardak Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Naval Postgraduate School, Mayden Wardak Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Maidan Wardak, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²²⁷⁰ Washington Post (The), Taliban blocks major Afghan highway in expanding attacks, 26 October 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Maidan Wardak, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²²⁷¹ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁷² Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Maidan Wardak, 1 February 2017, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Mayden Wardak Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²²⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Wardak Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²²⁷⁴ Wiener Zeitung, Skifahren bei den Buddhas, 4 January 2018, [url](#); New York Times (The), Who Is Winning the War in Afghanistan? Depends on Which One, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

²²⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA soldiers accused of harassing civilians, 11 April 2018, [url](#)

²²⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gunmen take taxes on Kabul-Bamyan highway, 5 November 2018, [url](#)

along main roads to Kabul in Saydabad and Daymirdad districts, restricting movement between provinces.²²⁷⁷ Following clashes between Taliban and Afghan security forces, electricity was cut off in the province²²⁷⁸ and the Kabul-Kandahar highway has been closed occasionally.²²⁷⁹ Moreover, demining operations took place in January 2018 on the southern highway through Maidan Wardak province.²²⁸⁰

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Wardak province has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.²²⁸¹

2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak

Wardak is considered a 'relatively volatile' province by Khaama Press, with Taliban active in some of its districts.²²⁸² The Haqqani network expanded to the province in the past and used to cooperate with jihadist groups operating south of Kabul. The Haqqani network has mainly provided indirect support in form of funds, training, and appointing local Islamist militant leaders.²²⁸³

According to an article by the Jamestown Foundation, a US based institute for research and analysis, increased violence against the Shia community risks triggering sectarian conflicts. In Wardak province, for instance, a militia composed of 1 000 armed Hazara allied itself with Hazara groups in Ghazni and other Hazara dominated areas in 2016, in order to create its own protection force for the central region.²²⁸⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Wardak province is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps, which falls under the Task Force Southeast, led by US forces.²²⁸⁵

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Wardak province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.²²⁸⁶ When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

²²⁷⁷ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²²⁷⁸ AP, Afghan officials say highway reopened after Taliban assault, 7 October 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni in darkness since 5 days after power cables cut, [url](#)

²²⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 people killed, 37 wounded in Maidan Wardak car bombing, 27 October 2018, [url](#); AP, Afghan officials say highway reopened after Taliban assault, 7 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁸⁰ Tolonews, A Night With Deminers Clearing The Maidan Wardak Highway, 23 January 2018, [url](#)

²²⁸¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

²²⁸² Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban's military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

²²⁸³ Stanford University, Mapping militant organizations, Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#)

²²⁸⁴ Jamestown Foundation (The), How Islamic State-Khorasan is Driving Afghanistan Toward Sectarian Conflict, 12 October 2018, [url](#); Khabarnama, قوماندهان شمشیر: تشکیل نیروهای مسلح مردمی در کجابه بهسود [The Sword Commander: the formation of popular armed forces in Kojab Behsud], 20 October 2016, [url](#)

²²⁸⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 16

²²⁸⁶ BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

WARDAK	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²²⁸⁷ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Chak	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%
Daymirdad	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Hesa-e-Awal-e-Behsud	Gov control	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Jaghatu	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%
Jalrez	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%
Markaz-e-Behsud	Gov control	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Gov control or undetermined	/
Maydanshahr (capital)	Open Taliban presence - Medium	GIRoA influence	GIRoA influence	Contested	TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Nerkh	Open Taliban Presence - high	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Saydabad	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Taliban control	TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%

2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.34.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 224 civilian casualties (88 deaths and 136 injured) in Wardak province. This represents an increase of 170 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by suicide attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.²²⁸⁸

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Jalrez and Saydabad in the second highest category and the districts Chak and Narkh in the third highest category. Maydan Shahr and Jaghatu are in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.²²⁸⁹

²²⁸⁷ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

²²⁸⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²²⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 90 incidents related to insurgents in Wardak province.²²⁹⁰

The province has seen intensive night raids and airstrikes that have caused casualties among civilians, the most prominent one in Jaghatu district at the end of September 2018 which killed 12 persons.²²⁹¹ Moreover, Nerkh²²⁹² and Jalrez²²⁹³ districts were also affected by air strikes and military operations that caused at least 11 fatalities among civilians.²²⁹⁴ Two civilians have been killed and nine others were wounded in mortar shell attacks allegedly carried out by the Taliban in the capital Maidan Shahr in late June 2018.²²⁹⁵ According to residents of Saydabad district in March 2018, four civilians were killed in a night raid by the Afghan security forces in the Tangi Dara area.²²⁹⁶

Military operations conducted by Afghan security forces took place in Saydabad²²⁹⁷ and Chak²²⁹⁸ districts, also killing high ranking Taliban members.²²⁹⁹ Members of the Haqqani network were purportedly arrested in the province.²³⁰⁰

Taliban insurgents carried out suicide attacks outside a police compound in the provincial capital in October 2018, as well as in January 2019, resulting in casualties among Afghan security forces, civilians and among the insurgents themselves.²³⁰¹ The most prominent attack was a Taliban car-bomb on a National Directorate of Security base near the provincial capital, which killed between 12 and 126 Afghan security forces in January 2019.²³⁰² Sources described it as 'one of the deadliest attacks against the intelligence service in the 17-year war with the Taliban'.²³⁰³ Furthermore, the Taliban took Afghan security force members hostage after fights between the two sides in June 2018,²³⁰⁴ they overran several government check-points in Jalrez district²³⁰⁵ and carried out battles in Daymirdad,²³⁰⁶ causing victims among the security forces and the insurgents themselves.²³⁰⁷

In September 2018 four people were killed when their vehicle struck a landmine in the Khanjan Khel area of Nerkh district. The Taliban in the area had warned residents against traveling on the road from

²²⁹⁰ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²²⁹¹ Tolonews, Preliminary Findings Indicate Wardak Airstrike Killed 12 Civilian, 26 September, 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 of a family killed in Wardak raid, claim residents, 24 September 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Hundreds of Civilians Killed by Airstrikes in Past Three Months in Wardak, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹² Afghanistan Times, Hundreds of Civilians Killed by Airstrikes in Past Three Months in Wardak, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed in Miadan [sic!] Wardak airstrike, 23 January 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed in Miadan [sic!] Wardak airstrike, 23 January 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Hundreds of Civilians Killed by Airstrikes in Past Three Months in Wardak, 9 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians killed, 9 hurt in Maidan Wardak mortar shells attack, 23 June 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹⁶ Tolonews, Wardak Residents Claim 4 Civilians Killed In Govt Forces Raid, 30 March 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹⁷ Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban's military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹⁸ Khaama Press, Taliban's shadow governor of Maidan Wardak killed in ANDSF operations, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁹⁹ Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban's military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban's shadow governor of Maidan Wardak killed in ANDSF operations, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰⁰ Xinhua News Agency, One Haqqani militant killed, 5 arrested in eastern Afghanistan, 11 March 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰¹ Tolonews, Blast Targets Afghan Forces Base in Wardak, 21 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 people killed, 37 wounded in Maidan Wardak car bombing, 27 October 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghans Vote In Kandahar Elections Delayed By Violence, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰² New York Times (The), After Deadly Assault on Afghan Base, Taliban Sit for Talks With U.S. Diplomats, 21 January 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Taliban kill 'more than 100 people' in attack on Afghan military base, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁰³ New York Times (The), After Deadly Assault on Afghan Base, Taliban Sit for Talks With U.S. Diplomats, 21 January 2019, [url](#); Il Messaggero, Afghanistan, sangue sul disimpegno Usa: autobomba die talebani contro scuola militare, 130 vittime, 22 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁰⁴ DW, Taliban take Afghan security forces hostage in Maidan Wardak, 23 June 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰⁵ Tolonews, 11 Security Forces Killed in Wardak Clashes, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰⁶ VoA, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attacks, 9 September 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰⁷ Tolonews, 11 Security Forces Killed in Wardak Clashes, 9 September 2018, [url](#); VoA, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attacks, 9 September 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban's shadow governor of Maidan Wardak killed in ANDSF operations, 20 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban's military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

8pm to 4 am.²³⁰⁸ In another similar incident in May 2018 four people were killed and two injured when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Tangi Dara area of Saydabad district.²³⁰⁹

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, Wardak is one of the provinces where threats by the Taliban during the electoral process took place in form of 'night letters' to citizens, road blockages and indirect fire.²³¹⁰

2.34.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 199 persons displaced from Wardak province, mainly displaced within the province itself or in neighbouring provinces Kabul and Ghazni.²³¹¹

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Wardak province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.²³¹²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 205 persons displaced to Wardak province, mainly coming from within the province itself (2 156 IDPs) and a small number from Chaparhar district in Nangarhar province.²³¹³

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Wardak province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.²³¹⁴

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Saydabad	707	560	/	/
Nerkh	1 092	/	/	/
Jaghathu	301	/	/	/
Chak	105	/	/	/
Jalrez	364	/	/	/
Daymirdad	630	/	/	/
Maydanshahr	/	1 561	/	/
Markaz-e-Behsud	/	84	/	/

In February and March 2018, UNOCHA reported on displacement out of Nerkh, Chak, Saydabad and Jalrez districts due to insecurity and conflict between Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin and the Taliban.²³¹⁵ The majority of these IDP families went to the capital of Maydanshar and the Dashte Top area of Saydabad district.²³¹⁶ In the same period, UNOCHA's Weekly Field Reports reported on displacements from different districts in Wardak to the provincial capital of Maydanshar, due to insecurity, clashes between members of non-state armed groups and a pro-government militia and armed clashes between armed opposition groups.²³¹⁷

²³⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed in Wardak roadside bombing, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed, 2 injured in Maidan Wardak bombing, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

²³¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5, 6

²³¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²³¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²³¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁵ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 27 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²³¹⁶ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 27 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²³¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12-18 February 2018, 18 February 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 February - 6 March, 6 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1

On the 13 August, following the Taliban attack on Ghazni City, UNOCHA reported on large numbers of civilians fleeing the city to neighbouring Wardak province via the embattled Highway 1, although these reports were not confirmed by the authorities.²³¹⁸ In November 2018, heavy fighting was reported in Malestan and Jaghuri districts of Ghazni province. An escalation of the conflict with intensified ground operations and airstrikes triggered displacement into Wardak, Bamyan and Kabul provinces.²³¹⁹

In October 2018 the head of DoRR reported during an OCT meeting in Wardak that the number of IDPs in the province was expected to increase, as the joint ANSF military operations were going on in different locations.²³²⁰ Furthermore, 1 600 displaced people from insecure districts within the province reportedly arrived in Maydanshar that same month.²³²¹

According to UNHCR, Wardak is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there, but 'choose to live somewhere else once they return'.²³²²

²³¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict, Update No. 1, 13 August 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²³¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes, Flash Update No. 1, 14 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

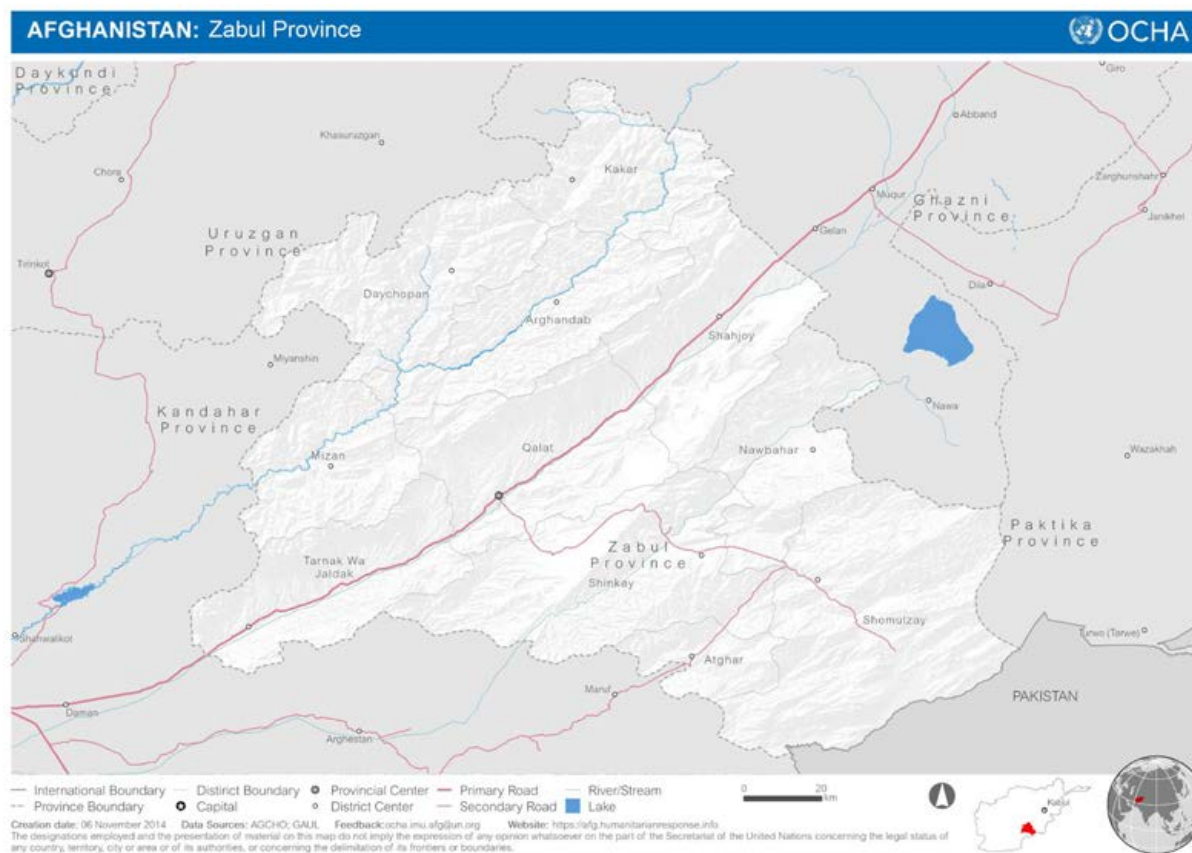
²³²⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 8 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²³²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 October 2018, 14 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²³²² UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.35 Zabul

2.35.1 General description of the province



Zabul province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan and shares an international border with Pakistan. Among the Afghan provinces, Zabul borders Kandahar, Uruzgan, Ghazni and Paktika. The provincial capital is Qalat (formerly known as Qalat-i Ghilzai);²³²³ Zabul is divided into the following districts: the provincial capital Qalat, Arghandab, Atghar, Daychopan, Kakar (also known as Khake Afghan), Mizan, Nawbahar, Shahjoy, Shinkay, Shomulzay, Tarnak wa Jaldak (also known as Shahr Sefa).²³²⁴ According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Zabul is estimated at 371 043 for 2018/19²³²⁵ and it is composed mainly of Pashtuns and Baloch.²³²⁶ The province is also known by the name 'Zabalistan' and is considered the birthplace of the Pashtun ethnic group.²³²⁷

The Kabul-Kandahar Highway, also known by the name of 'Highway One',²³²⁸ runs through the districts of Tarnak wa Jaldak, Qalat and Shahjoy.²³²⁹ The road has a significant strategic relevance, as it connects the capital city with Kandahar, a city that is considered to be the native region of the Taliban movement. It passes through remote areas of the province, many of which are not under government

²³²³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²³²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Zabul, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²³²⁵ Afghanistan, CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 3

²³²⁶ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Zabul, 1 February 2017, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²³²⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d., [url](#)

²³²⁸ Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what's gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](#)

²³²⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

control. It is a key supply route for the south.²³³⁰ Conflict-related security incidents such as illegal armed groups attacking police check-posts and detonations of improvised explosive devices are reported to have taken place along some highway sections in Zabul province.²³³¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Zabul province increased by 21 % in 2018, compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Tarnak wa Jaldak and Mizan, where security conditions were reportedly bad.²³³² The opium trade represents one of the main sources of income for the insurgency.²³³³

2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul

In the 1980s, during the Soviet occupation, the mujahideen movement mainly infiltrated Afghanistan from Pakistan through Zabul province. Located along the 'conservative Pashtun belt', Zabul province has a historical significance for the Taliban, who started their battle over the control of the country in the 1990s from there. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founder of the Taliban movement, was from the the Hotak tribe, one of the two main tribes in the province.²³³⁴

Nowadays considered a 'Taliban stronghold' in the 'volatile south', the province sees a weak presence of the Afghan government, which is limited to the capital city, while the majority of the population lives across numerous villages in rural areas. Among the inhabitants of Zabul the 'feeling of being forgotten by the government' is reportedly one of the reasons for the considerable Taliban presence in the area.²³³⁵ According to the Survey of the Afghan People 2018 by the Asia Foundation, 58.5 % of Zabul dwellers sympathized 'a lot' with the Taliban, the most of any province of Afghanistan.²³³⁶ Furthermore, 63 % claimed to have no fear when encountering them, while many of the respondents were sceptical of the performance by the ANA and ANP.²³³⁷

Besides local Taliban insurgents, ISKP fighters are purportedly active in several districts of the province.²³³⁸ According to the Saudi-Arabian newspaper Arab News, confrontations about the right to lead the Afghan insurgency arose within the Taliban movement in 2015, after it was disclosed that Mullah Omar had died in 2013. This situation fuelled the hopes of ISKP, which wished to exploit these divisions in order to become the dominant faction in the southern region. After clashes between the Taliban Red Unit and the Taliban splinter group of Mullah Mohammad Rasool in the western region of Afghanistan, which caused the latter's expulsion to Pakistan, his successor, Mullah Mansour Dadullah declared allegiance to ISKP and moved to Khak-e Afghan district in Zabul province. The ISKP group has been composed of Afghans from across the country and Uzbek militants, most of them being members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.²³³⁹ Thus, throughout 2015 ISKP had increased its influence in the province and it even targeted Highway One and abducted Hazaras and Shia Muslims. This caused the official Taliban movement to launch a military reaction, supported by the Red Unit, ending with their victory over IS in the same year.²³⁴⁰

²³³⁰ Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what's gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](#); RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#); Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

²³³¹ Tolonews, Seven Police Killed In Kabul-Kandahar Highway Attack, 15 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion on Kandahar-Zabul highway leaves 3 civilians dead, 7 July 2018, [url](#)

²³³² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 30

²³³³ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

²³³⁴ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

²³³⁵ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

²³³⁶ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 61

²³³⁷ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, [url](#), p. 47

²³³⁸ Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Arab News, In Afghanistan, the Taliban's anti-Daesh squad gains a reputation for ruthlessness, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

²³³⁹ Arab News, In Afghanistan, the Taliban's anti-Daesh squad gains a reputation for ruthlessness, 27 June 2018, [url](#); AAN, Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

²³⁴⁰ Arab News, In Afghanistan, the Taliban's anti-Daesh squad gains a reputation for ruthlessness, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Zabul province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under the Train Advise Assist Command-South (TAAC-S), led by US forces.²³⁴¹

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Zabul province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.²³⁴² When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

ZABUL	BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)	US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)	LWJ (last accessed: ²³⁴³ April 2019)	Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)
Atghar	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 99%; Gov control: 1%
Arghandab	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS Activity	INS Activity	Taliban control	TB control
Daychopan	Open Taliban presence - low	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control
Kakar (Khak-e-Afghan)	Taliban control	High INS activity	High INS activity	Taliban control	TB control
Mizan	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 96%; Gov control: 4%
Nawbahar	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS Activity	INS Activity	Contested	TB control
Qalat (capital)	Gov control	GIROA control	GIROA control	Gov control or undetermined	TB control: 75%; Gov control: 25%
Shahjoy	Open Taliban presence - Medium	INS Activity	Contested	Contested	TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%
Shinkay	Open Taliban presence - low	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%
Shomulzay	Open Taliban presence – Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	TB control: 88%; Gov control: 12%
Tarnak Wa Jaldak	Open Taliban presence - Medium	Contested	Contested	Contested	/
Seyuri	/	/	/	/	TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%

²³⁴¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 15

²³⁴² BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

²³⁴³ LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

Shahr-e-Safa	/	/	/	/	TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%
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2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.35.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 293 civilian casualties (57 deaths and 236 injured) in Zabul province. This represents a decrease of 12 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and UXO/landmines.²³⁴⁴

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Shahjoy in the highest category and Qalat in the category below. Daychopan, Mizan and Arghandab are in the third highest category and Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Shinkay, Nawbahar and Shamul Zayi districts are in the fourth category. The remaining districts are in lower category.²³⁴⁵

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 117 incidents related to insurgents in Zabul province.²³⁴⁶

The province has seen intense fighting and military operations such as night raids and air strikes, which have caused casualties among civilians.²³⁴⁷ Taliban insurgents have been carrying out activities related to terrorism such as shootings and suicide attacks in some districts of Zabul province, resulting in casualties among the Afghan security forces and the insurgents themselves.²³⁴⁸ Furthermore, airstrikes by US forces took place in June 2018 and killed Taliban leaders and commanders.²³⁴⁹

Three civilians were killed in July 2018 by a blast in the Juldak area of Qalat city when their vehicle was hit by a bomb allegedly planted by the Taliban.²³⁵⁰ Still in July, two children were killed and two others and a woman were injured in July 2018 when their house in Shajoy district was hit by a mortar shell fired by the Taliban.²³⁵¹ Furthermore, a woman was killed and two others were injured when their car hit an IED in the Kam Karez area of Sayori district in February 2018.²³⁵²

According to a report about 2018 elections-related violence by UNAMA, citizens from some districts of Zabul were threatened through Taliban's 'night letters' and asked to show their *tazkiras* on road blockades.²³⁵³

²³⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

²³⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p.2

²³⁴⁶ Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

²³⁴⁷ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

²³⁴⁸ Khaama Press, Militants suffer heavy casualties in ANDSF operations in Kandahar and Zabul, 7 February 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan forces thwart suicide attack on a governmental compound in Zabul, 22 December 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, District Police Chief Killed In Taliban Attack in Zabul, 14 October 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 3 ANA soldiers killed in Zabul battle, 19 December 2018, [url](#); New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Dec. 14-20, 21 December 2018, [url](#); New York Times Magazine (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: Dec. 28-3 Jan., 4 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban executioner killed in U.S. drone strike in Zabul province, 14 December 2018, [url](#); Xinhua News Agency, Airstrikes kill 2 Taliban commanders in Southern Afghanistan, 1 January 2018, [url](#)

²³⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians killed in Zabul bomb blast, 7 July 2018, [url](#)

²³⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 children killed in Nangarhar, Zabul incidents, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

²³⁵² Tolonews, Woman Killed in Zabul Roadside Explosion, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

²³⁵³ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 5

2.35.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 897 persons displaced from Zabul province.²³⁵⁴ Among them, 1 872 persons were displaced within the province itself, while the 25 other persons were displaced to Kandahar.²³⁵⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 1 005 persons displaced from Zabul province within the province itself.²³⁵⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 102 persons displaced to Zabul province.²³⁵⁷

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 1 152 persons displaced to Zabul province.²³⁵⁸

District	Displaced from (2018)	Displaced to (2018)	Displaced from (2019)	Displaced to (2019)
Arghandab	192	/	/	/
Daychopan	300	/	1 005	/
Kakar	405	/	/	/
Mizan	202	/	/	/
Nawbahar	94	/	/	/
Qalat	104	1 495	/	1 152
Shahjoy	486	607	/	/
Shinkay	108	/	/	/
Shomulzay	6	/	/	/

According to UNOCHA, on 9 December 2018, 900 IDPs came to Qalat district from several districts because of armed conflicts in their places of origin.²³⁵⁹

²³⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4-9 December 2018, 9 December 2018, [url](#)

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The goal of this report is to provide security-related information relevant for international protection status determination.

An important goal of this report is to provide details on a regional, provincial or even district level.

The reporting period for incidents and events illustrating the general trends of the conflict, is 1 January 2018 until 28 February 2019.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

- **General description of the security situation**
 - Conflict background
 - Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan
 - Political landscape
 - Peace talks
 - International context
 - Actors in the conflict
 - Pro-government forces
 - Tasks/roles/numbers
 - Components
 - Civilian casualties attribution
 - Anti-government elements
 - Level of organisation
 - Civilian casualties attribution
 - Recent security trends and armed confrontations
 - Trends, nature of violence and methods primarily used
 - Impact of the violence on the civilian population
 - Civilian casualties
 - State ability to secure law and order
 - Socio-economic situation
 - Refugees, IDPs, returnees
 - Children
 - Geographical overview
 - Broad regional differences
 - Insurgent control
 - Conflict severity
 - Mobility
 - security aspects of travelling (roads, flights)
- **Regional description: per province**
 - General description (districts, population, geography, economy)
 - Conflict background (description on presence and general activity of actors, Taliban control/presence)
 - Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

- Civilian casualties
- Conflict severity
- Incident numbers
- Description of representative incidents
- Displacement



Publications Office

doi: 10.2847/585139