

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE CONTENTS

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SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

KEY ISSUES & EVENTS

Anti-Taliban armed factions are active in multiple provinces. Some political opposition groups are attempting to organize themselves under an umbrella group for negotiations with the Taliban.

The Taliban helped mediate an ongoing ceasefire between the Pakistan government and the Pakistani Taliban.

Islamic State-Khorasan attacks have declined, but they are spreading geographically.

The United States continues to press the Taliban on key interests including equal rights, forming an inclusive government, and counterterrorism commitments following a series of Taliban policies curtailing civic rights.

SECURITY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

According to the United Nations, the presence of anti-Taliban armed groups has expanded, although membership and capabilities are hard to assess. At least a dozen groups exist, with the National Resistance Front (NRF) and Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) the most active and visible. The Taliban maintain that these groups do not pose a significant challenge to their authority, but in early May, Taliban security forces redeployed from quieter areas in the south to the northern provinces of Panjshir, Baghlan, and Takhar, where these groups are active.¹ The NRF and AFF have taken credit for dozens of small-arms attacks and ambushes, such as a June 28 attack on the Taliban in Kapisa Province in which three Taliban were reportedly killed.²

In June, one news report indicated that these same Taliban forces redeployed again to reinforce dozens of other Taliban, including suicide bombers, in what appeared to be an anticorruption security operation against fighters in coal-rich Balkhab District, northern Sar-e Pul Province.³

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The fighters appeared to be under the command of Malawi Mehdi, an ethnic Hazara who joined the Taliban in 2019 as the shadow governor of Balkhab District after clashing with the former Afghan government over his extortion of coal mines in the area. Once the Taliban seized Kabul, they forbade local, noncentralized tax collection. Mehdi was demoted to intelligence chief in Bamyan Province and later fired from that position in April. Afterward, Mehdi and his supporters began resisting Taliban attempts to impose central authority.⁴

The June clash sparked two days of intense fighting. At least 20 Taliban, 15 civilians, and eight Mehdi fighters were reportedly killed.⁵ The conflict appears to be expanding, with civilians fleeing the crossfire. In early July, the Taliban reportedly deployed 8,000 forces to Balkhab District, prompting the displacement of at least 27,000 civilians into neighboring provinces.⁶

The UN also reported that representatives of some opposition groups met in Turkey to incorporate as the High Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan, and called on the Taliban to prepare for negotiations.⁷ During a May visit to Kazakhstan, Donald Lu, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, said:

The U.S. government supports Afghan peace and stability. We will never support the war against the government or the Taliban. For us, success will be achieved when the Taliban establish a legitimate administration in which all Afghans feel involved in decision-making. I will never support any armed resistance. Afghanistan's people have been subjected to bloodshed for more than 40 years, and it must now come to an end.⁸

UNAMA Reports a Significant Reduction in Civilian Harm, but Ongoing Human Rights Violations

According to UNAMA, from August 15, 2021, the date that the Ghani administration dissolved, through June 15, 2022, there “has been a significant reduction in civilian harm.” In over seven months, from January 1 through August 15, 2021, there were an average of 987 civilian casualties per month, with men suffering over 60% of these casualties (28% children, nearly 12% women). UNAMA attributed 51% of these casualties to the Taliban insurgency. From August 15, 2021, through June 15, 2022, an average of 210 civilian casualties occurred each month, with men suffering nearly 75% of these casualties (21% children, over 4% women). UNAMA attributed about 50% of the casualties since August 15 to IS-K; attacks that predominantly targeted nonmilitary mosques, public parks, schools, and public transportation.

UNAMA also cataloged a series of Taliban human rights violations including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture,

and ill treatment that are “impacting the enjoyment of a broad range of human rights.” Further, the impact of these violations is being compounded by Taliban measures that “stifle debate, curb dissent, and limit the fundamental rights and freedoms of Afghans,” with women and girls, in particular, subjected to severe restrictions on their human rights.

Since September 2021, UNAMA has engaged the Taliban from the local to the national level—meeting relevant ministries including the interior, defense, and intelligence, among others—to raise awareness of human rights standards and advocate for thorough accountability. UNAMA said the Taliban have taken some steps to protect and promote human rights including a general amnesty for former government and security force members, a December 2021 decree on women’s rights, a code of conduct on prison reform, and a directive on the use of force by Taliban security members.

Source: UNAMA, Human Rights in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021–15 June 2022, 7/2022, pp. 3–10.

Similarly in June, Hugo Shorter, charge d'affaires at the UK Mission to Afghanistan in Doha said, the “UK does not support anyone, including Afghan nationals, seeking to achieve political change through violence, or any activity inciting violence for political purposes,” adding that “there is no alternative to engaging pragmatically with the current administration of Afghanistan.”⁹ The following day, the Taliban released five British nationals who had been held since December 2021.¹⁰

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), citing **open-source reporting**, said the Taliban regime facilitated an indefinite ceasefire agreement between Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)— also known as the Pakistani Taliban— and the Pakistan government on May 31. DIA said the Taliban likely did this “to prove to the international community that it is a reliable partner” and “almost certainly to reduce tensions with Islamabad.”¹¹ Pakistan has pressed the Taliban to curtail TTP cross-border operations from Afghanistan in light of mounting attacks on Pakistani security forces. But rather than directly targeting the TTP, the Taliban have moved the group away from the border to prevent it from attacking Pakistan.¹² For more information on the ceasefire between TTP and the Pakistan government, see p. 74.

Other Islamist militant groups active in Afghanistan include the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K, designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the State Department in 2016) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). According to State, the IMU has lost most of its strength in Afghanistan and its recruiting pool is being absorbed by IS-K. State said that IS-K promotes itself in part by impugning the Taliban’s Islamic credentials, accusing the Taliban of complicity with Western governments. In areas without a strong Taliban presence, IS-K may brand itself as an alternative authority to increase its recruiting appeal. Nonetheless, IS-K currently operates through clandestine cells in mostly urban environments and has not made any serious attempts to hold territory or govern in recent years.¹³ According to the UN, the number of IS-K attacks has decreased, but the attacks are spreading geographically.¹⁴ As of April 2022, IS-K’s strength was approximately 2,000 members.¹⁵ For more information on Taliban operations against IS-K, see p. 80.

The UN said that crime-related security incidents remain nearly as high as last year, due to deteriorating economic and humanitarian conditions. Herat, Nangarhar, Kabul, and Kandahar Provinces are the most affected by criminal activity.¹⁶ The Taliban continue to announce the graduations of hundreds of police personnel from different training centers in the country.¹⁷

Political Violence and Protest Incidents Increase Slightly

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), **political violence** and protest incidents in Afghanistan (April–June 2022) increased by more than 8% compared to total incidents last quarter



Police trainees in Kandahar Province formed for a visit by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. (Taliban regime photo)

Open-source reporting: Relevant information derived from the systematic collection, processing, and analysis of publicly available information in response to known or anticipated intelligence requirements.

Source: DOD, “DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,” 11/2021, p. 159.

Political violence: The use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation. Political violence is a component of political disorder, a social phenomenon that also includes precursor events, or critical junctures, that often precede violent conflicts, including demonstrations, protests, and riots. Political disorder does not include general criminal conduct.

Source: ACLED, “Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook,” 2019, p. 7, www.acleddata.com, accessed 7/7/2022.



A Taliban fighter stands guard outside the meeting hall in Kabul for the “Grand Assembly of the Ulema.” (AFP photo by Wakil Kohsar)

(January–March 2022).¹⁸ The NRF was involved in over 26% of political violence incidents this quarter, followed by IS-K (nearly 9%) and the AFF (4%). Protest incidents accounted for over 4% of all incidents this quarter, down from 14% last quarter.¹⁹ Kabul saw the most incidents since January (14%) followed by northern Panjshir (10%) and Baghlan (10%) Provinces.²⁰

ACLEED is a nonprofit organization funded in part by the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Its purpose is to collect and provide publicly available data on all reported political violence and protest events around the world.²¹ ACLED notes that Afghanistan has always been a unique data challenge due to its largely rural character and reporting biases that stem from intimidation by militant and state forces, a situation that has not changed under the Taliban.²²

TALIBAN CONTROL SOLIDIFYING

The UN said that Taliban leaders continue to restructure state institutions and replace former government personnel with Taliban affiliates, often to help address internal tensions.²³ In March, the Taliban terminated subnational representative bodies, including provincial councils. In their place, the Taliban began establishing *ulema* shuras, or councils of learned men who hold government appointments in a Muslim state. These shuras are intended to implement *sharia* (Islamic law) and oversee the activities of provincial administrations, under the guidance of the Taliban Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs.²⁴ According to DIA Director Lieutenant General Scott Berrier’s testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, “Limited infighting at senior levels has emerged over power-sharing arrangements, but the Taliban likely will not fracture in the coming year.”²⁵

The Taliban made a series of policy decisions this quarter that they declared to be in adherence to Islam and Afghan traditions. On Eid

al-Fitr (April 29), a celebration at the end of Ramadan, Amir Haibatullah Akhundzada issued a statement committing to “all sharia rights of men and women,” and highlighting as policy goals economic development, security, equal education and health care, national unity, and the return of Afghans from abroad.²⁶ For more information on how some of these policies have affected vulnerable populations, see p. 84.

On May 11, the Taliban Deputy Prime Minister Maulavi Mohammed Abdul Kabir chaired the first meeting of the newly formed “Commission for the Return and Communication with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures.”²⁷ According to news reports, some former government and security officials have been returning to Afghanistan under the auspices of this commission.²⁸ The commission also announced its intent to convene a grand assembly of the ulema.²⁹ A week later, anti-Taliban group representatives met in Turkey forming a “High Council of National Resistance for the Salvation of Afghanistan” and called on the Taliban to prepare for negotiations.³⁰ The council proposed that the Taliban hold discussions with former Afghan authorities concerning formation of an inclusive government so as to avoid a civil war.³¹

On June 30, about 4,500 Islamic clerics and tribal elders assembled for three days in Kabul. According to news reports, the assembly was a Taliban attempt to bolster their domestic legitimacy amidst ongoing crises including the June earthquake in eastern Afghanistan that killed more than 1,000, and ongoing difficulties accessing international financing. Following a brief episode of gunfire, both the NRF and IS-K reportedly claimed responsibility for an attack outside the assembly; no casualties were reported.³² The assembly produced an 11-article resolution that stressed, among other topics, compulsory support for the Taliban’s “Islamic system,” a desire for engagement with and recognition by the international community, the illegality of ongoing IS-K attacks, and a need for attention to the rights of women, children, and minorities.³³ According to former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who still resides in Kabul, the meeting was “symbolic,” a “gathering of the Taliban themselves, mostly of their own rank and file.”³⁴

On July 11, Taliban acting minister of defense Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob announced that Kabul and Doha are expected to sign a security-cooperation agreement.³⁵ Yaqoob had met with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and other senior Qatari government and security officials in early July. Yaqoob reportedly requested Qatar’s assistance in providing salaries, uniforms, and equipment to Taliban security forces.³⁶

Earlier in March, the U.S. strengthened its security cooperation with Qatar by designating it a major non-NATO ally.³⁷ Analysts noted this strategic relationship between Qatar and the United States, suggesting Qatar might act as an intermediary between the United States and the Taliban. They also noted that bilateral security cooperation with Qatar could enable Afghanistan to gain greater independence from Iranian and Pakistani influence.³⁸

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TALIBAN PROGRESSING

According to the UN, the Taliban intensified their diplomatic and economic interactions with regional neighbors this quarter. While none have formally recognized the Taliban as a government to date, some states have accepted Taliban diplomats.³⁹

Pakistan

To its immediate east, Afghanistan shares a disputed border with Pakistan, a long-time Taliban ally. There have been some disagreements between the two since the Taliban took power in August 2021, centering on Taliban compliance with its February 29, 2020, U.S.-Taliban agreement commitment to prevent any terrorists, including the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan or TTP), from using Afghan soil to attack the United States or its allies, including Pakistan.⁴⁰

Recently, Pakistan reached a rapprochement with the Taliban after Taliban-hosted negotiations led to a new Pakistan-TTP ceasefire on June 3. Relations soured in December 2021, when the initial Pakistan-TTP ceasefire lapsed.⁴¹ According to DIA, the Taliban likely did this “to prove to the international community that it is a reliable partner” and “almost certainly to reduce tensions with Islamabad.”⁴² As of late-June, the ceasefire was holding, despite firefights between Pakistani soldiers and unidentified militants in a former TTP border stronghold.⁴³

China

China has increasingly engaged with the Taliban in recent months, although with few concrete results so far. On March 24, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with acting Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Baradar and acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul. Minister Wang is the highest-ranking Chinese official to visit the country since the Taliban takeover; the ministers reportedly discussed Afghanistan’s mining sector and its potential role in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (a massive land and sea infrastructure project connecting China to Eurasia).⁴⁴ State said it was not aware of any current cooperation between public or private entities on mining, but a Chinese firm in 2008 signed a contract to exploit Afghanistan’s copper deposits at Mes Aynak.⁴⁵

On March 30, a week after the meeting in Kabul, China hosted a regional conference in central China with Afghanistan and its neighbors, in what the UN called “Chinese diplomatic engagement with de facto Afghan authorities to shore up bilateral relations after the United States and NATO-led troops withdrew from Afghanistan.”⁴⁶ Although the foreign ministers in attendance reportedly stressed the need for the Taliban to protect the rights

of all Afghans, the conference took place only days after the Taliban issued a series of policies further restricting women's rights.⁴⁷

Iran

To the west, Iran's relationship with the Taliban appears to remain tense despite diplomatic engagement. Iran confirmed on April 26 that it accepted three Taliban diplomats in the Afghan embassy in Tehran.⁴⁸ However, Iran said official recognition cannot precede Taliban formation of an inclusive government.⁴⁹ This move comes after weeks of disagreements between Iran and the Taliban. Iran suspended consular services in Afghanistan earlier in April following protests outside the Iranian embassy in Kabul and the Iranian Consulate in Herat.⁵⁰ The demonstrations targeted Iran's treatment of Afghan refugees.⁵¹ Skirmishes have also erupted between Iranian and Taliban forces along their border, leading Iran to temporarily close the main border crossing in Herat Province on April 23.⁵²

India

On July 7, India reestablished a diplomatic presence in Kabul by reopening its embassy.⁵³ Earlier, the Taliban on June 2 hosted officials from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs for the first time since the Taliban takeover. The meeting reportedly focused on diplomatic relations, as well as trade and humanitarian aid, and came after reports in May indicated that India might reopen its Kabul embassy. India was the last member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO, an organization comprising China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan) to reopen its embassy in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan

To Afghanistan's north, the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan continue to have mixed relations with the Taliban. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have called for increased engagement with the Taliban; both countries have significant economic interests in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan hopes to begin construction on the Mazar-e Sharif-to-Peshawar railway, which would give landlocked Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan greater access to Pakistan's Karachi port.⁵⁵ Turkmenistan is also looking to proceed with the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India (TAPI) natural-gas pipeline, which would help it expand natural-gas exports to South Asia.⁵⁶

In contrast, Tajikistan appears wary of the Taliban and has been the only neighboring country to publicly oppose the Taliban's return to power.⁵⁷ There have been reports that Tajikistan is hosting or is in contact with some leaders of the National Resistance Front (NRF), an anti-Taliban resistance group largely made up of Afghans of ethnic Tajik descent.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Tajikistan has kept its embassy open in Kabul, engaged with the Taliban at the Chinese-led foreign ministers conference on March 30, and has provided Afghanistan with electricity.⁵⁹

U.S. DIPLOMACY WITH THE TALIBAN

On July 6, President Biden provided notice to Congress of his intention to rescind Afghanistan’s designation as a major non-NATO ally (an ally that is eligible to receive specified military training and assistance).⁶⁰ To date, no country has officially recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan since they seized control of Kabul in August 2021; however, by early April 2022, several countries, including China, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, had accredited Taliban-appointed diplomats.⁶¹ This quarter, State informed SIGAR that the U.S. government has not yet decided whether to recognize the Taliban—or any other entity—as the government of Afghanistan, adding that the legitimacy and support the Taliban leaders seek from the international community will depend on their conduct.⁶²

Nevertheless, the United States has engaged with Taliban representatives on a wide range of issues relevant to U.S. national-security interests and has closely observed Taliban actions in a number of areas.⁶³ According to State, policy priorities include:⁶⁴

- the welfare and safety of U.S. citizens abroad
- the release of U.S. hostage Mark Frerichs (taken hostage in February 2020)
- addressing the humanitarian and economic crises in the country
- ensuring the Taliban abide by commitments to permit the departure from Afghanistan of U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, Special Immigrant Visa holders, and Afghans of special interest to the United States
- supporting the formation of an inclusive government that reflects the country’s diversity
- ensuring the Taliban uphold their counterterrorism commitments, including those stated in the February 29, 2020, U.S.-Taliban agreement
- encouraging the Taliban to respect human rights in Afghanistan, including those of religious and ethnic minorities, women and girls, civil society leaders, Ghani administration-affiliated officials, and individuals who were formerly affiliated with the U.S. government, U.S. military, and U.S. NGOs or media institutions

In late June, U.S. officials and the Taliban met in Doha to discuss earthquake relief, the preservation of Afghan central bank assets held in the United States, and women’s rights.⁶⁵ Following the Taliban decision on March 23 to block girls’ access to secondary education, U.S. officials cancelled several meetings with Taliban representatives, calling the decision “a potential turning point in our engagement.”⁶⁶ In early April 2022, representatives of the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States met in Brussels to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and condemned the Taliban’s decision related to girls’ secondary education, as well as other violations of human and civil rights. They reaffirmed their support for continued engagement and for providing humanitarian aid to

the Afghan people, and stressed that “progress towards normalized relations between the Taliban and the international community will depend mostly on the Taliban’s actions and their delivery on commitments and obligations to the Afghan people and to the international community.”⁶⁷

A May 12 statement by the Group of Seven (G7) nations further asserted, “With these moves, the Taliban are further isolating themselves from the international community” and expressed the countries’ “strongest opposition and deplore the increasing restrictions imposed on the rights and freedoms of women and girls in Afghanistan by the Taliban.”⁶⁸

Following “energetic and focused diplomacy” with U.S. allies, regional partners, and Muslim majority countries and organizations immediately following the decision, U.S. officials conveyed to senior Taliban representatives the “unified international opposition to ongoing and expanding restrictions on women and girls’ rights and roles in society.” After a late May 2022 meeting with Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, U.S. Special Representative on Afghanistan Thomas West said, “Girls must be back in school, [and] women free to move and work without restrictions for progress to normalized relations.”⁶⁹

TALIBAN SECURITY FORCES AND ANDSF EQUIPMENT

Taliban Army Strength Increasing

According to the UN, the Taliban Ministry of Defense announced on May 15 that 130,000 personnel were recruited for a new national army, organized into eight regional corps, plus a central corps in Kabul.⁷⁰ This reported current strength is 50,000 personnel more than reported by the Taliban in mid-January, and only 20,000 members short of the 150,000-member target strength the



Kabul graduation ceremony of 550 members of the Taliban’s defense support and security department. (Taliban regime photo)



A Taliban UH-60 helicopter in earthquake-affected Gayan District, Paktika Province in late June. (AFP photo by Ahmad Sahel Arman)

Taliban reported at that time. That target strength would approach the 182,071 reported strength of the former Afghan National Army in spring 2021.⁷¹ The Taliban continue to announce graduations of hundreds of army personnel from training centers in the country.⁷² According to DIA Director Berrier, as of November 2021, “Taliban fighters were using weapons, vehicles, and equipment left by former ANDSF units, including UH-60 and Mi-17 helicopters, and have demonstrated the capability to conduct ground operations and move troops with their very nascent air force capabilities.”⁷³

Most of these army personnel appear to be new recruits, since the majority of security personnel from the ANDSF have been dismissed or fled. According to the UN, some technical and specialized military personnel remain from the former Afghan army, but nearly all women have been dismissed, except for those needed for specialized service at detention facilities or for female body searches.⁷⁴ According to Taliban Defense Ministry Spokesman Inayatullah Khwarazami, female employees of the former Afghan Ministry of Defense are still working and being paid, but are working in areas such as ministry health care.⁷⁵

The DIA, based on open-source reporting, continues to report that some ANDSF and civilians have joined Taliban security forces at lower levels, likely for personal gain.⁷⁶ State concurred with this assessment, noting that “some former ANDSF, often of lower ranks, have gone to work for the Taliban for economic reasons.”⁷⁷ Both DIA and State also said that other former ANDSF personnel have joined in limited numbers anti-Taliban forces such as IS-K or the National Resistance Front (NRF), a small Tajik-dominated, anti-Taliban militant resistance movement active in several provinces, and to a lesser extent the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF).⁷⁸ State said that it is unaware of any significant outflows of former ANDSF personnel to neighboring countries recently, in contrast to the personnel who fled during the summer and fall of 2021.⁷⁹

Taliban Trying to Rebuild Air Force

The Taliban are attempting to reconstitute an air force from former Afghan Air Force (AAF) aircraft and personnel remaining in Afghanistan. As of August 15, 2021, the date of the Ghani administration's collapse, the former AAF had 131 usable aircraft available and the Afghan Special Security Forces' (ASSF) Special Mission Wing (SMW) had 39 aircraft of unknown status available (helicopters included 18 Mi-17s and five UH-60s; airplanes included 16 PC-12 single-engine passenger and light-cargo aircraft).⁸⁰

According to DIA information based on open-source reporting, the Taliban claim to have 33 pilots and continue to encourage former AAF pilots to join its nascent air force. The pilots working for the Taliban reportedly need jobs and say the Taliban are the most reliable employer in Afghanistan. The pilots also said that they have not been threatened by the Taliban.⁸¹

ANDSF Equipment Remaining in Afghanistan

The Taliban possess substantial stores of U.S.-funded equipment captured when the ANDSF collapsed. However, DOD noted that without the technical maintenance and logistics support that the U.S. had been providing to the ANDSF, the operational capability of the equipment will continue to degrade.⁸²

According to DOD, \$18.6 billion worth of ANDSF equipment was procured through the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) from 2005 until August 2021 and much of that equipment was destroyed during combat operations. DOD estimates that \$7.12 billion worth of ANDSF equipment

Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: An Assessment of the Factors That Led to Its Demise

In response to directives from the House Armed Services Committee and House Committee on Oversight and Reform and its Subcommittee on National Security, SIGAR issued *Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces* as an interim report in May. The objectives of this evaluation were to (1) determine the factors that contributed to the ANDSF's collapse; (2) assess any underlying factors over the 20-year security sector assistance mission that contributed to the underdevelopment of important ANDSF capabilities and readiness; and (3) account for all U.S.-provided ANDSF equipment and U.S.-trained personnel, where possible. SIGAR plans to issue a final report in fall 2022, which will include an assessment of the relative successes and failures of the U.S. mission to reconstruct the ANDSF.

SIGAR found six factors that accelerated the ANDSF's collapse in August 2021. The single most important near-term factor in the ANDSF's collapse was the U.S. decision to withdraw the U.S. military and contractors from Afghanistan as called for in the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban agreement, signed under the Trump Administration and confirmed by President Biden in an April 2021 address to the nation. Many Afghans thought the U.S.-Taliban agreement was an act of bad faith and a signal that the U.S. was handing over Afghanistan to the enemy as it rushed to exit the country; its immediate effect was a dramatic loss in ANDSF morale. Other factors contributing to the ANDSF's collapse included the change in the U.S. military's level of support to the ANDSF, the ANDSF never achieving self-sustainment, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani frequently changing ANDSF leaders and appointing loyalists, the Afghan government's failing to take responsibility for Afghan security through an implementation of a national security strategy, and the Taliban's military campaign effectively exploiting ANDSF weaknesses. These six intertwined factors worked together, ending with the ANDSF's collapse.

Source: SIGAR, *Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: An Assessment of the Factors That Led to its Demise* 22-22-IP, 5/2022, pp. 1, 6.



Taliban stand guard in front of a Sikh temple attacked in Kabul on June 18. (AFP photo by Sahel Arman)

remained in Afghanistan in varying states of repair when U.S. forces withdrew in August 2021. DOD said the ANDSF abandoned their locations and left much of their major pieces of equipment, such as Humvees and aircraft, in a nonoperational condition.⁸³

ONGOING SECURITY EFFORTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Taliban Security Operations Continue to Target IS-K

According to DIA and State, based on open-source reporting, IS-K continues to attack minority populations in Afghanistan, including members of Sufi religious orders and Shi'a communities.⁸⁴

This quarter, IS-K claimed responsibility for multiple attacks, including an April 21 attack on a mosque in Mazar-e Sharif, an April 29 attack on a mosque in Kabul, the May 25 bombings of three minivans in Mazar-e Sharif, and a June 18 attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul.⁸⁵ In October 2021, the Taliban announced that they would be responsible for security at Shi'a mosques and other holy sites. Despite some harassment by the Taliban, one Hazara leader emphasized that IS-K is their main fear. Meanwhile, IS-K has also targeted critical infrastructure; at least four electrical pylons were destroyed in separate attacks in Kunduz and Samangan Provinces during April and May.⁸⁶ State added that IS-K tends to focus on "soft," or lightly defended targets, including public transport vans.⁸⁷

DIA assessed that these attacks were intended to destabilize the Taliban and increase IS-K's recruiting profile. DIA also said that deteriorating



Taliban intelligence agents in Nimruz Province display confiscated equipment. (Taliban regime photo)

economic conditions have increased the Afghan population’s vulnerability to IS-K influence and recruitment.⁸⁸ State said it is “difficult to assess the degree to which economic factors independently influence [IS-K] or other militant operations,” adding, while economic desperation could compel vulnerable Afghans to join these groups, “terrorists are not motivated primarily by financial considerations.” State continued, saying that if the Taliban are distracted or otherwise hampered by Afghanistan’s economic difficulties, it could limit their ability to act against IS-K and other groups.⁸⁹

State said the Taliban have publicly stated they are acting to counter IS-K through arrests and dismantling support networks.⁹⁰ According to DIA, the Taliban security forces continue to conduct operations against IS-K and claim to have disrupted IS-K planning. In mid-April, the Taliban again increased counterterrorism operations by establishing checkpoints and conducting house-to-house searches. These efforts follow a pattern of larger-scale Taliban cordon-and-search operations that reportedly began in mid-February 2022.⁹¹ DIA said that the Taliban are unlikely to be able to prevent all IS-K plots or completely eradicate the group. In response to an April 21 bombing at a Shi’a mosque in Mazar-e Sharif, the Taliban reportedly arrested, tried, and executed an unknown number of IS-K members.⁹²

More information on Taliban security operations and IS-K activities appears in the Classified Supplement to this report.

Internal Security and Protests

According to DIA Director Berrier, the Taliban is using travel and residency restrictions that are mostly enforced by its internal security apparatus, the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), to contain the movement of militants from other groups.⁹³ These efforts appear to be working against some groups, such as TTP and al-Qaeda. According to Berrier, “Al Qaeda has had some problems with reconstituting leadership, and to a degree I think the Taliban have held to their word about not allowing al-Qaeda to rejuvenate so far.”⁹⁴

Nonetheless, the same institutions monitoring militants are also enforcing new laws that criminalize some civic activities that had previously been permissible. DIA said in late April 2022 that the Taliban reinstated a mandate for head-to-toe covering for women; Taliban Amir Haibatullah Akhundzada said families could face punishment if they failed to comply. These same restrictions were imposed on women journalists. Then in early June, the Taliban allegedly detained several journalists, including those covering women’s protests.⁹⁵ (See page 5 for more information on Taliban decrees concerning women and girls.) According to the UN, the Taliban have increasingly restricted freedoms of assembly, opinion, and expression, while quelling dissent. The GDI reportedly conducts arbitrary arrests, creating a “chilling effect on freedom of media and civic space.”⁹⁶

Taliban Crack Down on Press Freedom, Detain and Threaten Australian Journalist

Lynne O’Donnell, a Foreign Policy columnist, returned to Kabul almost one year after the United States left. While there, O’Donnell, former Kabul bureau chief for the Associated Press and Agence France-Presse, was detained by Taliban intelligence agents. They forced her to issue two tweets and record a video apologizing for 2021 and 2022 articles she wrote about life under Taliban rule.

One tweet—dictated by the Taliban, deleted, and rewritten—read, “I apologize for 3 or 4 reports written by me accusing the present authorities of forcefully marrying teenage girls and using teenage girls as sexual slaves by Taliban commanders. This was a premeditated attempt at character assassination and an affront to Afghan culture.” The other said, “These stories were written without any solid proof or basis, and without any effort to verify instances through on-site investigation or face-to-face meetings with alleged victims.”

After she submitted to their demands, O’Donnell said the Taliban told her, “You are now free to stay. You can go anywhere in the country—we will help you.” Instead, she left and later wrote “I can never go back.” One day later, O’Donnell posted, “Tweet an apology or go to jail, said #Taliban intelligence. Whatever it takes. They dictated. I tweeted. They didn’t like it. Deleted, edited, re-tweeted. Made video of me saying I wasn’t coerced. Re-did that too.”

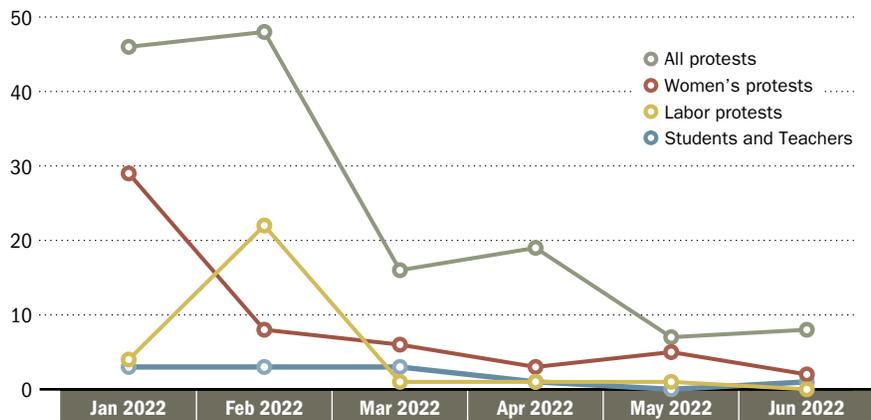
Source: Foreign Policy, “The Taliban Detained Me for Doing My Job. I Can Never Go Back,” 7/20/2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/20/taliban-afghanistan-media-crackdown-journalism-detained/>; Lynne O’Donnell via Twitter (@lynnekodonnell), 7/19/2022, <https://twitter.com/lynnekodonnell/status/1549397516210298883?s=21&t=Tq4uFQg3gFkPYXit7IObDw>, <https://twitter.com/lynnekodonnell/status/154939751887372036>, and 7/20/2022, <https://twitter.com/lynnekodonnell/status/1549707743946235904?s=21&t=NY458KrNfiXO9SNvalGgUA>; New York Times, “Reporter Says Taliban Forced Her to Publicly Retract Accurate Articles,” 7/20/2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/business/media/taliban-reporterlynne-odonnell.html>

SIGAR Assessing Risks to Afghan Media

As part of its Congressionally directed assessments of the causes and repercussion of the Taliban takeover, SIGAR is performing fieldwork to evaluate the status of, and potential risks to, the Afghan people and civil society organizations, including Afghan journalists, resulting from the Taliban's return to power. The assessment's scope covers February 2020—the start of a signed commitment between the U.S. government and the Taliban—to the present. SIGAR has primarily conducted interviews with Afghans identified as facing risks across five sectors: women and girls, journalists, educational institutions, health-care operations, and nongovernmental institutions.

FIGURE S.1

PROTEST INCIDENTS BY TYPE, JANUARY-JUNE 2022



Source: ACLED, "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)," www.acleddata.com, accessed 7/7/2022; SIGAR analysis of ACLED data, 7/2022.

Taliban efforts to restrict certain civic freedoms coincide with a decline in protests. As seen in Figure S.1 above, protests this quarter continued a downward trend after reaching a high point in February. Since January, women's protests have accounted for 37% of all protests, followed by labor (20%), and students and teachers (8%).⁹⁷



Weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment seized by Taliban intelligence in Sar-e Pul Province. (Taliban regime photo)

Local Reprisals, Revenge, and the Commission of Purification

DIA continues to report that Taliban leadership is unlikely to have been targeting former ANDSF personnel, although there has been "localized small-scale reprisal killings, violence, and intimidation against former ANDSF and Afghan government employees."⁹⁸

According to DIA, the Taliban's Commission of Purification was established to remove Taliban members who have violated the rights of others or committed ethnic, religious, and personal-animosity crimes. In February, the Taliban chief inspector of defense and chairman of the Commission of Purification claimed the commission had identified and expelled 4,350 members from the Taliban. The commission is also responsible for returning items confiscated during Taliban security operations to their owners after issuing licenses for the objects.⁹⁹ DIA said "weapons, ammunition, and vehicles were confiscated during security operations and can be reclaimed by calling numbers publicized by the Taliban regime, with an issued license."¹⁰⁰

U.S. SUPPORT FOR GOVERNANCE AND THE FORMER AFGHAN NATIONAL DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES

Governance Support

As of June 30, 2022, the United States had provided nearly \$36.1 billion to support governance and development in Afghanistan. Most of this funding, almost \$21.3 billion, was appropriated to the Economic Support Fund (ESF) administered by the State Department (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).¹⁰¹

During August and September 2021, the U.S. government reviewed all non-humanitarian assistance programs in Afghanistan. After the review, State and USAID paused the majority of development-assistance programs to assess the situation, including the safety and ability of implementing partners to operate. Since then, more than a dozen State and USAID programs in Afghanistan have restarted with a focus on addressing critical needs of the Afghan people in several key sectors—health, education, agriculture, food security, and livelihoods—as well as supporting civil society, with a focus on women, girls, and human rights protection more broadly.¹⁰²

State said that all U.S. assistance continues to be directed through UN agencies and implementing partners on the ground in Afghanistan, as opposed to being disbursed by U.S. agencies or paid directly to the Taliban regime. Implementing partners are required to protect against diversion, fraud, waste, and abuse, including diversion to the Taliban and the Haqqani Network. These partners have taken steps to ensure funds reach the beneficiaries through a network of private, licensed financial sector providers including banks, money service providers, and mobile money operators.¹⁰³ If implementing partners suspect that funds are being diverted, abused, or otherwise used fraudulently, they are required to report the activity. Partners must also submit regular financial reports to respective program offices to verify where and how funds are spent.¹⁰⁴

Security Support to Former ANDSF

The ANDSF have dissolved and U.S. funding obligations for them have ceased, but disbursements will continue, as necessary, to contract implementers until all program contracts are reconciled.¹⁰⁵ The United States had appropriated \$88.8 billion to help the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan provide security in Afghanistan, as of June 30, 2022. This accounts for 60.8% of all U.S. reconstruction funding disbursements for Afghanistan since fiscal year (FY) 2002.

DSCMO-A Ends, ASFF Contract Closeouts Transferred to Other Entities

According to DOD, the Defense Security Cooperation Management Office-Afghanistan (DSCMO-A) was disestablished on June 1, 2022. DSCMO-A

SIGAR AUDIT

A SIGAR audit report issued this quarter focused on the extent to which DOD, from FY 2019 through May 2021, provided accountability and oversight of the funds DOD provided to the Afghan government to pay the salaries of Ministry of Defense (MOD) personnel. SIGAR found that DOD spent approximately \$232 million on questionable salaries for MOD personnel that were calculated outside of the U.S.-funded Afghan Personnel and Pay System, paid to suspicious units or non-existent object codes, or never delivered to the accounts of MOD personnel.

Foreign Military Sales: The portion of U.S. security assistance for sales programs that require agreements or contracts between the United States and an authorized recipient government or international organization for defense articles and services to be provided to the recipient for current stocks or new procurements under DOD-managed contracts, regardless of the source of financing. In contrast to regular FMS cases, **pseudo-FMS** cases are administered through the FMS infrastructure but a “pseudo Letter of Offer and Acceptance” (LOA) is generated to document the transfer of articles or services, but the partner nation receiving the articles or services does not sign the pseudo-LOA and does not enter into an agreement or contract to receive the materials or services.

Source: DOD, “DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,” 11/2021, p. 87; DSCA, “Security Assistance Management Manual, Chapter 15,” available at <https://samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-15>.

had been headquartered in Qatar at Al Udeid airbase and had assumed responsibility of ASFF funds and overall contract management following the disestablishment of the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A). After DSCMO-A closed on June 1, 2022, those ASFF contracts that had been obligated by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), by CSTC-A, or by DSCMO-A were transferred to DSCA, U.S. Army Central Command (ARCENT), or to the U.S. military departments to administer the final disposition of efforts and service contracts in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

According to DOD, ARCENT has not been subject to any unusual litigation or other unforeseen issues as it works with the contract commands to close 42 remaining ASFF-funded contracts for which CSTC-A or DSCMO-A had obligated funds. Similarly, DSCA reported no issues with closing ASFF-funded pseudo-**Foreign Military Sales** (FMS) cases.¹⁰⁷

DOD said that Department of the Army organizations are closing 43 ASFF-funded contracts (contracts that included aircraft procurement, aviation contract logistics support, ammunition, and ANDSF training), and that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) reported that nine ASFF-funded projects and three NATO ANA Trust Fund (ANA-TF) projects are now “physically and fiscally complete.” USACE continues to close an additional 12 ASFF and ANA-TF projects.¹⁰⁸

As seen in Table S.1 on the next page, cases obligated by DSCMO-A or CSTC-A as non-FMS cases or as military interdepartmental purchase requests (MIPRs) have a total remaining value of \$192.4 million. Pseudo-FMS cases are being managed by the Department of the Army and the Department of the Air Force with a total remaining value of \$424.6 million.¹⁰⁹

State Department Details Deteriorating Human Rights in Afghanistan

In April 2022, State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor released the 2021 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, detailing a wide range of credible reports of human rights abuses in Afghanistan both before and after the Taliban takeover. These include: targeted killings and forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, serious restrictions on free expression and the media by the Taliban, restrictions on movement and the right to leave the country, restrictions on and harassment of NGOs and human rights organizations, trafficking in persons, and restrictions on women’s rights such as the right to work and to access educational institutions.¹¹⁰

In early June 2022, State’s Office of International Religious Freedom also released its 2021 *International Religious Freedom Report* (IRF), which highlights the Taliban’s ongoing restrictions of religious freedom

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

TABLE S.1

SUMMARY STATUS OF ASFF OBLIGATED CONTRACTS				
	Cumulative Obligations	Cumulative Expenditures	Unliquidated Obligation (ULO)^a	ULO as of:
Defense Security Cooperation Management Office-Afghanistan Obligations				
Contracts	\$300,044,317	\$178,661,550	\$121,382,767	6/2/2022
Noncontract MIPRs ^b	182,781,348	111,786,781	70,994,567	6/2/2022
Department of the Air Force Obligated Contracts				
A-29	\$1,054,783,000	\$989,383,000	\$65,399,000	5/16/2022
C-130	153,230,000	103,440,000	49,788,000	5/24/2022
PC-12	44,260,000	16,416,000	32,252,000	3/23/2022
C-208	120,903,024	115,620,239	5,273,857	5/24/2022
GBU-58		All Closed		5/23/2022
Munitions	29,213,000	4,947	24,617	5/23/2022
Department of the Army Obligated Contracts				
ASFF	\$1,079,397,027	\$946,855,135	\$132,642,270	5/27/2022
UH-60	464,200,789	433,854,921	30,369,617	5/27/2022
ASFF ammunition	53,216,456	26,424,631	Not Reported	Not Reported
PEO STRI (simulation, training, and instrumentation)	545,358,000	436,483,000	108,845,000	5/27/2022

^a Unliquidated Obligations (ULOs) are equal to undisbursed obligations minus open expenses.

^b Military Interdepartmental Purchase Requests.

Source: DOD, response to SIGAR data call, 6/15/2022; DOD, "DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," 11/2021, p. 295.

and persecution of the country's religious minorities. According to State's IRF report, the Taliban have:¹¹¹

- detained members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Kabul, abusing them and falsely accusing them of belonging to IS-K; 10 were released by the end of 2021 reportedly on the condition that they "repent" their Ahmadi beliefs and attend a Taliban-led madrassa. Eighteen Ahmadis remained in detention during the reporting period.
- expelled Shi'a Hazara from their homes in several provinces partly for the purpose of redistributing their land to Taliban supporters
- placed restrictions on businesses owned by individuals from religious minority groups, including the hours of operation and the type of merchandise they can sell

Members of religious minority communities, including Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and Shi'a Hazara, have expressed fears over their safety, with Christians reporting threats from the Taliban and some Sikhs reporting harassment by Taliban members at their *gurdwara* (site for meeting and worship) in Kabul. However, a leader of the Shi'a Hazara community said their primary concern was violent attacks by IS-K, not the Taliban. State

reports that the Taliban have conducted outreach to religious minorities and in some instances increased security within their communities.¹¹²

U.S. Treasury's General License Authorizations

The U.S. Treasury Department's General License (GL) 20 authorizes, to the extent required, virtually all transactions involving Afghanistan and its governing institutions that would otherwise be prohibited by U.S. sanctions, excluding financial transfers to the Taliban, Haqqani Network, and other sanctioned entities, and any blocked individual who is in a leadership role of a governing institution in Afghanistan, other than for the purpose of effecting the payment of taxes, fees, or import duties, or the purchase or receipt of permits, licenses, or public utility services, provided that such payments do not relate to luxury items or services.

Previously, the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued three GLs (17, 18, and 19) that broadened the types of activities now authorized, that would otherwise have triggered sanctions, to help improve the flow of humanitarian aid and other critical support to Afghanistan. These GLs allow for transactions and activities involving the Taliban and members of the Haqqani Network so long as the transactions are for the official business of the U.S. government or certain international organizations, or for NGOs working on certain humanitarian projects and other projects related to civil society development or environmental projects that provide critical support to Afghans.

Source: State, response to SIGAR vetting, 7/12/2022.

Remaining Women's Advancement Program Continues Activities

USAID informed SIGAR that the Women's Scholarship Endowment (WSE) continues to support female access to higher education following the resumption of program activities after Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued general licenses in December 2021.¹¹³ This quarter, WSE facilitated the re-registration of 119 students to resume their studies with institutions of higher education in Afghanistan. WSE also received over 3,000 scholarship applications and will award 80 scholarships to female students to begin their studies in September 2022. However, due to the reduced capacity of some universities, USAID said a few students had to change courses either because fewer students registered for the course, or the university did not have female staff available to teach a course for female students. WSE staff communicated their concern that limited resources for private institutions to hire female teachers and sustain operations pose a major implementation risk.¹¹⁴

As of July 10, 2022, USAID has obligated \$50 million and disbursed \$50 million for the WSE program.¹¹⁵

USAID DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS RESUME

Following the resumption of project activities under OFAC licenses authorizing the delivery of assistance in Afghanistan, USAID's Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians (COMAC) and Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan's Recovery (STAR) programs have faced several challenges associated with Taliban governing practices.¹¹⁶

Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians

COMAC is a five-year, \$40 million, nationwide program that began in 2018. It was established to provide assistance to Afghan civilians and their dependent family members who experienced loss of life, injury, or lack of economic livelihood because of military operations, insurgent attacks, unexploded ordnance including land mines, improvised explosive devices, and cross-border shelling. This support includes tailored assistance (TA), such as physical rehabilitation, counseling, economic reintegration, medical referrals, and immediate assistance (IA) in the form of in-kind goods, such as essential food and household sanitary items for up to 60 days.¹¹⁷

In February and March 2022, according to COMAC's most recent quarterly report (January through March 2022), Taliban representatives pressed COMAC's implementing partner to sign a memorandum of understanding

(MOU) with the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs (MoMDA) in order to continue distribution of assistance within their compounds. Under guidance from USAID, the implementing partner did not execute such a MOU and, on March 16, Taliban representatives notified COMAC staff to leave their office in the MoMDA compound.¹¹⁸

In late February, the MoMDA in Kabul and Directorate of Economy in Herat seized COMAC equipment, including personal protective equipment.¹¹⁹ MoMDA representatives also expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration with COMAC's beneficiary criteria and reluctance to simply provide benefits to beneficiaries identified by MoMDA.¹²⁰

Given Taliban restrictions on women working within offices, including requirements for segregated workspaces, COMAC's implementing partner also reported that it has created separate workspace to accommodate their female staff continuing to work, and developed a stipend for female staff members' male escorts, or *mahrams*. COMAC reported in early July that its female staff are now able to work in the Kabul office, despite some earlier resistance from the Taliban Ministry of Interior.¹²¹ In mid-January 2022, COMAC temporarily halted project activities in Badghis Province due to local Taliban representatives restricting the activities of female employees and threatening them with violence for noncompliance; other NGOs operating in the province similarly halted their activities there.¹²²

Apart from managerial and staffing disputes with the Taliban, COMAC's implementing partner announced during the most recent reporting period of January through March 2022 that IA distribution was increasing following a "notable drop" during the previous two quarters. The implementer attributed the increase primarily to improving security conditions, the resumption of project activities, access to the offices, and restarting field activities.¹²³ COMAC also reported a "sharp increase" in the distribution of assistance packages due to staff efforts to address backlogged TA cases that had accumulated during the suspension of program activities.¹²⁴

COMAC staff has continued to engage with Taliban representatives at both the national and sub-national levels, with 83 coordination meetings as of April 2022. These meetings were intended to share details of project activities, coordinate activities with Taliban-controlled institutions, request Taliban support, and ensure COMAC staff's safety and security. During the previous quarter, COMAC received official letters from provincial police in Kunduz and Faryab providing assurances for the safety of their field teams, with COMAC following up with police in Balkh, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Jowzjan, Sar-e Pul, and Samangan to obtain similar letters. However, the Minister of Interior in Kabul has resisted providing COMAC with any formal letter guaranteeing staff safety.¹²⁵

As of July 10, 2022, USAID had obligated \$40 million and disbursed \$35.9 million for the COMAC program.¹²⁶

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

TABLE S.2

USAID REMAINING DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 7/6/2022
Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians (COMAC)	3/12/2018	3/11/2023	\$49,999,873	\$35,936,156
Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan's Recovery (STAR)	2/18/2021	2/17/2023	19,997,965	4,520,504
Strengthening Peace Building, Conflict Resolution, and Governance in Afghanistan	7/1/2015	3/31/2023	16,047,117	14,791,244
Survey of the Afghan People	10/11/2012	10/10/2022	7,694,206	6,225,021
Total			\$93,739,161	\$61,472,924

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 7/9/2022.

Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan's Recovery

USAID said that on June 30, Mercy Corps coordinated with the Taliban Directorate of Economy and convinced it to issue an agreement letter for all STAR project activities, including permission to proceed without a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The issued letter directs all Taliban sectorial departments to agree and support the implementation of the project activities.¹²⁷ The STAR program had begun to resume some activities in late November and early December 2021.¹²⁸

STAR is an approximately \$20 million program that began in February 2021 and operates in nine provinces (Herat, Ghor, Nangarhar, Kunar, Ghazni, Paktiya, Khost, Jowzjan, and Sar-e Pul). The program focuses on supporting food and livelihood security for conflict-affected families through cash assistance, resilience-focused agricultural and livestock support, market skills and linkages, and rehabilitation or construction of critical water sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, with a particular focus on women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.¹²⁹

Earlier, STAR's implementing partners reported the project had faced several delays, especially in respect to Taliban representatives' demands for project MOUs.¹³⁰

In Herat's Adraskan District, project activities were suspended in early March when the district governor and Directorate of Economy instructed project staff to pause all activities until an MOU had been signed with national-level ministries. Local Taliban representatives in Herat also would not permit STAR activities to proceed without an MOU. In Ghor Province, project activities were suspended March 22–30 as NGOs had not signed an MOU with relevant ministries; on March 30, the provincial governor decided to allow NGO activities to resume pending another review in two months' time.¹³¹ In other areas, such as in Jowzjan Province, the Taliban requested project documentation such as budgets and work plan, but the STAR project has been able to resume activities in Jowzjan without acceding to Taliban demands.¹³²

Taliban members have also attempted to interfere in the beneficiary selection process and project implementation, pressuring STAR staff

to include specific households in project activities. STAR implementing partners reported that Taliban authorities are “not familiar with NGO procedures and policies for project implementation,” and that they tried to avoid these interventions through coordination meetings with local Taliban officials to explain beneficiary selection processes.¹³³

As of July 10, 2022, USAID has obligated \$10 million and disbursed \$4.5 million for the STAR program.¹³⁴

Removing Unexploded Ordnance

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) in State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs manages the conventional-weapons destruction program in Afghanistan to protect victims of conflict, provide life-saving assistance, and enhance the security and safety of the Afghan people.¹³⁵ Although direct assistance to the former Afghan Directorate for Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) was canceled on September 9, 2021, remaining mine-action projects and implementing partners have continued on-the-ground mine and explosive-remnants of war (ERW) clearance activities.¹³⁶ PM/WRA is one of the few State-funded programs authorized to continue operations in Afghanistan.¹³⁷

PM/WRA currently supports four Afghan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and four international NGOs to help clear areas in Afghanistan contaminated by ERW and conventional weapons (e.g., unexploded mortar rounds).¹³⁸

Since FY 2002, State has allocated \$440.7 million in weapons-destruction and mine-action assistance to Afghanistan (an additional \$11.6 million was obligated between 1997 and 2001 before the start of the U.S. reconstruction effort). The current situation in Afghanistan has delayed the usual approval process. As of June 16, 2022, PM/WRA had released \$8 million of FY 2021 funds for Afghanistan.¹³⁹

Although some information on ordnance cleared is still available, due to the dissolution of DMAC, PM/WRA is not able to provide quarterly data on minefields cleared, estimated hazardous areas, contaminated areas, and communities affected.¹⁴⁰

Counternarcotics

The Taliban and Opium Poppy Cultivation

According to State, open-source reporting indicates that Taliban fighters have been destroying poppy fields to enforce the Taliban’s announced ban on narcotics. In Helmand Province’s capital of Lashkar Gah, Taliban Deputy Interior Minister for Counternarcotics Mullah Abdul Haq Akhund said that those violating the ban “will be arrested and tried according to sharia laws in relevant courts.” State said it is not yet aware of any individuals being tried for violating the ban.¹⁴¹

According to the UN, the Taliban Ministry of Interior permitted a two-month grace period to enable farmers to complete the spring harvest and sell their opium gum, although heroin and synthetic drugs remain prohibited.¹⁴²

State says the biggest challenge for the Taliban's narcotics ban is that millions of impoverished Afghan laborers and farmers rely on proceeds from opium poppy cultivation to survive. This reliance grew after the Taliban took over; the Afghan economy collapsed, and most international aid ceased. The Taliban have no programs to fund the cost of alternative crops, and they have repeatedly requested assistance from the international community. The Taliban appear committed to their narcotics ban, despite the risk of losing the economic and political support of drug dealers and farmers who once paid them a narcotics tax.¹⁴³

LESSONS LEARNED REPORT ON COUNTERNARCOTICS

SIGAR's 2018 Lessons Learned report, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, examined U.S. counternarcotics efforts from 2002 through 2017. SIGAR found that despite the U.S. spending \$8.62 billion in that time, Afghanistan remained the world's largest opium producer, and that opium poppy was Afghanistan's largest cash crop.

Status of the State Department's Counternarcotics Programs

The State Department's current policy prohibits direct assistance to the Taliban.¹⁴⁴ While some programs remain active indirectly—administered through implementing partners and NGOs—other programs have been terminated or paused following the Taliban takeover in August 2021.¹⁴⁵

According to INL, the “Taliban has not impacted the ability for alternative development partners to implement projects,” citing ongoing activities by the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as well as drug demand reduction programs through Colombo Plan and UNODC. INL continues to fund oversight efforts such as the Afghanistan Opium Survey and its Afghan Opiate Trade Project (AOTP) through UNODC. The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) has disbursed \$24.2 million since 2006 for Afghanistan Opium Surveys.¹⁴⁶ The AOTP publishes occasional reports on trends in the global Afghan opiate trade to support international counternarcotics efforts. INL has obligated and disbursed \$10.3 million for AOTP since 2011.¹⁴⁷

Refugees and Internal Displacement

On March 31, 2022, the U.S. government announced nearly \$204 million in new funding to continue assistance in Afghanistan, including \$134 million from State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). According to State PRM, this assistance will support the scaled-up humanitarian responses in Afghanistan and neighboring countries through independent humanitarian organizations, including United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), by funding the efforts and activities outlined in both the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan and the 2022 Afghanistan Situational Regional Refugee Response Plan. This new funding will provide emergency cash, shelter, and reintegration assistance



Packages of UN relief supplies for Afghan refugees and displaced persons await distribution in Kabul. (UNHCR Afghanistan photo)

to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, protection and gender-based violence prevention services, and multisector assistance to refugee populations in Afghanistan and neighboring countries.¹⁴⁸

This quarter, State PRM continued to implement the more than \$176 million in assistance provided in FY 2021 to support Afghan refugees and IDPs. This funding includes:¹⁴⁹

- more than \$96 million to UNHCR in Afghanistan and the region for immediate assistance and long-term integration, including protection assistance, cash grants, and provisions of shelter and core relief items
- nearly \$8 million to UNFPA to respond to immediate reproductive-health and gender-based-violence needs of returnees and IDPs in Afghanistan and the region
- nearly \$8 million to IOM for direct primary health-care interventions for returnees, refugees, underserved migrant populations, and host communities in Afghanistan and the region
- more than \$19 million to NGOs and other organizations in Afghanistan and the region for health, education, livelihoods, and protection activities

Afghan Refugees

Since January 1, 2021, UNHCR reported that more than 175,000 Afghans have newly arrived within neighboring countries seeking international protection.¹⁵⁰ During the first six months of 2022, 167 Afghan refugees have returned under UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation program, including 84 from Iran and 83 from Pakistan. This figure represents 24% of the 691 refugees that returned during the same period in 2021.¹⁵¹

According to State PRM, the Taliban's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation have reached out to related ministries in Pakistan and Iran and continue to encourage Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan. Taliban representatives have voiced support for the expansion of services for returnees. Yet, in practice, broad Taliban interference with humanitarian operations could impact the provision of support for returnees.¹⁵²



Relief supplies awaiting distribution to some 550 displaced households in Bamyan Province. (UNHCR Afghanistan photo)

In late February 2022, the Taliban announced that Afghans would not be permitted to leave the country “unless their destinations are known,” with women unable to travel abroad for education unless accompanied by a male guardian, according to media reports.¹⁵³ Following this announcement, the Taliban appeared to be working to stop Afghans trying to flee by road; on the main highway from Kabul to Pakistan, Taliban fighters stopped all cars at several checkpoints and sometimes pulled aside families with suitcases, according to State.¹⁵⁴ After U.S. and UK diplomats shared their concerns, however, a Taliban spokesperson said Afghans “who have legal documents and invitation can travel abroad,” adding that his earlier comments were directed towards Afghans departing the country without legal documents or travelling with smugglers.¹⁵⁵

According to reporting this quarter from organizations working in border provinces, the Taliban have not been interfering with Afghans trying to leave Afghanistan at border checkpoints; instead, neighboring countries have imposed restrictions that hamper movements across Afghanistan’s international borders.¹⁵⁶ Iran continues to remain inaccessible to asylum seekers, with entry being granted only to Afghan passport holders with valid Iranian visas; Iranian authorities have also increased security measures at unofficial border crossings. Similarly, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have limited entry for Afghan passport holders with valid visas.¹⁵⁷

Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement

According to State PRM, the total number of IDPs in Afghanistan is estimated at 3.5 million due to conflict across the country. UNHCR further estimates that 59% of Afghanistan’s population will need humanitarian and protection assistance during 2022, largely due to spiraling food insecurity, dangerous levels of malnutrition, eroded livelihood opportunities, as well as internal displacement and increasingly complex protection risks and needs.¹⁵⁸

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE ENDNOTES

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- 3 Foreign Policy, “Taliban Wage War Over Coal in Northern Afghanistan,” 7/5/2022; Exovera, “Over-The-Horizon Counter Terrorism Morning News Report,” 6/26/2022, p. 21.
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- 5 ACLED, “Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED),” www.acleddata.com, accessed 7/7/2022; www.acleddata.com,” accessed 7/7/2022; SIGAR analysis of ACLED data, 7/2022.
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- 7 UN, “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security,” 6/15/2022, p. 2; State, response to SIGAR data call, 7/12/2022.
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