

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE CONTENTS

Key Issues & Events	117
Security Situation in Afghanistan	117
U.S. and International Engagement on Afghanistan	119
Taliban Rule	123
U.S. Support for Security and Democracy, Gender, and Rights in Afghanistan	128
Counternarcotics	134
Refugees and Internal Displacement	138
Security and Governance Endnotes	142

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

KEY ISSUES & EVENTS

In early November, Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada ordered Afghan judges to impose punishments for certain crimes according to the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia, including public lashings, stonings, and executions.

Islamic State-Khorasan carried out multiple attacks in Afghanistan this quarter, including the bombing of the Kabul Longan Hotel on December 12, frequented by Chinese diplomats and businessmen; five Chinese nationals were injured in the attack.

In its 2022 report on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that opium sales tripled to \$1.4 billion between 2021 and 2022, and opium poppy cultivation increased 32% over the previous year, to 233,000 hectares, the third largest area under cultivation since UNODC began systematic monitoring.

In further setbacks to gender rights in Afghanistan, the Taliban banned women from attending university, working for non-healthcare nongovernmental organizations, and entering public bathhouses, gyms, and parks.

SECURITY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Overall levels of violence in Afghanistan have subsided significantly compared to the period prior to the Taliban takeover in 2021, given that the Taliban ceased fighting its insurgency following the collapse of the former Afghan government. However, violent incidents continue regularly. The Taliban faces increasing challenges to its authority primarily from the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) and various anti-Taliban resistance groups, most notably the National Resistance Front (NRF) that emerged in Panjshir Province in August 2021. Still, no anti-Taliban group is considered an existential threat to Taliban rule.¹

This quarter, IS-K carried out several attacks against various civilian (especially against minorities such as the Hazara Shi'a community), Taliban, and international targets across the country, including in Badakhshan, Herat, Kabul, Laghman, and Nangarhar Provinces.² On December 2, IS-K

gunmen attacked Pakistan's embassy in Kabul, injuring one guard and damaging the building; Taliban authorities arrested one suspect.³ On December 12, IS-K bombed the Kabul Longan Hotel, frequented by Chinese diplomats and businessmen. A Taliban spokesperson claimed its security forces killed three IS-K attackers in the aftermath.⁴ The Chinese foreign ministry announced five Chinese nationals were injured in the attack and advised all Chinese citizens and organizations to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible given the current security situation.⁵ On January 11, 2023, IS-K carried out a suicide bombing outside the Taliban foreign ministry in Kabul, killing at least five civilians.⁶

The Taliban perceives IS-K as its primary threat, according to State, though Taliban officials have publicly downplayed the danger to their regime.⁷ During the quarter, Taliban security forces continued operations against IS-K, somewhat degrading IS-K's capabilities. State said by late 2022, IS-K attacks were less frequent compared to earlier in the year.⁸ In late October, the commander of the Taliban's 217th Omari Corps, headquartered in Kunduz, claimed that Taliban security forces killed two senior IS-K commanders during an operation in Takhar's Dashti Qala District, and an additional six IS-K members in Kabul.⁹ The Taliban also said they arrested IS-K members responsible for the September 2022 attack on the Kaaj education center and the Pakistan Embassy attack, both in Kabul. However, IS-K attacks continue, especially against the Hazara Shi'a.¹⁰

Throughout this quarter, the NRF also clashed with Taliban forces in multiple provinces, including Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kapisa, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Panjshir, Parwan, Sar-e Pul, and Takhar. The NRF has expanded its operations outside of Afghanistan's eastern and northeastern regions, but the most significant clashes have taken place in Panjshir, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).¹¹ Other anti-Taliban groups have also clashed with the Taliban, including the Afghanistan Liberation Movement in Kandahar, the Afghanistan Freedom Front in Kandahar and Zabul, and Watandost Front in Ghazni.¹² UNAMA reported that at least 22 anti-Taliban groups claim to operate in Afghanistan, though none have taken control of significant territory.¹³ State said some former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) members and former government officials, particularly non-Pash-tuns, have joined these groups. However, of the hundreds of thousands of Afghans who served in the ANDSF, it is likely only a small percentage have joined.¹⁴

The Taliban have targeted civilians they suspect of having links with anti-Taliban resistance groups, particularly arresting and killing individuals in Panjshir they believe have affiliations with the NRF.¹⁵ In late October, Taliban forces reportedly tortured to death two civilians in Panjshir with suspected links to the NRF and displaced village residents in Panjshir's Bazarak District, using their homes as a Taliban base.¹⁶ NGOs operating in

Afghanistan report they are unable to travel to certain parts of the country, such as Panjshir Province, due to ongoing clashes between Taliban and anti-Taliban forces.¹⁷

Taliban and Pakistani forces clash at the border

Tensions between the Taliban and Pakistan have mounted in recent months, resulting in the periodic closure of the Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing. On December 15, Taliban and Pakistani security forces exchanged fire near the Chaman border crossing, which Pakistani officials said stemmed from a dispute involving Pakistani forces repairing a fence along the disputed border. One Pakistani civilian was reportedly

killed and 15 wounded. This follows a December 11 exchange of fire in which Taliban forces killed seven Pakistanis and injured more than two dozen, while Pakistani forces killed a Taliban border guard. The tensions have been exacerbated by the recent increase in anti-Pakistan attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which operates from Afghanistan.

Source: Voice of America, "Fresh Border Clashes Between Pakistan, Afghanistan's Taliban," 12/15/2022; Dawn, "Pakistan at end of its tether with Kabul over TTP attacks," 12/17/2022.

This quarter, former ANDSF and former Ghani administration officials were still targeted, despite Taliban leaders offering a general amnesty days after their takeover in August 2021. In early November, for instance, Taliban authorities arrested five former ANDSF members and government officials in Samangan Province, according to media reports.¹⁸ On January 14, 2023, unknown gunmen killed former member of parliament Mursal Nabizada in her home in Kabul; her security guard also was killed in the attack.¹⁹

The Taliban's enforcement of amnesty has varied and gone unheeded among the group's rank and file, with lower-level Taliban members reportedly responsible for reprisal killings; hundreds of such killings have been reported over the past year.²⁰ According to State, there is no indication at this time that these reprisals were directed by Taliban leaders or part of a Taliban "policy."²¹ Nevertheless, former ANDSF members reported living in constant fear that Taliban authorities will detain, torture, or kill them, with some remaining in hiding and many having fled the country. State informed SIGAR that it is aware of a small number of former ANDSF members who may have gone to fight on both sides of the Russia-Ukraine war.²²

U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN

To date, no country has officially recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan after the group seized control of the country in August 2021. However, several countries, including China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, have allowed Taliban-appointed diplomats to take residence at their respective Afghan embassies.²³ According to State, the U.S. government has been "very clear with the Taliban that any steps toward normalization will be informed by the Taliban's own actions, including

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

on supporting the formation of an inclusive government, fulfilling their counterterrorism commitments, and respecting the rights of all Afghans, including women, members of minority groups, and individuals associated with the Afghan Republic.”²⁴

Even though the United States does not recognize the Taliban—or any other entity—as the official government of Afghanistan, U.S. officials have continued to engage with Taliban representatives on a wide range of issues relevant to U.S. national-security interests and closely observe Taliban actions in several areas.²⁵ The United States also remains the largest donor to Afghanistan, having appropriated more than \$2 billion since August 2021.²⁶

While there is currently not an approved Integrated Country Strategy for Afghanistan, according to State, U.S. priorities in Afghanistan include:²⁷

- preventing terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base for external operations that could threaten the United States or its allies
- facilitating safe passage for U.S. citizens and certain Afghans to the United States
- facilitating delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people
- advocating for U.S. values and international human rights, especially those of women, girls, and members of minority groups
- coordinating with the international community on shared interests and support for the people of Afghanistan

In the 2022 National Security Strategy, released on October 12, 2022, the White House reiterated that the United States’ security priority in Afghanistan is to “ensure Afghanistan never again serves as a safe haven for terrorist attacks on the United States or our allies,” relying on over-the-horizon counterterrorism actions such as the July 2022 strike that killed al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul. The White House further noted that the U.S. government intends to hold “the Taliban accountable for its public commitments on counterterrorism.”²⁸

State’s Afghanistan Affairs Unit

State’s Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU) in Doha, Qatar, was formally established on February 24, 2022, as the official U.S. diplomatic mission to Afghanistan following the suspension of operations at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in August 2021. The AAU coordinates with a variety of State Department offices and other U.S. government agencies to advance State Department priorities. Since September 5, 2021, the AAU has met

regularly with Taliban representatives through the Issue Solutions Channel to discuss a range of issues relevant to U.S. national security interests and priorities. A military [communications] channel was set up following the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban Doha Agreement to deconflict battlefield movements and support the safe withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces from Afghanistan.

Source: State OIG, Inspection of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit, ISP-23-05, 11/2022, pp. 1–3; Afghanistan Study Group, Final Report, 2/2021, p. 20.

UN Special Rapporteur Visit to Afghanistan

In October 2022, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett completed a 12-day visit to Afghanistan, during which he visited Kabul, Bamyan, and Panjshir. Bennett reported that the humanitarian situation remains “dire” and security conditions “fragile,” with most stakeholders expressing “grave concerns about the desperate situation of women and girls, increased attacks on places of worship, schools, transportation systems and minority communities, especially Hazara-Shia.” He also met with Taliban officials and urged them to address these concerns, especially the rights of women and girls, and stressed the importance of an inclusive government.²⁹ The Taliban denied reports of human rights abuses and announced that Taliban courts will prosecute media outlets operating outside Afghanistan that report on such abuses for promoting “propaganda against the regime.”³⁰



UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett meets with Taliban deputy foreign minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai in Kabul. (Taliban regime photo)

Herat Security Dialogue Held in Tajikistan

On November 29–30, the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies hosted the 10th Herat Security Dialogue in Dushanbe, Tajikistan focusing on how to establish an inclusive political system in Afghanistan, with support from the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³¹ A range of Afghan and international participants, including former Afghan government officials and U.S. Charge d’Affaires for Afghanistan Karen Decker (who works from Doha), highlighted the worsening human rights situation under the Taliban, especially for women and girls. Decker underscored the importance of U.S.

engagement in addressing the country's humanitarian needs and stated that the United States was working on mechanisms to provide assistance directly to the Afghan people rather than the Taliban regime. Exiled NRF leader Ahmad Massoud also participated in the conference, where he stressed that elections are the only means out of the current political crisis in Afghanistan.³²

Entity of Particular Concern: The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016, which amended the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, requires the President to designate nonstate actors that have engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom as Entities of Particular Concern; the President has delegated this authority to the Secretary of State. According to the law, a nonstate actor is defined as “a nonsovereign entity that (A) exercises significant political power and territorial control; (B) is outside the control of a sovereign government; and (C) often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives.”

Source: State, Countries of Particular Concern, Special Watch List Countries, Entities of Particular Concern, 11/15/2021.

Taliban Redesignated Entity of Particular Concern

In the wake of continued violence against the Hazara Shi'a community, human rights groups have emphasized the Taliban's failure to adequately protect Afghanistan's population and called on the Taliban to ensure the safety of minority communities.³³ On December 2, 2022, Secretary of State Antony Blinken redesignated the Taliban as an **Entity of Particular Concern** for engaging in particularly severe violations of Afghans' religious freedom.³⁴

State Designates Terrorists Operating in Afghanistan

On November 30, 2022, the State Department designated three leaders of al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent—Emir Osama Mehmood, Deputy Emir Atif Yahya Ghouri, and head of recruitment Muhammad Maruf—and Qari Amjad, the deputy emir of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under Executive Order 13224, as amended. Under this designation, all property and interests of the designated individuals subject to U.S. jurisdiction are blocked and all U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with them.³⁵

In announcing these designations, Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed that the United States is “committed to using its full set of counterterrorism tools to counter the threat posed by terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, including al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), as part of our relentless efforts to ensure terrorists do not use Afghanistan as a platform for international terrorism.”³⁶

Several terrorist groups continue to exploit Afghanistan as a safe haven, including AQIS, the TTP, and al Qaeda. According to State, the presence of the late al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul in July indicates that at least some in the Taliban continue to maintain a relationship with al Qaeda. State informed SIGAR that they continue to press the Taliban to uphold their counterterrorism commitments under the Doha Agreement, and also continue to monitor al Qaeda's presence in the country.³⁷

In early December, the Taliban Ministry of Interior spokesperson claimed there are no terrorist groups within Afghanistan that can pose a threat to other countries.³⁸ Conversely, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said the Taliban have shown that they are “either unable or unwilling” to live up to their counterterrorism commitments. He reiterated that the United States has capabilities to strike at terrorist groups operating within Afghanistan “that [do] not leave us entirely beholden to the Taliban,” as demonstrated by the July 2022 air strike against al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul, and “will take action if we see international terrorists regrouping in Afghanistan. We will take action in a way that protects our interests.”³⁹ The National Intelligence Council assessed that al Qaeda “will need an extended period of restructuring before they will be capable of threatening the region and the West from Afghanistan.”⁴⁰

TALIBAN RULE

Since August 2021, the Taliban, favoring a strong centralized state, have consolidated their administrative control over Afghanistan. In doing so, they have moved away from the seemingly more moderate positions publicized soon after their takeover to a strict implementation of their interpretation of Sharia and enforcement of theocratic rule.⁴¹ On November 14, for instance, Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada ordered Afghan judges to impose “Sharia punishments”—including public lashings, stonings, and executions—for certain crimes, such as robbery, kidnapping, and sedition.⁴²



The Taliban publicly flog a man accused of adultery in Uruzgan Province. (Mohammad Shareef Sharafat, RFE/RL photo)

Shortly after the order, a series of such punishments was carried out in different parts of the country. On November 23, 12 people, including three women, were publicly flogged in front of a crowd of thousands in a football stadium in Logar Province. A Taliban official claimed those punished were guilty of “moral crimes,” such as adultery, robbery, and homosexuality.⁴³ On December 7, in Farah Province, the Taliban publicly executed a man accused of a stabbing death in 2017, following authorization by the Taliban’s supreme spiritual leader. This was the first officially confirmed public execution by the Taliban following their takeover. The execution, in which the victim’s father shot the man three times, was attended by more than a dozen senior Taliban officials, including the acting interior minister, acting deputy prime minister, acting foreign minister, and acting education minister, according to media reporting. A Taliban spokesperson asserted that “retribution is a divine order and must be implemented.” The execution was condemned by the State Department, the UN, and human rights groups.⁴⁴ The very next day, in Parwan Province, Taliban authorities publicly lashed 27 people for alleged charges of adultery, theft, drug offenses, and other crimes.⁴⁵ As of late December, Taliban authorities had reportedly carried out public floggings of more than 130 men and women since Akhundzada’s order was issued.⁴⁶

Immediately after their takeover, Taliban officials stated they would review Afghanistan’s 1964 constitution and temporarily enact articles that were “not in conflict with Islamic Sharia and the principles of the Islamic Emirate.”⁴⁷ Over the past year, the Taliban have maintained much of the former Afghan government’s structure and with many junior level civil servants continuing to hold positions under Taliban-appointed leadership, largely mullahs and Taliban loyalists with little administrative or government experience. The Taliban have also abolished several democratic and human rights government bodies and appointed new provincial *ulema* shuras comprised of religious scholars and tribal elders to replace the country’s provincial councils elected under the previous government, while continuing to exclude women from positions in government and reject calls for inclusive governance.⁴⁸ Shuras are traditionally defined as bodies of learned men who hold government appointments in a Muslim state. These *ulema* shuras are intended to implement the Taliban’s interpretation of Sharia and oversee the activities of provincial administrators, under the guidance of the Taliban’s Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs.⁴⁹

The Taliban have faced growing internal tensions, including between hardliners and those advocating a more pragmatic position on a variety of issues, including disputes over recent restrictions on girls’ education, as well as ethnic divisions between non-Pashtun and Pashtun populations, given the dominance of Pashtun Taliban leaders in the group. In response to these divisions, the conservative Akhundzada, who rules from Kandahar, has played a decisive role unifying the group, outwardly at least, while

also increasingly pushing for implementation of policies reflective of the group's religious ideology.⁵⁰ In September 2022, Deputy Minister of Justice Abdul Karim Haider stated that Afghanistan does not require a constitution and can instead rely on Islamic law alone, explaining, "The holy Quran, the Sunnah of Mohammad (peace be upon Him), and the jurisprudence of every Islamic country are the basis of the constitution in general and in detail." He also stated that there is no need for political parties.⁵¹ Nevertheless, a Taliban spokesperson announced in late October that efforts were underway to draft a new constitution in line with the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia, according to media reporting.⁵²

SIGAR Assessment of the Afghan Government's Collapse

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 *Why the Afghan Government Collapsed* in November 2022. This report evaluated the factors that contributed to the Afghan government's dissolution in August 2021, and the extent to which U.S. reconstruction efforts achieved their stated goals and objectives to build and sustain governing institutions.

SIGAR identified six factors that contributed to the collapse of the Afghan government:

- (1) senior Afghan officials failed to recognize that the United States would actually withdraw militarily from Afghanistan, leaving the Afghan government fundamentally unprepared to manage the fight against the Taliban.
- (2) the exclusion of the Afghan government from U.S.-Taliban talks weakened and undermined its position as the Taliban reinvigorated its battlefield campaign following the U.S.-Taliban agreement in February 2020.
- (3) the Afghan government, despite its weakened position, insisted that the Taliban be effectively integrated into the Republic, making progress on peace negotiations difficult.
- (4) the Taliban were unwilling to compromise as the U.S.-Taliban agreement emboldened the insurgent group as it fought the Afghan government on the battlefield.

(5) former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani governed through a highly selective, narrow circle of loyalists and adopted an assertive and undiplomatic approach to dealing with perceived rivals, destabilizing the government at a critical juncture.

(6) the Afghan government's high level of centralization, endemic corruption, and struggle to attain legitimacy were long-term contributors to its eventual collapse.

SIGAR also identified four findings on the question of whether U.S. governance objectives were achieved. First, despite appropriating more than \$36.2 billion towards supporting governance and economic development in Afghanistan, the United States failed to achieve its goal of building stable, democratic, representative, gender-sensitive, and accountable Afghan governance institutions. Second, U.S. failure to resolve Afghan corruption, to hold democratic elections that were not marred by fraud, or to adequately monitor and evaluate the outcomes and impacts of U.S. reconstruction efforts contributed to the overarching inability to establish viable governing institutions. Third, at least some progress towards achieving U.S. governance objectives was made before the Afghan government collapsed, especially in developing the human capital and institutional capacity of various Afghan government organizations. Finally, some residual elements of the Afghan government still exist under Taliban control and are functioning, although their sustainability is uncertain.

Source: SIGAR, *Why the Afghan Government Collapsed*, SIGAR 23-05-IP, 11/2022, i-iii.

Survey: Nearly All Afghans Report Suffering Under Taliban

In a new Gallup survey conducted in July and August 2022 and released in early December, 98% of Afghans surveyed reported that they are suffering under Taliban rule, as compared to thriving or struggling. This surpasses a previous high of 94% found in a 2021 survey. This categorization is based on a 10-point scale where a rating of 4 or less is considered suffering; on average, Afghans rated their current life at a 1.3. Gallup noted that the survey results show that “life is worse for Afghans than it has been at any point during the past decade—or for anyone else on the planet.”⁵³

The survey further found that a record low number of Afghans (22%) reported women being treated “with respect and dignity.” The previous low was 31% reported in 2021. The number of women reporting that they are treated “with respect and dignity” dropped from 26% in 2021 to just 12% in 2022; for men, the number stayed approximately the same at 33%. Following a downward trend in recent years, 2021 was the first year that Gallup’s survey found that the majority of both Afghan men and women felt women were not treated with respect.⁵⁴ For more information on the Gallup survey, see pages 77–78.

Women’s Rights Continue to Deteriorate Under Taliban

This quarter, the Taliban further restricted the rights of women and girls. New edicts banning women from attending university and working for NGOs join the existing restrictions on women’s employment and women and girls’ freedom of movement, a ban on female participation in sports, orders for media outlets to cover the faces of female interviewees and prohibit male and female presenters from appearing together in programs, and the removal of the women’s seat from the Commission of Media Violations. The Taliban also exercised draconian punishments against Afghan women and girls in line with their fundamentalist ideology, such as lashing students for allegedly failing to follow their required dress code.⁵⁵

On November 10, the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced a ban on women entering public bathhouses, gyms, and parks due to Taliban officials’ alleged concerns that restrictions on female dress and requirements for gender segregation were not being followed.⁵⁶ On December 20, Taliban authorities also announced a ban on female students attending university.⁵⁷ Combined with the existing ban on girls’ access to secondary education, this amounts to a ban on girls’ education in Afghanistan beyond the sixth grade. Only four days later, Taliban authorities announced a ban on women working for both domestic and foreign NGOs, allegedly after receiving complaints that female employees were not wearing hijab correctly. A Taliban spokesperson stated that any organization that does not comply with this order will have their operating license revoked.⁵⁸ In January 2023, allegations surfaced that the Taliban were using university enrollment data to force female students to marry Taliban fighters.⁵⁹ More information about the Taliban’s ban on women’s

access to university can be found on pages 98–102 and the Taliban’s ban on women working for NGOs on pages 70–74.

Women-led protests continued this quarter in response to the increasing Taliban restrictions on women and girls’ rights. In late October, women gathered in Kabul to protest the ban on girls’ secondary education. Another women-led protest erupted in Badakhshan following reports that the Taliban attacked a group of students entering a university in Faizabad because they were not fully covering their faces. The Taliban dispersed the demonstration and arrested the participating students.⁶⁰

On November 3, Taliban authorities also disrupted a news conference in Kabul intended to launch an Afghan Women’s Movement for Equality, and arrested five activists (one woman and four men), according to media reports.⁶¹ Several female protestors, who were detained by Taliban authorities in February 2022 and released after several weeks, reported being tortured or otherwise abused and denied due process while in captivity.⁶² Within the past few months, the Taliban have increasingly cracked down on civil society, especially women’s rights advocates, according to State.⁶³

The international community roundly condemned these actions. A joint December 21, 2022, statement by the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the High Representative of the European Union described the Taliban’s “oppressive measures” against women and girls as “relentless and systematic” and stressed that “Taliban policies designed to erase women from public life will have consequences for how our countries engage with the Taliban.”⁶⁴ The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the UN likewise condemned the Taliban’s restrictive policies towards women. The OIC secretary-general affirmed that “the true teachings of Islam...calls for the education of girls.”⁶⁵ UNAMA stressed that the Taliban’s restrictions on women will lead to the further international isolation of Afghanistan, economic hardship, and suffering that will impact “millions for years to come.”⁶⁶

On October 11, the State Department announced visa restrictions under the Immigration and Nationality Act for current or former Taliban members, members of non-state security groups, and other individuals believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, the repression of and violence against Afghan women and girls.⁶⁷ In late November, several UN special rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, argued that the Taliban’s actions against women and girls may be constitute crimes against humanity and should be investigated “with a view to prosecutions under international law.”⁶⁸ Yet, the National Intelligence Council assessed that the Taliban “will largely ignore external pressure to alter its fundamental governing approach.”⁶⁹

See pages 98–102 for more information on the status of girls’ education in Afghanistan.

U.S. SUPPORT FOR SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY, GENDER, AND RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

U.S. Support for Democracy, Gender, and Rights in Afghanistan

Since 2002, the United States has provided more than \$35.53 billion to support governance and economic development in Afghanistan, as of December 31, 2022. Most of this funding, more than \$20.67 billion, was appropriated to the Economic Support Fund (ESF), which is managed and reported by USAID.⁷⁰

During August and September 2021, the U.S. government reviewed all non-humanitarian assistance programs in Afghanistan. State and USAID paused the majority of development-assistance programs to assess the situation following the Taliban takeover, including the safety and ability of implementing partners to continue operations. Following Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) licenses in November 2021 authorizing the delivery of assistance to Afghanistan, State and USAID restarted several programs addressing critical needs of the Afghan people in key sectors—health, education, agriculture, food security, and livelihoods—as well as supporting civil society, with a focus on women, girls, and human rights protections more broadly. These efforts are implemented through NGOs, international organizations, or other third parties, which State said minimizes any benefit to the Taliban to the extent possible.⁷¹

As seen in Table S.1, USAID continues to manage several democracy, gender, and rights programs in Afghanistan; USAID is no longer providing support to Afghan governing institutions. NGOs and civil society organizations face various challenges associated with Taliban governing practices, including increasing reports of Taliban interference and restrictions over their activities in recent months.⁷² State is aware of Taliban detentions of Afghan civil society figures, including journalists, activists, and women protestors, though they are not aware of a comprehensive policy targeting them at this time. Nevertheless, as both State and USAID noted, the Taliban have increasingly cracked down on civil society organizations and restricted the civic space within which they are able to operate.⁷³ State added that they are aware that the Taliban appear to be increasing pressure on Afghan media outlets through intimidation, detaining journalists, and refusing to allow some foreign journalists into Afghanistan if the authorities believe their reporting to be overly critical of Taliban policies.⁷⁴

The UN and USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance also reported that Taliban authorities regularly impede aid organizations operating in Afghanistan.⁷⁵ As of November 2022, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) recorded at least 532 incidents of serious threats and risks against aid workers and operations during 2022.⁷⁶

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

Following the Taliban’s December 24 prohibition on women working for both local and international NGOs, several organizations, including Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and CARE, suspended operations in Afghanistan; in mid-January, several NGOs resumed some healthcare-related activities with female staff.⁷⁷ A joint statement by the State Department and the foreign ministers of other international donors reiterated that the Taliban’s ban on female employment with NGOs is “reckless” and “dangerous” and “puts at risk millions of Afghans who depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival.”⁷⁸ See pages 76–78 for more information on Taliban interference into NGO operations.

TABLE S.1

USAID ACTIVE DEMOCRACY, GENDER, AND RIGHTS PROGRAMS				
Project Title	Start Date	End Date	Total Estimated Cost	Cumulative Disbursements, as of 1/4/2023
Promote Scholarship Endowment Activity	9/27/2018	9/26/2023	\$50,000,000	\$50,000,000
Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians (COMAC)	3/12/2018	3/11/2023	49,999,873	41,369,403
Enabling Essential Services for Afghan Women and Girls	7/25/2022	7/24/2025	30,000,000	21,291,247
Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan’s Recovery (STAR)	2/18/2021	2/17/2023	19,997,965	10,283,500
Promoting Conflict Resolution, Peace Building, and Enhanced Governance	7/01/2015	3/31/2023	16,047,117	15,174,944
Survey of the Afghan People	10/11/2012	10/10/2022	7,694,206	6,461,478
Safeguarding Civic Rights and Media Freedoms in Afghanistan (Huquq)	*	*	*	183,938
Supporting Media Freedoms and Access to Information for Afghan Citizens	*	*	*	0
Total			\$173,739,161	\$144,764,510

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, 1/13/2023.

Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians (COMAC)

COMAC is a five-year, \$40 million, nationwide program that began in 2018. The program was established to aid Afghan civilians and their dependent family members who have experienced loss of life, injury, or lack of economic livelihood due to military operations, insurgent attacks, unexploded ordnance such as landmines, improvised explosive devices, or cross-border shelling. COMAC’s support activities include tailored assistance (TA), including physical rehabilitation, counseling, economic reintegration, medical referrals, and immediate assistance (IA) in the format of in-kind goods, such as essential food and household sanitary items for up to 60 days.⁷⁹

Following the Taliban takeover, COMAC paused, but gradually resumed field operations on December 5, 2021, after which the program’s project

design and standard operating procedures were updated to continue activities without providing capacity-building assistance to Taliban-controlled governing institutions.⁸⁰

According to COMAC's FY 2022 annual report, COMAC provided 3,228 IA packages to 1,805 households, along with 3,280 TA packages, during the fourth quarter of FY 2022. Most assistance was provided to backlogged cases from before the collapse of the former Afghan government. In providing this assistance, COMAC staff stopped engaging Taliban-controlled institutions for victim vetting and switched to visual compliance and community vetting.⁸¹

This assistance was a marked increase compared to the same period last year, with improved access to many areas due to the overall reduction in violence following the Taliban takeover. Comparatively, in the fourth quarter of FY 2021, COMAC provided 1,024 IA packages to 665 eligible households, along with 456 TA packages. COMAC was limited in its distribution as the program's coverage area and service delivery were significantly restricted due to the worsening security situation in the summer of 2021 and the suspension of activities following the Taliban takeover that August. Although improved this quarter, COMAC activities were still affected by potential clashes between the Taliban and anti-Taliban groups, with COMAC staff unable to travel to Panjshir Province due to the security situation there.⁸²

While continuing assistance to victims of conflict, COMAC staff reported Taliban interference caused several disruptions to program activities, including the seizure of COMAC equipment and restrictions on female staff. Most notably, on September 28, the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs (MoMDA) told COMAC staff they must halt all field activities over their refusal to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MoMDA to coordinate program activities. Prior to this, local Taliban authorities had restricted COMAC activities in Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, and Helmand Provinces.⁸³ One USAID implementing partner referred to the "inability to sign MOUs with de-facto authorities" as "the biggest obstacle" to program implementation in Afghanistan which "threatens to cause further delays without a compromise by USAID or the de-facto authorities."⁸⁴ See page 77 for details of USAID's current policy on MOUs with the Taliban.

Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan's Recovery (STAR)

USAID's STAR program is a two-year, \$20 million program launched in February 2021. It provides assistance for livelihoods such as cash for work programs, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) support to help households become more resilient to economic shocks and to help foster a sustained increase in agricultural productivity and income. It is implemented in nine provinces (Ghazni, Ghor, Herat, Jawzjan, Khost, Kunar,

Nangarhar, Paktiya, and Sar-e Pul), focusing on some of the most marginalized and vulnerable parts of Afghanistan.⁸⁵

During FY 2022, STAR implementing partners conducted a needs assessment survey to address several WASH challenges. These include water scarcity, communities only having access to water from unprotected sources, a severe lack of access to safe water and sanitation facilities in health centers and schools, lack of awareness of good hygiene practices, and ongoing effects of drought.⁸⁶

According to the project's FY 2022 annual report, STAR provided food and livelihood security assistance to 11,523 individuals in 194 communities, completed hygiene promotion trainings for 45,602 people, and employed 2,976 individuals in cash for work programs. Men largely participated in the cash for work labor activities due to cultural norms and Taliban restrictions on women's movement.⁸⁷

Some STAR implementing partners were able to coordinate limited activities with local Taliban officials. Local authorities in Nangarhar provided verbal permission for the STAR program to conduct WASH construction at a school severely lacking potable water, but work had not yet begun by the end of the reporting period, according to the implementing partner's most recent report. In early September, after coordinating with Taliban officials, local authorities in Ghazni Province also gave project staff permission to implement activities. In other provinces, project staff continued their efforts to coordinate permissible activities with Taliban officials.⁸⁸

However, the lack of signed MOUs with Taliban authorities remained a "major challenge" overall and caused suspensions and delays of several STAR program activities, including WASH construction activities, in Kunar, Nangahar, and Herat Provinces. STAR implementing partners observed that all NGOs are pressured to sign MOUs with the Taliban to continue work on existing projects and that MOUs will soon be required for all projects started under the Taliban.⁸⁹ On December 5, 2022, USAID approved an MOU between the STAR implementing partner and Taliban authorities in Herat for WASH activities, though it has not yet been signed as of January 11, 2023. USAID has not approved any other MOUs this reporting period.⁹⁰

STAR construction activities were also delayed awaiting vetting approvals for vendors by USAID, according to the project's most recent report. As of September 30, 2022, STAR had five vetting approvals pending with USAID that had been submitted eight to 10 weeks prior; earlier in the year, the approval time was about three weeks.⁹¹

Women's Scholarship Endowment (WSE)

This quarter, USAID's five-year, \$50 million Women's Scholarship Endowment (WSE) project that started in 2018, continued to support Afghan women pursuing higher education in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM). According to USAID, WSE awarded 106

scholarships to Afghan girls in the last quarter. The scholarship recipients are from 13 provinces and enrolled in 16 universities. As of December 14, 2022, the program had awarded 338 scholarships cumulatively.⁹²

According to USAID, the ban on women's access to university education has impacted 202 out of the 338 current WSE scholarship recipients in Afghanistan. The 202 impacted students have been effectively barred from continuing their studies in public and private universities in Afghanistan. Most of the scholarship recipients were able to complete their fall semester final exams before the ban went into effect. USAID expects that women who are pursuing medical degrees will be the only students not impacted by the ban. USAID informed SIGAR that WSE is exploring alternative means of assistance, such as supporting Afghan girls to pursue their studies online or at regional universities. Yet, Afghan girls going abroad for a university education could face several challenges, including the logistics and accompanying costs of obtaining passports and visas, as well as language requirements by universities outside Afghanistan. Currently only 10 WSE scholarship recipients are pursuing their education outside Afghanistan.⁹³

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, and 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/chapter15>.

Contract vendors must submit claims to begin the close-out process. Vendors typically have a five-year

U.S. Security Support to ANDSF

Following the Taliban takeover, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) dissolved and U.S. funding obligations for them ceased, but disbursements to contractors continue, as necessary, until all Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) obligations are liquidated, DOD told SIGAR.⁹⁴

According to DOD, resolving ASFF-funded contracts is an ongoing contract-by-contract matter between contractors and the contracting office in the military departments (Army, Air Force, and Navy). Whether the contracts were awarded using ASFF funds, for which the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) received obligation authority from the DOD Comptroller, or using ASFF funds for which the Defense Security Cooperation Agency received obligation authority and then passed it through to the military departments to implement using pseudo-**Foreign Military Sales** (FMS) cases, all contracts being closed out were awarded by a contracting entity within one of the military departments.⁹⁵

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

window before expired funds are cancelled by DOD, and DOD cannot force vendors to submit invoices for payment. For these reasons, DOD cannot at this time provide complete information on contract closing dates, the amount of funds available to be recouped, or the approximate costs of terminating each contract.⁹⁶

As seen in Table S.2, ASFF funds that were obligated by CSTC-A or its successor DSCMO-A (which was disbanded on June 1, 2022) for use on new contracts awarded locally by Army Contract Command-Afghanistan or as military interdepartmental purchase requests (MIPRs) to leverage already-awarded contracts, have total remaining unliquidated ASFF obligations of \$98.5 million. Contracts, used to support pseudo-FMS cases managed by the Departments of the Army, Air Force, and Navy have total unliquidated ASFF obligations of \$388.8 million.⁹⁷

Between FY 2002 and FY 2021, Congress has appropriated \$88.8 billion to help the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan provide security in Afghanistan. This accounts for nearly 61% of all U.S. reconstruction funding for Afghanistan since FY 2002. The U.S. government ceased providing funds for Afghan security forces following the Taliban takeover in August 2021.⁹⁸

TABLE S.2

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	\$278,037,015.27	\$179,535,245.93	\$98,501,769.34	11/28/2022
Department of the Air Force Obligated Contracts				
A-29s	\$1,031,492,000.00	\$992,471,000.00	\$39,022,000.00	11/29/2022
C-130	153,230,000.00	109,210,000.00	44,013,000.00	11/30/2022
PC-12	44,486,955.16	17,796,747.33	26,690,207.83	12/7/2022
C-208	120,903,024.00	115,620,239.00	5,273,857.00	12/2/2022
Munitions	29,213,000.00	6,769,000.00	22,440,000.00	12/6/2022
Department of the Army Obligated Contracts				
ASFF	\$861,781,935.82	\$775,725,570.78	\$86,303,171.19	12/13/2022
UH-60	285,263,075.00	273,575,336.00	11,687,935.00	12/13/2022
ASFF Ammunition	61,180,123.69	34,443,873.86	26,736,249.83	12/13/2022
PEO STRI (simulation, training, and instrumentation)	526,802,878.00	433,029,399.00	93,775,480.00	12/13/2022
Department of the Navy Obligated Contracts				
Contracts	\$38,686,124.10	\$7,498,073.94	\$32,853,664.28	1/9/2023
Total	\$3,431,076,131.04	\$2,945,674,485.84	\$487,297,334.47	

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

Source: DOD, response to SIGAR data call, 12/14/2022, 1/10/2023; DOD, "DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," 11/2021, p. 295.

COUNTERNARCOTICS

The Status of the Afghan Opiate Industry

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported in November that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan increased 32% from 2021 to 2022, despite the Taliban's April 3, 2022, ban.⁹⁹ UNODC estimated that the area under poppy cultivation reached 233,000 hectares (the third highest ever recorded) for the 2022 season, primarily concentrated in Afghanistan's southwest region. UNODC said the Taliban takeover and decree sparked fears about product scarcity and the future of the narcotics market, with the result that the per-kilogram price of opium doubled, increasing income 300% for farmers.¹⁰⁰ Record prices, at a time of heavy inflation and economic crisis, offer strong incentive for poppy farmers and others in the opiate industry to continue producing.¹⁰¹ This contrasts with the over abundant supply recorded after the 2017 harvest, which lowered prices.¹⁰²

The Taliban's April 3 ban coincided with the beginning of the spring poppy harvest. Due to widespread economic reliance on poppy cultivation, a two-month grace period for harvesting was extended to farmers.¹⁰³ Taliban officials did proceed with some public crop destruction in a possible effort to bolster their authority, but overall, the harvest remained unaffected.¹⁰⁴ On November 4, 2022, Taliban authorities formed a committee to explore a joint effort to fight narcotics trafficking with the so-called 'Administrative Office of the Islamic Emirate,' and the ministries of communication and information technology, economy, and justice.¹⁰⁵ Following the announcement, a spokesperson from the ministry of interior declared they had already arrested "nearly 2,450 major and small-time smugglers" this year.¹⁰⁶ Given that opium exports have not decreased over the past two years, UNODC said it is unlikely these interventions interrupted any major trafficking networks.¹⁰⁷ Following the release of the November 2022 UNODC Opium Survey, the Taliban Ministry of Interior publicly challenged UN efforts, calling their figures "imaginary and arbitrary... without a source or basis."¹⁰⁸

The profitable opium markets stand in stark contrast to Afghanistan's licit economy, which has contracted 21% since 2020.¹⁰⁹ A November 2022 survey by the World Bank deemed the overall state of welfare in Afghanistan "grim," with roughly half of all households experiencing a decline in income.¹¹⁰ Additionally, 65% of Afghan respondents also said they believe economic conditions will worsen over the next year.¹¹¹ While many industries in Afghanistan are suffering, data from UNODC's Drugs Monitoring Platform found that opiates trafficking has not been affected since the Taliban seized power in August 2021.¹¹² Afghanistan continues to provide 80% of the global supply through various cross-national networks.¹¹³

Criminal networks and terrorist organizations utilize these established drug trade pathways to move guns, cigarettes, and victims of sex trafficking.¹¹⁴

Beyond the widespread economic reliance on opium poppy, narcotic sales also provide the Taliban income opportunities. Before the fall of the Afghan government, opiate and methamphetamine trafficking was a key source of income for the Taliban.¹¹⁵ Southwest Afghanistan, the base for the Taliban insurgency prior to 2021, accounted for 73% of the total area used for poppy cultivation in 2022. At the same time opiate prices have soared, the historical Taliban stronghold of Kandahar increased poppy cultivation by 72% over the past year.¹¹⁶

Counternarcotics remains a stated priority of the international community. The UN's Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Roza Otunbayeva met with the deputy interior minister for counternarcotics, Haji Abdul Haq Akhund on December 4, 2022. UNAMA said they discussed the drug ban, treatment for addiction, crop eradication, awareness, and alternatives to poppy/opium-based livelihoods.¹¹⁷ The UN's ongoing counternarcotic activities include tracking Afghan opiate production through UNODC, health interventions related to the use of illicit drugs, and supporting alternative livelihoods for opium poppy farmers.¹¹⁸

Regional countries have also expressed concern about the opium industry and their intent to counter trafficking out of Afghanistan. On December 7, 2022, Kyrgyzstan and India held the first India Central Asia National Security Advisors meeting in Delhi.¹¹⁹ In an interview, the Secretary of the Security Council for the Kyrgyz Republic said, regarding Afghanistan, "all of [central Asia] need to take coordinated efforts, we are working towards it, both with India and our neighbors... with Russia, and also with Iran and Pakistan."¹²⁰ He clarified that while partner countries can assist with closing smuggling routes and providing aid, the Taliban have a responsibility to stop poppy cultivation and drug trafficking within Afghanistan.¹²¹

Quarterly Highlight on Counternarcotics

In an October 2021 quarterly report highlight, SIGAR examined the history of opium-poppy production in Afghanistan—both under the previous era of Taliban rule and under the former Afghan government—and international efforts to counter the narcotics industry. It noted several historical challenges to U.S. and international efforts, including

corruption and the Taliban insurgency. The highlight further discussed various challenges the Taliban may face in enforcing an opium ban, such as Afghans' continued economic reliance on opium-poppy cultivation and the potential for the ban to undermine support for the Taliban regime.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 10/30/2021, pp. 107–111.

The annual planting season for poppy runs October–December, and harvest for 2023 will not begin until the spring. The Taliban’s response to the next harvest season will give a better understanding of their position on narcotics. However, the costs to the Taliban for enforcing the ban are known to be grave. The UN estimates 20 million people are under high and critical levels of food insecurity in Afghanistan.¹²² A ban will directly affect the economic livelihood of poppy farmers, daily laborers, indirect beneficiaries in the local economy, local opium traders, local manufacturers of heroin, and domestic traffickers.¹²³

The Methamphetamine Market

While Taliban authorities have sent mixed messages on opiates, Afghan opiate industry expert David Mansfield argues the growing methamphetamine market is a more likely target for eradication efforts.¹²⁴ Methamphetamine production has steadily increased since 2017, when local suppliers began using the ephedra plant to create ephedrine, a base ingredient for methamphetamine.¹²⁵ A number of large methamphetamine seizures in neighboring countries in 2020 solidified Afghanistan’s role as a major methamphetamine producer.¹²⁶

In November 2021, satellite imagery captured 11,886 cubic meters of dried ephedra, enough for 220 tons of methamphetamine, available at the open-air market Abdul Wadood bazaar.¹²⁷ Abundant supply lowered the price on ephedra until the Taliban banned its harvest in December 2021.¹²⁸ The ban quickly raised the price of ephedra, ephedrine, and methamphetamine. The Taliban have taken public action against the ephedra market, conducting raids on Abdul Wadood bazaar and searching homes across the country.¹²⁹ Despite the crackdown, neighboring countries including Pakistan, Iran, India, Iraq, Turkey, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have intercepted record-breaking amounts of methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan since 2021.¹³⁰

Methamphetamine production has risen quickly in the region, but it is still a relatively small market compared to the opium poppy industry.¹³¹ Prior to the Taliban takeover, it was estimated that the opium trade was Afghanistan’s largest economic driver, providing full time employment to 500,000 people.¹³² Mansfield argues that methamphetamine does not have the same history and reach within Afghanistan, and so it may be logistically and politically easier to focus drug eradication efforts on ephedra.¹³³

State Department Counternarcotics Programs

From 2003 until the fall of the Afghan government in August 2021, the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) operated multiple programs in Afghanistan to reform the criminal justice system and limit the production and trafficking of illegal drugs.¹³⁴ As of December 2022, INL programming has been reduced to

counternarcotic oversight efforts, including funding the Afghanistan Opium Surveys and the Afghan Opiate Trade Project (AOTP) through UNODC.¹³⁵

The Afghanistan Opium Surveys utilize data collected by UNODC through remote sensing, surveys, and global data collections on drugs to predict medium- and long-term trends in the narcotics industry.¹³⁶ Understanding the evolution of the Afghan drug market is essential to global efforts to plan and implement counternarcotic measures.¹³⁷

The AOTP also monitors and analyzes trends in the Afghan opiate industry to support the international response to the illicit drug economy. In 2022, AOTP produced a report analyzing the role of women in the opiate trade; their findings dispelled conceptions that women are not involved in the illicit drug economy.¹³⁸

Since the first quarter of FY 2022, following the Taliban takeover, INL has disbursed \$25.1 million from the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account on counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan.¹³⁹

REMOVING UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE

Since 1989, at least 46,625 Afghan civilians have been killed or injured by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).¹⁴⁰ UN humanitarian mine action partners have cleared over 13 million items of unexploded ordnance from Afghanistan, but the threat remains high, especially for children.¹⁴¹ In September 2022, for instance, four children were killed and three injured when unexploded ordnance that the children were playing with detonated inside their school in Helmand Province.¹⁴² Due to the ongoing civilian threat, the State Department continues to fund on-the-ground mine and ERW clearance activities through implementing partners via a Treasury OFAC license exemption. Direct assistance to the former Afghan Directorate for Mine Action Coordination (DMAC), a government entity, was canceled on September 9, 2021, in compliance with international sanctions against Specially Designated Terrorist Groups.¹⁴³

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 with a mission to protect victims of conflict, provide life-saving humanitarian assistance, and enhance the security and safety of the Afghan people.¹⁴⁴ PM/WRA currently supports six Afghan NGOs, one public international organization (United Nations Mine Action Service), and four international NGOs to help clear areas in Afghanistan contaminated by ERW and conventional weapons (e.g., unexploded mortar rounds).¹⁴⁵ From September to December 2022, PM/WRA implementing partners cleared 8,361,763 square meters of minefields, and destroyed 1,141 anti-tank mines and anti-personnel weapons, 506 items of unexploded ordnance, and 1,504 small arm ammunitions.¹⁴⁶ By March 2023,

PM/WRA expects to have disbursed the entirety of its \$15 million in FY 2022 allocated funds.¹⁴⁷

Since FY 2006, State has allocated over \$380 million in weapons-destruction and mine-action assistance to Afghanistan.¹⁴⁸ Implementing partners have cleared a total of 346,929,868 square meters of land and destroyed 8,498,504 landmines and other ERW.¹⁴⁹ However, the exact amount of land mines and ERW yet to be destroyed is unknown. As of the fourth quarter of FY 2022, PM/WRA estimates there are 804 square kilometers of contaminated minefields and battlefields remaining, but this estimate fluctuates with additional surveys and the completion of clearance activities.¹⁵⁰

REFUGEES AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

On September 23, 2022, the U.S. government announced more than \$326.7 million in additional funding to Afghanistan, bringing the total U.S. government humanitarian contribution to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees to almost \$923.8 million in 2022. This funding includes nearly \$208 million from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance and nearly \$118.8 million from State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). According to PRM, part of this funding will support efforts to reintegrate returning Afghan refugees and provide multi-sector aid to displaced populations both in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.¹⁵¹

This quarter, State PRM and USAID continued to implement the assistance provided in FY 2022 to support Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This funding includes:¹⁵²

- more than \$80 million from State PRM to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Afghanistan, as well as \$32 million to Pakistan and \$3.9 million to other regional countries
- roughly \$2.3 million from USAID and \$52 million from State PRM to the UNFPA to support health and protection programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- roughly \$63 million from USAID and nearly \$11 million from State PRM to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support health, shelter and settlement, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs



U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West meets with Afghan refugees in Pakistan. (U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan photo)

Afghan Refugees

As of June 30, 2022, UNHCR recorded 2,072,657 Afghan refugees living in Afghanistan's neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.¹⁵³ The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported decreasing outflows of refugees from Afghanistan this quarter, as 154,118 Afghans left the country November 1–15, and 127,793 left the country November 16–30. Comparatively, 192,021 Afghans left the country in the final two weeks of October.¹⁵⁴

According to PRM, Iran's borders remained open only to Afghans with valid passports and visas, not to asylum seekers. However, Afghans continued to make their way into Iran through unofficial border crossings. Pakistan has also limited entry through the Torkham border crossing to those with valid passports and visas. PRM noted exceptions may apply for critical medical conditions on humanitarian grounds at both the Torkham and Chaman border crossings. Afghans holding Tazkiras (a national identity document) from neighboring districts at Chaman may also be granted exceptions. Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have restricted entry to visa holders.¹⁵⁵ The Taliban have suspended issuing passports since October, due to technical issues.¹⁵⁶

UNHCR estimates that as of June 2022, there are 1,285,754 registered Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, 780,000 living in Iran, 6,883 living in Tajikistan, 11 living in Uzbekistan, and 9 living in Turkmenistan.¹⁵⁷ UNHCR's External Situation Report for November warned that the arrival of winter,

steep economic decline, rising living costs, and a lack of livelihood opportunities have strained conditions for Afghan refugees living in neighboring countries.¹⁵⁸

Nearly 763,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan from Iran and 75,700 returned from Pakistan in 2022. Among the returnees from Iran, 43% were adult males, 14% were adult females, and 43% were children under 18. Among the returnees from Pakistan, 20% were adult males, 26% were adult females, and 54% were children under 18.¹⁵⁹ In October, UNHCR recorded 1,612 returnees from Pakistan, the highest monthly figure since 2018. Returnees cited the lack of employment opportunities and high living costs as reasons for leaving Pakistan and Iran.¹⁶⁰

According to State PRM, the Taliban continue to explore regional engagement to support Afghan repatriation. The Taliban ministry of refugees and repatriation (MoRR) has reached out to related ministries in Pakistan and Iran.¹⁶¹ In December, MoRR representatives attended an Iranian-hosted meeting focused on returning Afghan migrants.¹⁶² While the Taliban have outwardly supported expanding services for refugees, PRM expressed concern about the Taliban's interference in humanitarian operations helping returnees.¹⁶³

UNHCR's voluntary repatriation program helped 6,058 Afghan refugees return to Afghanistan between January 1 and November 30, 2022. Of these, 5,682 returned from Pakistan, 357 returned from Iran, and 19 returned from other countries. On August 1, 2022, UNHCR increased the cash grant provided by the voluntary repatriation program from \$250 to \$375 per person to offset economic burdens. UNHCR has provided a total of \$2,141,223 to returned refugees through the program, supporting their immediate humanitarian needs and transportation costs.¹⁶⁴ However, PRM warned that the Taliban's interference with humanitarian operations could impact support for returnees, as UN OCHA reports record-high operational constraints faced by humanitarian partners in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁵

Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement

UN OCHA reported roughly 32,400 newly internally displaced persons in Afghanistan in 2022. Of these internally displaced, 21% were adult males, 21% were adult females, and 58% were children under 18.¹⁶⁶ UNHCR also recorded 211,807 IDP returnees in 2022.¹⁶⁷ The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that there are currently some two million Afghan IDPs in over 1,000 large, sprawling "slum-like" settlements across nearly 30 provinces in Afghanistan. The Taliban reportedly evicted roughly 20,000 IDPs from settlements in Badghis in December, despite harsh winter conditions.¹⁶⁸

SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE ENDNOTES

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