Win, Hold, Fold, or Run? Afghanistan in the Spring of 2019

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Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images
Introduction

The war in Afghanistan is at a critical stage. There is no clear end that will result in a U.S. military victory or the creation of stable Afghan state. A peace settlement may be possible, but so far, this only seems possible on terms sufficiently favorable to the Taliban so that such peace may become an extension of war by other means.

This study presents a survey of open source metrics and data on the situation in Afghanistan as of the spring of 2019. It warns that after some eighteen years of conflict, the United States developed an approach to the war that can defeat the Taliban and other threats in Afghanistan. It also warns that the U.S. has failed to help the Afghan government overcome its many critical military and civil limitations, and is still unable to choose and implement some form of consistent U.S. strategy.

The study presents a wide range of material drawn from U.S. government sources, NATO, institutions like the UN and World Bank, and media like the *Long War Journal* that address key challenges shaping Afghanistan’s future. The data and metric indicates that:

- The war is a stalemate, but one that marginally favors the Taliban – and does so in spite of massive ongoing U.S. air, financial, and advisory support.
- Open source reporting on the course of the fighting is highly controversial – to the point where the U.S-led command seems to be cancelling reporting on Afghan government vs. Taliban control and influence and no longer reports on many aspects of ANSF operational capabilities. Excerpts from SIGAR, Lead IG, and *Long War Journal* reporting are particularly revealing.
- Other metrics and data reflect a critical lack of progress in key aspects of Afghan government forces, governance, and economic development.
- These problems exist in spite of continued Afghan dependence on massive U.S military aid, major increases in the use of U.S. airpower, continued U.S. support of key Afghan ground forces, and forward U.S. train and assist support of other Afghan combat forces at the Kandak level.
- Other metrics and data highlight long list of equally critical uncertainties, most of which raise serious questions about U.S. capability to create a stable Afghanistan, only some of which can be addressed with any confidence.

These are challenges should have a major impact on U.S. strategy at a time when the U.S. has to make hard choices about staying, seeking a peace, or finding ways to withdraw even if a peace is not reached. The U.S. currently is pursuing a peace settlement that so far excludes any formal participation by the Afghan government that the U.S is in Afghanistan to aid. Media reporting also raises growing questions as to whether the U.S. is classifying or altering some aspects of its open source reporting to disguise this lack of progress, while it may be seeking to withdraw, even at the cost of a peace settlement that will not offer real security.

The Afghan government has made its own attempts to define a peace settlement, but remains deeply divided and either faces a Presidential election in September 2019 that raises serious questions about Afghanistan’s future leadership and unity or continued governance by an increasingly weak and divided Afghan leadership that has served long beyond the period when new elections should have been held.
It is also clear from the data presented in this study that the Afghan government will not be able to survive without billions of dollars in annual financial aid from outside powers like the U.S. for years to come. It is equally clear that it would suffer unacceptable military losses if the U.S. did not continue to provide massive amounts of air support and if the U.S. and its allies did not provide substantial train and assist help to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and direct land force support to Afghan Special Security Forces and other elite units. Afghan forces may be making progress, but serious questions emerge as to whether they would (or could) stand on their own without outside support for something like the next half-decade.

The study does not examine the politics of Afghanistan or the current peace efforts in detail. These issues are too topical and volatile. It does, however, present metrics that show that while Afghanistan continues to pursue reform in many civil areas, its success is questionable at best. Sources like the World Bank, the United Nations, and the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction show just how badly governed and corrupt the country still is. They show, how serious the challenges it faces in terms of poverty and development still are, and its growing dependence on on a narco-economy.

And finally, the metrics show that a deeply divided population is growing at a rate its economy cannot properly support, and that it will face critical challenges in employing its youth even if it can achieve some meaningful form of peace, unity, and development. These civil problems are so critical that they raise serious questions as to whether the country can either create a peace the bring true stability and security, or emerge out of its coming election with a successful enough government to either continue the fight or manage a peace. Afghanistan’s civil threats are as serious as its security threats.
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Key Challenges
Key Challenges

After eighteen years of war, the United States has still failed to come to grips with at least two of its three major threats in Afghanistan. The first is the importance of the civil side of the war. The U.S. has not faced the fact that the weaknesses of the Afghan government, the divisions within the Afghanistan population, and Afghanistan’s structural problems in governance, economics, and demographics are as serious a threat to any lasting form of stability and victory as the Taliban.

It also has not faced the fact that America’s constant changes in strategy, its erratic civil and military aid programs and funding, its lack of any coherent approach to nation building, and its fluctuating military posture pose an equal threat to success.

The U.S. now faces a long list of major uncertainties, none of which it has properly addressed:

• Peace Process vs. War By Other Means
• Taliban Intentions: Victory/Exhaustion/Peace
• U.S. and Allied Intentions: Stay/Leave/Conditional/Equivocate/Cut
• Afghan Intentions: Power/Fight/Negotiate/Divide
• Tactical Situation – Control, Influence, Stalemate
• ANSF and Other Afghan Security Forces
• Afghan Political Stability, Election, Fragmentation and “Kabulstan”
• Civil Stability: Governance, Economic, Population
• Neighbors: Pakistan, Iran China, Russia, Iran, Central Asia
• Impact of War of Attrition, Chance of Implosion
• Impact of NATO-ISAF/US Withdrawal
• Strategic Value of Afghanistan and War: Cost-Benefits of Treating as a “Sunk Cost”

To the extent U.S. has succeeded in the war, it has been largely in making major reductions in the size of the in-country U.S. land force effort, and in the annual cost of the war in casualties and dollars. It has done so largely by increasing its use of airpower, and developing a new mix of manned and unmanned targeting and precision strike capabilities, while providing training, equipment, and sustainment support to Afghan forces, and a limited number of specialized combat forces to support Afghan elite National Security forces. This has so far given the Afghan government the capability to hold heavily populated areas. At the same time, the U.S. has largely abandoned serious efforts at nation building, and to shape the future of Afghan politics, governance, economics and civil society even though a divided Afghan government has been in a series of crises that seem to have with no predictable end.
The metrics in this study suggest that the war has become a faltering stalemate where the Taliban and other threat forces now seem to have a marginal advantage. They also seem to indicate that the U.S. is replacing a “conditions-based aid” strategy that it implemented a little over a year ago, but never fully implemented, with a “peace” strategy that borders on becoming a “conditions based withdrawal.”

Current U.S. military and civil aid programs, America’s current military and diplomatic posture, and the President FY2020 budget request still call for a continued levels of US financial commitment and civil-military presence in Afghanistan. However, some senior U.S. policy makers no longer seem to support an “open-ended” war, and many members of Congress have begun to question U.S. strategy and there have been growing demands for peace negotiations and finding some end to the war.

This lack of policy-level, political, and public support may explain why later sections of this study show the U.S. has become unwilling to provide official open source assessments of the relative success of the Afghan government and Taliban in controlling and influencing the Afghan population and given Districts in the country. It may also explain why the U.S. seems to be seeking a peace with the Taliban that would lead to full U.S. withdrawal in one and one-half years.

So far, U.S. policymakers have not publically addressed the probable consequences of a peace settlement and/or U.S. withdrawal for the country, the region, or broader U.S. strategic interests. It is clear, however, that the risks are serious. Where Clausewitz one described war as an “extension of politics by other means,” the U.S. may be seeking “peace as an extension” of war by other means, and as a way of declaring some kind of victory and leaving. Beyond that, it is unclear that the U.S. has any longer-term strategy for either Afghanistan -- or the region -- than one of fighting an indefinite war of attrition.
Counterinsurgency: The Real Nature of the Threat

The Three Primary Threats that Always Dominate the War

• The overt enemy: The insurgents, extremists, terrorists
• The host country government or “partner” whose divisions, corruption, and failures create and sustain the threat
• U.S. ignorance of the host country and its neighbors, efforts to transform in its own image, erratic programs and strategies, rapid rotations, and unwillingness to face the challenges and complexity of creating lasting civil-military outcomes.

Optional Elements

• Outside powers and sanctuaries.
• Governance, economic, corruption, demographic, ethnic and sectarian problems within the host country.
• Failure to control costs, casualties, and duration.
Six Options: Afghan Peace or Afghanistan in Pieces?

1. Peace agreement: Rapid U.S. and allied withdrawal, aid cuts
2. Peace agreement: U.S. provides military support, sustained aid.
5. U.S. stays: Open ended war of attrition
6. U.S. Stays: Afghanistan election creates successful governance. Afghan forces take over over time and win war of attrition. Aid is conditional and Afghan economic development succeed in Afghan terms
Key Uncertainties

- Peace Process vs. War By Other Means
- Taliban Intentions: Victory/Exhaustion/Peace
- U.S. and Allied Intentions: Stay/Leave/Conditional/Equivocate/Cut
- Afghan Intentions: Power/Fight/Negotiate/Divide
- Tactical Situation – Control, Influence, Stalemate
- ANSF and Other Afghan Security Forces
- Afghan Political Stability, Election, Fragmentation and “Kabulstan”
- Civil Stability: Governance, Economic, Population
- Neighbors: Pakistan, Iran China, Russia, Iran, Central Asia
- Impact of War of Attrition, Chance of Implosion
- Impact of NATO-ISAF/US Withdrawal
- Strategic Value of Afghanistan and War: Cost-Benefits of Treating as a “Sunk Cost”
Unstable and Turbulent Funding and Radical Shifts in the Estimates of the Cost of War
**US Casualty Data as of June 5, 2019**

**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM U.S. CASUALTY STATUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>KIA</th>
<th>Non-Hostile</th>
<th>Pending</th>
<th>WIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan Only</td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20,057</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Locations</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>OEF U.S. DOD Civilian Casualties</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Worldwide Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,351</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,846</strong></td>
<td><strong>505</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,096</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>KIA</th>
<th>Non-Hostile</th>
<th>Pending</th>
<th>WIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFS U.S. Military Casualties</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFS U.S. DOD Civilian Casualties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>397</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3 OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (Afghanistan only) includes casualties that occurred between Oct. 7, 2001, and Dec. 31, 2014, in Afghanistan only.

4 OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (Other Locations) includes casualties that occurred between Oct. 7, 2001, and Dec. 31, 2014, in Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Philippines, Seychelles, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Yemen. Wounded in action cases in this category include those without a casualty country listed.

**OPERATION FREEDOM'S SENTINEL U.S. CASUALTY STATUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>KIA</th>
<th>Non-Hostile</th>
<th>Pending</th>
<th>WIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFS U.S. Military Casualties</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFS U.S. DOD Civilian Casualties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>397</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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OPERATION FREEDOM'S SENTINEL includes casualties that occurred in Afghanistan after Dec. 31, 2014.

Source: Department of Defense, [https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/](https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/), accessed 6 June, 2019
In December, the DoD Comptroller released the DoD’s congressionally-mandated quarterly Cost of War report, which details the DoD’s spending on overseas contingency operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria through September 30. According to this report, the DoD has spent $1.5 trillion in support of contingency operations since September 11, 2001. The total cost of operations in Afghanistan over that time was $737.6 billion, of which $157.9 billion has been obligated in support of OFS since that operation began in 2015.157 The Comptroller reported that the DoD obligated $41.2 billion for OFS during FY 2018, which was $1.3 billion less than the amount spent on OFS in FY 2017. Average monthly spending on all OCO in FY 2018 was reported at $3.7 billion, of which $3 billion was in support of operations in Afghanistan. According to the DoD Comptroller, these obligations cover all expenses related to the conflicts, including war-related operational costs, support for deployed troops, and transportation of personnel and equipment.158 USFOR-A’s implementation of the South Asia strategy called for an increase in personnel in Afghanistan in FY 2019 above the estimate included in the President’s FY 2018 Budget. The DoD Comptroller submitted an amendment to this budget, which included an additional $1.2 billion to support an increase in U.S. forces. Of this funding, $836.8 million was designated for Army operating forces. Other major costs included Navy weapons maintenance, Navy weapons support, Army logistics, and pay and benefits for U.S. military personnel.
AFGHANISTAN COST OF WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION, ANNUAL AND CUMULATIVE OBLIGATIONS FY 2002 TO FY 2019 Q1 ($ BILLIONS)

CUMULATIVE OBLIGATIONS THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2018

- **COST OF WAR**
  - Department of Defense*: $744.9

- **COST OF RECONSTRUCTION**
  - Department of Defense*: $197.7
  - USAID: 24.0
  - Department of State: 17.7
  - Other Agencies: 1.1

* DOD’s Cost of Reconstruction amount also included in total Cost of War.

Reconstruction costs for Afghanistan equal approximately 10% of all funds obligated by the Department of Defense for Afghanistan since 2001. DOD reported in its Cost of War Report as of December 31, 2018, that it had obligated $744.9 billion for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel in Afghanistan, including the cost of maintaining U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

The comparable figures for Afghanistan reconstruction, consisting of obligations (appropriated funds committed to particular programs or projects for disbursement) of the DOD, Department of State, USAID, and other agencies was $197.7 billion at that date. Note that the DOD contribution to the reconstruction of Afghanistan is contained in both the $744.9 billion Cost of War and $197.7 billion Cost of Reconstruction figures. Figure 3.4 presents the annual and cumulative costs for war and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Source: DOD, Cost of War Monthly Report, “Total War-related Obligations by Year Incurred,” data as of December 31, 2018. Obligation data shown against year funds were obligated. SIGAR analysis of annual obligation of reconstruction accounts as presented in SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 1/30/2019. Obligation data shown against year funds were obligated.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, p. 54.
US Aid Spending: 2012-2019

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 52-53.
Erratic US Aid Spending by Major Category: 2012-2019

OCO CATEGORIES

The FY 2020 OCO request is divided into three requirement categories – direct war, enduring, and OCO for base.

Direct War Requirements ($25.4 billion) – Reflects combat or combat support costs that are not expected to continue once combat operations end at major contingency locations. Includes in-country war support for Operation FREEDOM’S SENTINEL (OFS) in Afghanistan and Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) in Iraq and Syria. Funds partnership programs such as the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), the Coalition Support Fund (CSF), and Middle East border security.

OCO for Enduring Requirements ($41.3 billion) – Reflects enduring in-theater and CONUS costs that will remain after combat operations end. These costs, historically funded in OCO, include overseas basing, depot maintenance, ship operations, and weapons system sustainment. It also includes the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAII), and Security Cooperation. Combined, enduring requirements and direct war requirements comprise “traditional” OCO.

OCO for Base Requirements ($97.9 billion) – Reflects funding for base budget requirements, which support the National Defense Strategy, such as defense readiness, readiness enablers, and munitions, financed in the OCO budget to comply with the base budget defense caps included in current law.

Source: OSD Comptroller, FY2020 Budget Overview, pp. 6.3-6.4.
OCO FY2020 Request by Functional/Mission Category
($US Current Billions)

Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) ($4.8 billion): This request funds the sustainment, infrastructure, equipment, and training requirements for up to 352,000 members of the Afghan National Army and National Police as well as up to 30,000 Afghan Local Police. The request supports further development of the ANDSF as an effective and sustainable force to combat a resilient insurgency and as a reliable counterterrorism partner with the United States. A key element of the request is funding for the final year of the President of Afghanistan’s four-year ANDSF Roadmap to increase the capacity and combat effectiveness of the AAF and the ASSF and seize the initiative in the fight against insurgent and terrorist forces, strengthen and restructure Afghan Security Institutions, and facilitate a political settlement to the war.

Support for Coalition Forces ($0.6 billion): Amounts requested to finance coalition, friendly forces, and a variety of support requirements for key foreign partners who wish to participate in U.S. military operations but lack financial means. Such support reduces the burden on U.S. forces and is critical to overall mission success. The FY 2020 budget request for support for coalition forces includes $450 million for the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) and $150 million for the Lift and Sustain program. The FY 2020 CSF request of $450 million reflects a $450 million (50 percent) decrease from the FY 2019 enacted level of $900 million due to the continuing suspension of U.S. security assistance to Pakistan based on the President’s January 4, 2018, guidance.

Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) ($1.0 billion): The United States Government’s strategy to counter ISIS directed DoD to conduct a campaign to degrade, dismantle, and ultimately defeat ISIS. The focus of DoD’s efforts is to work by, with, and through the Government of Iraq’s Security Forces and Vetted Syrian Opposition (VSO) forces to build key security force capabilities and promote longer term regional stability.

The FY 2020 CTEF budget request strengthens the security capabilities of DOD partners countering ISIS to secure territory liberated from ISIS and counter future ISIS threats by training and equipping partner security forces. The training, equipment, and operational support in this request will facilitate the consolidation of gains achieved against ISIS and prevent its reemergence. The $1,045 million request includes $745 million to assist the Iraqi Security Forces and $300 million to assist the Vetted Syrian Opposition. The FY 2020 budget also realigns $250 million from the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund to Operation and Maintenance, Defense-wide, for implementation by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency in order to align DoD authorities and funding to support border security requirements for partner nations fighting ISIS.

Security Cooperation ($1.1 billion): The FY 2020 budget request maintains the existing security cooperation account at $811 million, which funds counterterrorism, crisis response, and other security cooperation support to partner nations. The FY 2020 budget also realigns $250 million from the Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund to Operation and Maintenance, Defense-wide, for implementation by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency in order to align DoD authorities and funding to support border security requirements for partner nations fighting ISIS.

Security Cooperation funds support programs to enable partner nations to deter and defeat existing and evolving terrorist and other transnational threats. Training and equipping partner nations allows U.S. forces to be more readily available for other contingency operations, build better relationships with partners, and promote global security in a more cost-effective manner.

The request supports the following activities:

- Executing DoD’s counterterrorism and train, advise, assist missions in Afghanistan to support the President’s South Asia strategy as leaders work to negotiate a settlement that safeguards national interests
- Sustaining personnel forward deployed to the Middle East to continue operations to ensure an enduring defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and allow flexibility for a deliberate, coordinated, disciplined withdrawal from Syria
- Building the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces and Syrian opposition forces to counter ISIS in support of the United States’ comprehensive regional strategy
- Conducting U.S. Central Command in-country and in-theater support activities, including intelligence support to military operations
- Enhancing U.S. deterrence activities in Eastern Europe to assure North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies and partners and deter aggressive actors

Source: OCO Comptroller, FY2020 Budget Overview, pp. 6.3-6.9.
The OFS request of $18.6 billion represents a slight increase from the $18.5 billion enacted in FY 2019.249 This includes $4.8 billion for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), the primary funding stream that supports the ANDSF. This is a slight decrease from the $4.9 billion enacted for the ASFF in FY 2019.

This funding covers the full range of ANDSF requirements, including salaries, equipment, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, training, facilities, food, and fuel. The budget assumes that the ANDSF will receive additional support of $273 million from the UN Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, $332 million from the NATO ANA Trust Fund, and $498 million from the Afghan government.250

The FY 2020 budget request reflects an important change in how the DoD accounts for OFS appropriations and expenditures. In previous years, the DoD Comptroller reported OFS requests and appropriations that exceeded $45 billion annually. However, this figure included activities that support the OFS mission but are not executed in Afghanistan and may be shared across the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility (such as logistics, transportation, intelligence, and equipment reset). The OFS accounting category also included funding for smaller OCO missions, including the Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines and classified missions.

In this year’s budget request, the DoD Comptroller adjusted the FY 2019 and FY 2020 OFS account to include only funds for combat operations in Afghanistan that will not be necessary after the cessation of hostilities. All enduring requirements that will continue following the end of combat operations, such as overseas basing, depot maintenance, and ship operations, are reported separately. Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines and classified operations are included in the new “enduring requirements” category.
Lead IG Estimate of Problems in the DoD Cost of War Report and Other Estimates of War Costs

In April, the DoD Comptroller released the DoD’s congressionally-mandated quarterly Cost of War report, which details the DoD’s spending on overseas contingency operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria through December 31, 2018. According to this report, the DoD has spent $1.5 trillion in support of contingency operations since September 11, 2001. The total cost of operations in Afghanistan over that time was $744.9 billion, of which $165.6 billion has been obligated in support of OFS since that operation began in 2015. Total obligations in support of OFS for the first quarter of FY 2019 were $7.7 billion. According to the DoD Comptroller, these obligations cover all expenses related to the conflicts, including war-related operational costs, support for deployed troops, and transportation of personnel and equipment.252

The DoD Comptroller told the DoD OIG that execution reporting in the Cost of War does not reflect the change in accounting use for appropriation reporting, described above, which separates direct war and enduring costs. As a result, the OFS account in the Cost of War report includes smaller OCO operations and expenditures outside of Afghanistan.253

In March 2019, the DoD OIG released a summary of six audits on the Cost of War released between 2016 and 2018. The audits identified several systemic problems that led to inaccurate and untimely outdated cost reporting for OFS and Operation Inherent Resolve. The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoD had systemic weaknesses in the accounting for costs associated with ongoing overseas contingency operations identified in six Cost of War (CoW) audit reports from 2016 to 2018. The DoD OIG also sought to determine the status of the 26 recommendations from the 6 CoW audit reports, and the actions that the DoD Components took in response to those recommendations.

The DoD OIG determined that personnel in the office of the Deputy Comptroller for Program/ Budget issued unreliable and outdated CoW reports from FY 2015 and 2016 to Congress, DoD decision makers, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Specifically, the DoD OIG and service audit agencies identified the following systemic problems with inaccurate and untimely cost reporting for OIR and OFS: Army, Navy and Air Force personnel under-reported and over-reported costs for OIR and OFS; Navy and Marine Corps personnel could not provide transaction-level detail to support their OFS obligations and disbursements; and Deputy Comptroller for Program/Budget and Army personnel did not submit CoW data by the required milestones.

The DoD OIG and service audit agencies closed 19 of the previous 26 open recommendations. The seven remaining recommendations were resolved, but remain open until the recommendations are implemented and verified by the DoD OIG. If the DoD Components do not implement corrective actions, Congress, DoD decision makers, the GAO and OMB may not be able to make informed budgetary decisions, maintain accountability of war-related overseas contingency operations funds, or determine precise spending trends for war-related overseas contingency operations appropriations.

In this summary report, the DoD OIG made four additional recommendations to address systemic internal control weaknesses. The DoD OIG recommended that the DoD develop and implement review processes to verify that military services develop, update, and implement standard procedures, tools and systems for accurate war-related overseas contingency operations costs reporting; and that the Navy and Marine Corps develop and implement procedures to capture the required level of detail of war-related overseas contingency operations costs in the respective accounting systems. Additionally, the DoD OIG recommended that the DoD and military services enforce the deadline to report the CoW data or coordinate with Congress to request an adjustment, and that the Army, Navy and Air Force auditors general include follow-up audits in their FY 2020 audit plans to verify the accuracy of the CoW data.

DoD Components agreed with most of the recommendations. However, the DoD Deputy Comptroller for Program/Budget disagreed with the recommendation to develop and implement review processes to verify that the DoD Components develop, update, and implement standard procedures, tools and systems for accurate war-related overseas contingency operations costs
OCO Funds Increase but Level OFS Funding in FY 2020 Request

In March, the DoD Comptroller released the President’s DoD FY 2020 budget request, which requests a total of $718.3 billion for the DoD, including $544.5 billion in base funding and $173.8 billion in Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO) funding.

While the overall Defense budget request increased by $33.3 billion compared to the appropriation enacted in FY 2019, the OCO budget nearly tripled. The budget request stated that the large increase in the OCO budget is because DoD base funding, which is capped by the Budget Control Act of 2011, is “insufficient to execute the National Defense Strategy.” Therefore, all requirements in excess of this statutory cap were shifted to the OCO budget, which is exempt from the caps set by the Budget Control Act. The FY 2020 OCO request also includes $9.2 billion unrelated to ongoing operations “for unspecified military construction to build border barriers, backfill funding reallocated [from military construction] in FY 2019 to build border barriers, and rebuild facilities damaged by Hurricanes Florence and Michael.

The OFS request of $18.6 billion represents a slight increase from the $18.5 billion enacted in FY 2019. This includes $4.8 billion for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), the primary funding stream that supports the ANDSF. This is a slight decrease from the $4.9 billion enacted for the ASFF in FY 2019. This funding covers the full range of ANDSF requirements, including salaries, equipment, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, training, facilities, food, and fuel. The budget assumes that the ANDSF will receive additional support of $273 million from the UN Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, $332 million from the NATO ANA Trust Fund, and $498 million from the Afghan government.

USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace (FFP), and the DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) are the primary U.S. Government offices responsible for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. OFDA had 23 active awards during the quarter that focused on water, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, health, logistics support and relief commodities, agriculture and food security, humanitarian coordination and management, and shelter and settlement support, including emergency response efforts for areas impacted by the drought. FFP had two active awards during the quarter that addressed food and nutrition assistance, including emergency response efforts for drought-affected people.

In March 2019, the United States announced more than $61 million in additional humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, including $46 million from FFP, $9.3 million from PRM, and $5.7 million from OFDA. This assistance will provide emergency food assistance, nutrition services, hygiene kits, safe drinking water, and sanitation for people, including refugees, in the most affected regions of Afghanistan.

The Changing U.S. Role in Warfighting and Shifts in Balance of U.S. Ground and Air Forces
The metrics in this section describe an awkward mix of success and failure – one documented in far more narrative detail in the reports of the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and the Lead Inspector General for Oversea Contingency Operations (LIG):

- The United States has reduced its military casualties to minimal levels – trends matched by its outside allies. The situation is reverse, however, in the case of Afghan forces. Although Resolute Support does not publish casualty statistics for U.S. or Non-US NATO and other outside forces, the level of Afghan military and police casualties has risen so sharply that it is classified by the Afghan government. President Ghani mentioned an unsupported figure of 28,000 dead since he became President in 2014 in early 2018, and and then 47,000 dead on January 25, 2019. No one has issued an official open source estimate of the number of wounded and injured.

- The U.S. has still not provided real transparency as to the the cost of the Afghan War, but recent metrics indicate that the total cost of warfighting and development/reconstruction has dropped from an annual peak of $112 billion – which may have included substantial money actually spent on Baseline and other programs -- to a planned total of $7 billion in FY2019. (The FY2019 total may not include the cost of air operations based outside Afghanistan and the full cost of supporting Afghan counterterrorism forces.)

- The US spent $133 billion on military and civil aid to Afghanistan between FY2002 and FY2019 – 63% of which was military aid. The cost of that aid dropped from $14.7 billion in FY2015 to $5.2 billion in FY2019.

- The annual funding and force level profiles of U.S. military and civil aid from FY2002 to the present have been incredibly erratic. They rose far too slowly from 2002 to 2008 to react to a reemerging threat, then received virtual flood of aid that peaked sharply in FY2011, and the fell precipitously in the years than followed. Funding levels were so turbulent, and tied to so many changes in program content, that vast amounts of money had to be wasted – problems compounded by what both General H.R. Macmaster and SIGAR found to be a gross lack of effective contract and execution management and massive corruption.

- The proposed FY2020 program is little more than an extension of the FY2019 program, once the changes in cost definition are examined. It does not track with either Presidential policy statements or the ongoing U.S. peace initiative.

- Official reporting on U.S. military and civil personnel levels is suspect, and seems to omit substantial numbers of temporary duty and other personnel. The military total has dropped from a peak over over 100,000 in 2011, however, to some 12,000 military in FY2019 – with as goal of 15,000 in FY2020. This does not include some 29,400 contractors in 2019, 11,600 of which were U.S. citizens and many of which were performing roles played by uniformed U.S. military in past wars.

- Press reports indicate that the US Embassy in Kabul – an embassy that became one of the largest the world -- is now going to be reshaped by plans to cut personnel by some 50% in April 2019.

- The U.S. military role shifted sharply from reliance on U.S. land combat forces to using airpower to support Afghan land forces after 2014. AFCENT data show that the U.S. flew 1,408 strike sorties in 2013 vs. 966 in 2018 – a drop of 48% in manned sorties releasing munitions. However, once unmanned aircraft are included, the U.S. dropped 7,362 munitions in 2018, versus 2,758 munitions in 2013 (+166% in 2018), only 947 in 2015 (+667% in 2018), and 4,361 in 2017 (+59% in 2018).
Giving U.S. Priority to Iraq: 2003-2008

Source: DoD Public Affairs, September 2011
US Shift to Lower Personnel Levels: FY2002-FY2017

In thousands of U.S. troops

Sources: DOD, Monthly Boots-on-the-Ground reports provided to CRS and congressional defense committees, 2001-June 2014. For month-by-month troop levels, both in-country and in-theater, see Table A-1.

Notes: Reflects U.S. troops in-country; excludes troops providing in-theater support or conducting counter-terror operations outside the region.
OCO Manning FY2008-FY2020

Trends in OCO Troop Levels in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan
(Annual Average in Thousands)

Source: OSD Comptroller, FY2020 Budget Overview, pp. 6.3-6.4, and DoD reporting as of 12/2018 for contractors.
Total OCO Manning Drops by 91% in FY2008-FY2020

Source: OSD Comptroller, FY2020 Budget Overview, pp. 6.3-6.4, and DoD reporting as of 12/2018 for contractors.
Contractors More than Double the Real Total of US Personnel Afghanistan in 2018-2019

According to DOD, as of December 2018, approximately 14,000 U.S. military personnel were serving as part of the United States’ Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS) mission in Afghanistan, the same number reported for the last year. An additional 861 DOD civilian personnel and 10,698 U.S. citizens who serve as contractors are also in Afghanistan. Of the 14,000 U.S. military personnel, 8,475 U.S. personnel are assigned to the NATO RS mission to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces, unchanged since last quarter. The remaining U.S. military personnel serve the OFS mission in support roles or in conducting air operations, training the Afghan special forces, and conducting counterterror operations.

As of December 2018, the RS mission included roughly 8,444 military personnel from NATO allies and non-NATO partner nations, bringing the current total of RS military personnel to 16,919 (a 690-person increase since last quarter). The United States contributes the most troops to the RS mission, followed by Germany (1,800 personnel) and the United Kingdom (1,100).

While the number of U.S. military and civilian personnel remained constant, the number of contractors increased by nearly 14 percent during the quarter, reaching the highest level since the 1st quarter of FY 2016. The greatest growth during the quarter was among contractors who perform logistics/maintenance, management/administrative, and training tasks.

The DoD reported that as of the end of the quarter, the authorized force level for U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan remained at approximately 14,000, including troops assigned to U.S. counterterrorism operations and 8,475 personnel supporting the Resolute Support mission.257 (The DoD does not release precise OFS personnel numbers to the public.) Some troops assigned to the OFS mission have already been transferred to locations outside of Afghanistan, such as Qatar, as part of General Miller’s effort to “streamline” OFS operations.

Resolute Support reported that as of March 2019, 39 nations are participating in the Resolute Support mission, contributing more than 17,034 troops, 8,475 of which were American (50%). This total force has changed little since December 2018, when Resolute Support reported that its mission consisted of 16,919 personnel.

The number of DoD contractor personnel continued to grow during the quarter. The DoD reported that there were more than 30,000 DoD contractors in Afghanistan during the quarter, including 12,247 U.S. contractors. This is one of the highest quarterly totals of DoD contractors since OFS began in 2015.261 USFOR-A noted that the areas with the greatest contractor increase since 2018 were base life support, security, and interpreters.262 The DoD reported that the authorized number of U.S. DoD civilian personnel in Afghanistan remained at approximately 800.

The DoD said that it has not received any order to reduce the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, despite news reports in December that the President was considering such a move. In February, Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan told NATO allies in Brussels that any change in force level would be done in coordination with its Resolute Support partners, not unilaterally.

The DoS reported that to the DoS OIG that as of February 23, there were more than 6,400 people supporting embassy operations, including 584 U.S. Government employees.
Radical Shifts in Role of US and Coalition Airpower: 2015-2019
(CAOC) Public Affairs – afcent.pa@afcent.af.mil as of February 28, 2019)

- Flew 1,408 strike sorties in 2013 vs. 966 in 2018 – drop of 48% in Manned sorties.
- But, dropped 7,362 munitions in 2018, versus 2,758 in 2013 (+166%) and 4,361 in 2017 (+59%)

Some figures may have changed due to data re-calculation and re-verification

- Assets under CFACC control include a compilation of aircraft from all U.S. military branches of service, as well as Coalition aircraft; however, not all aircraft flying in the AOR fall under CFACC control.
U.S. and Afghan airstrikes continue to be a critical component of unilateral and joint operations against the Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria–Khorasan (ISIS-K). As noted in the previous Lead IG quarterly report, General Miller ended his predecessor’s air campaign targeting sources of Taliban revenue, particularly narcotics processing facilities. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that General Miller directed this change “to maximize impact on the Taliban in an attempt to force them to the negotiation table.” USFOR-A added that while there are no current operations targeting Taliban financing, coalition and ANDSF forces may have destroyed some narcotics processing facilities while targeting Taliban leadership.

According to data released by U.S. Air Forces Central Command, U.S. manned and unmanned aircraft released 790 weapons in January and February 2019 targeting both the Taliban and terrorist groups, such as ISIS-K, as shown in Figure 2. This number of weapons releases is similar to the same period last year but much higher than before the announcement of the South Asia strategy. However, as explained in the Lead IG report for the second quarter of FY 2018, the methodology that U.S. Air Forces Central Command uses to tally weapons released does not count all munitions, which range from .50 caliber bullets to bombs and missiles, on a one-to-one basis, so reported totals from month to month are not directly comparable.
Coping with a Token Afghan Air Force: Rising Number of U.S. Air Strikes in 2018

U.S. Air Forces Central Command reported that U.S. aircraft released 2,149 weapons during the quarter. As shown in Figure 5, the number of weapons releases in the July to December period was more than 50 percent higher than the number of weapons releases in the first half of the year. However, the methodology that U.S. Air Forces Central Command uses to tally weapons released does not count all munitions, which range from .50 caliber bullets to bombs and missiles, on a one-to-one basis, so reported totals from month to month are not directly comparable.

Source: Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM'S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, p. 21.
Allies Remain Critical: NATO-Resolute Support -- Troop Contributions and International Aid
The Role of Allied Countries

The metrics in this section summarize the level of Allied military forces officially assigned to the NATO mission in Afghanistan in the spring of 2019, and major allied aid contributions from 2002 to that date. They also understate the allied contribution because they do not include substantial additional national aid to civil and military personnel and programs.

- Official NATO casualty data are not available on the sacrifices allied forces made in terms of killed and wounded, but allied forces did suffer substantial casualties.

- The personnel data show that allied military personnel peaked in early 2011 at a nominal level of 41,982 or 32% of the total. The reported U.S total was 90,000, but there were well over 10,000 U.S. military personnel not assigned to ISAF.

- By April 2019, there were only 17,034 U.S. and allied military personnel in the NATO force. U.S. assigned personnel had dropped to only 8,475 – roughly 60-70% of the actual U.S. total of permanently assigned personnel in country. Allied personnel, however, had risen to 50% of the NATO total.

- A metric drawn from a SIGAR report shows that allies donated some $14.4 billion in aid to international aid efforts. Additional purely national allied aid that was spent in allied areas of responsibility in Afghanistan or in purely national or NGO programs may have approached this total.

The lack of proper official U.S. recognition of these allied and strategic partner efforts, and adequate consultation on changes in strategy and force levels in Afghanistan, remains a serious problem in U.S strategic communications.
Following the completion of the mission of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the end of 2014, a new, follow-on, NATO-led mission called Resolute Support was launched on 1 January 2015 to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions. At the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, Allied leaders decided to extend the presence of RSM beyond 2016. Two years later, at the Brussels Summit in July 2018, they committed to sustaining the mission until conditions indicate a change is appropriate. At a meeting of defense ministers in November 2017, RSM troop-contributing nations confirmed that the number of troops deployed would increase from around 13,000 to around 16,000 troops.

Over 16,000 personnel from 39 NATO member states and partner countries are deployed in support of the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). At the 2018 Brussels Summit, NATO welcomed two new troop-contributing nations, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, which are currently finalizing the details of their offers to contribute. RSM operates with one central hub (in Kabul/Bagram) and four spokes in Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Laghman. It focuses primarily on training, advice and assistance activities at the security-related ministries, in the country’s institutions and among the senior ranks of the army and police. The Resolute Support Mission works closely with different elements of the Afghan army, police and air force.

Key functions include:

- Supporting planning, programming and budgeting;
- Assuring transparency, accountability and oversight;
- Supporting the adherence to the principles of rule of law and good governance;
- Supporting the establishment and sustainment of such processes as force generation, recruiting, training, managing and development of personnel.

NATO Peak International Security Assistance Force in January 2011

Major International Aid: 2002 to January 20, 2019

CUMULATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ARTF, LOTFA, AND NATO ANA TRUST FUND BY 10 LARGEST DONORS ($ MILLIONS)

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 58, 68.
Still Faltering
Afghan Force Development
The metrics for Afghan security forces shown in this section reflect a steady increase in the classification of virtually every area of force effectiveness. There now is virtually no official open source reporting beyond uncertain data on personnel levels by service and on the fluctuations in these levels.

Such data have little value and are often more misleading than useful. Military history has shown for thousands of years that such total “manning” levels are little more than meaningless when they cannot be related to the effectiveness of key units. No such data are available on the order of battle, the relative size and capability of Afghan government and threat forces, relative casualty levels, and ANSF ability to meet key warfighting needs.

The previous funding metrics show there were long delays in properly funding the Afghan force development effort, and that the sudden peak in funding between 2009 and 2011 was followed by an equally precipitous fall. The metrics in this section show that even greater problems existed in creating stable force expansion plans, and then in providing the necessary training effort and capacity.

The limited personnel numbers that are still provided are also suspect in many ways because it is not clear how many personnel are really active and in place, how many can actually be committed to combat, and how corrupt various aspects of given forces still are. There also is no way to tie manning levels to loyalty in a country where unemployment is a major crisis, and few other jobs are available.

These problems are further compounded by the fact that media reporting indicates that the most effective ANA and ANP units tend to be grossly overburdened with combat assignments, are the most dependent on U.S. airpower, and still need direct combat support from U.S. special forces, other advisors, and intelligence. The failure to report the dependence of the best Afghan units on U.S. support indirectly implies far more capability in both these units and the overall mass of Afghan land forces than is actually the case.

Similarly, the data on the development of the Afghan Air Force and increases in Special Security Forces do warn about the slow pace of their development, but do not warn that even if all the Air Forces current aircraft were fully combat ready, they could not approach the current level of airpower support that Afghan forces now get – and depend upon – from US and coalition airpower.

The same is true of increases in the Special Security Forces which cannot eliminate the need for Afghan land force dependence on U.S. combat forces – a dependence that U.S. does not describe in open source material, but is reflected in a wide range of media reporting.

Coupled to the problems in ANP and ALP forces described in SIGAR Quarterly Reports, and summarized in the metrics that follow, the current levels of classification make it virtually impossible to determine the effectiveness of – and credible future timelines in – the U.S. and Resolute Support effort to improve Afghan forces.
Since the previous High-Risk List in January 2017, SIGAR has published numerous oversight products on Afghanistan’s security institutions and has reported new developments in its quarterly reports to Congress. Of those, SIGAR’s most comprehensive effort is the Lessons Learned Program report, Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan. That 2017 SIGAR product presented key findings, including that the U.S. government was not properly prepared from the outset to help build an Afghan army and police force capable of protecting Afghanistan from internal and external threats and preventing the country from becoming a terrorist safe haven.17

SIGAR found that the U.S. government lacked a comprehensive approach to security-sector assistance and a coordinating body to successfully implement whole-of-government programs that were necessary to develop a capable and self-sustaining ANDSF.18

The 2019 High-Risk List reported that according to DOD, RS, and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A), the ANDSF currently face critical capability gaps in key areas that hinder the force’s effectiveness and readiness and may continue to do so in the future, including:

Force manning: recruiting, retention, and attrition: As of October 31, 2018, the Afghan National Army (ANA) was 36,621 personnel below its authorized strength of 227,374, and the Afghan National Police (ANP) was 6,686 personnel below its authorized strength of 124,628.19

With insufficient personnel, the ANDSF are less able to provide security to the Afghan population, are increasingly vulnerable to enemy attacks, and are at risk of incurring higher casualties. These issues make the force less sustainable in the long term and less capable of conducting its mission successfully.

Personnel accountability and pay systems: The ANDSF also struggles to accurately pay and account for its personnel. Since the beginning of the RS mission in January 2015, U.S. and Coalition personnel had scant presence at the lower tactical levels of the ANDSF, forcing the mission to rely on unverifiable Afghan personnel reporting.20 Over the past two years, RS advisors have worked to reduce their reliance on manual Afghan personnel reporting by implementing the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPs), in which ANDSF personnel are biometrically enrolled. The system is designed to integrate personnel data with compensation and payroll data to process authorizations, record unit-level time and attendance data, and calculate payroll amounts, among other uses.21 According to USFOR-A, as of December 2018, the APPS system has been delivered to and is fully capable for use by both the ANA and the ANP, but only 84% of ANA personnel (including civilians) and 60% of ANP personnel were enrolled into the system, matched to authorized positions, and met the minimum data-input

Logistics and maintenance: The Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) face key logistics and maintenance challenges, one of which is the implementation and maintenance of their electronic equipment-inventory and repair-status system, Core Inventory Management System (CoreIMS). According to DOD in December 2018, overall, MOD and MOI logisticians require persistent RS advisor attention, and their problems conducting national logistics planning remain “a vulnerability to the mission.”22

Institutional training: DOD reported in December 2018 that institutional and professional training for ANDSF personnel, coordinated at the national and regional levels (above corps or zone levels), are at a relatively nascent phase. DOD reports that despite RS advisory efforts, strong training institutions have not emerged, particularly within MOI, which controls the national police.23

Persistent terrorist threat from Islamic State: Although U.S. officials have consistently asserted that Islamic State Khorasan, the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, has been degraded on multiple fronts, the group poses a greater security threat to the Afghan people and security forces than it did in 2016.24 As the terrorist group has not been defeated, is not a party to peace negotiations, and continues to execute high-casualty attacks in major Afghan population centers, it remains potent.

Stalemate control of districts, population, and territory: The stalemate battlefield situation between the ANDSF and the Taliban is another risk, as the intensity of fighting has increased and both sides have incurred more casualties as they seek greater leverage at the negotiating table.25 If negotiators fail to secure a peace agreement, the ANDSF will be hard pressed to increase its control over Afghanistan’s population, districts, and territory. From November 2016 through October 2018, Afghan government control and influence over its districts ranged between 54% and 60%. Over the same period, the Afghan government controlled or influenced between 64% and 66% of the population.26

These issues indicate the importance of considering questions regarding the U.S. role in training, advising, and assisting the ANDSF following a peace agreement; preserving the capability gains of the Afghan Air Force and special forces; assisting the ANDSF in adapting to peacetime security functions and sustaining its systems and equipment; and integrating former Taliban fighters into the national security forces.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 7-9.
Classifying Most Key Reporting on the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

ANSF Data Classified or Not Publicly Releasable
USFOR-A newly classified the following data this quarter:
- A narrative assessment about Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) misuse by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI)

USFOR-A continued to classify or restrict from public release, in accordance with classification guidelines or other restrictions placed by the Afghan government, the following data (mostly since October 2017):
- ANSF casualties, by force element and total
- Corps- and zone-level Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) authorized and assigned strength by component
- Performance assessments for the ANA, ANP, MOD, and MOI
- Information about the operational readiness of ANA and ANP equipment
- Special Mission Wing (SMW) information, including the number and type of airframes in the SMW inventory, the number of pilots and aircrew, and the operational readiness (and associated benchmarks) of SMW airframes
- Reporting on anticorruption efforts by the MOI (unclassified but not publicly releasable)
- Reporting on the status of the ANSF’s progress on security-related benchmarks of the Afghanistan Compact (unclassified but not publicly releasable)

ANSF Combat Element Performance - Most Data Classified
USFOR-A continued to classify most assessments of ANSF performance. SIGAR’s questions about ANSF performance can be found in Appendix E of this report. Detailed ANSF performance assessments are reported in the classified annex for this report.

This quarter, USFOR-A provided a general overview on ANSF performance. According to USFOR-A, senior ANSF leaders are continuing to demonstrate progress in organizational management, decision-making, and operational planning and execution. The Afghan government has been striving to employ quality leaders and continues to successfully identify and replace ANSF leaders found guilty of corruption.¹⁰⁷

USFOR-A continued to report that ANA corps receive the preponderance of Coalition train, advise, and assist (TAA) support, and that as a result, their capabilities continue to advance more rapidly than the ANP’s. USFOR-A said the ANA’s improvements are evident in their ability to synchronize combat enablers (e.g., air and artillery support) and to conduct coordinated operational planning with adjacent corps.¹⁰⁸

USFOR-A also reported this quarter that the Afghan government has dissolved the ANP’s zone system, which has challenged Coalition advisors, who must now provide TAA support to multiple provincial police headquarters (PHQs) rather than to a single zone. Now instead of eight regional ANP zones, the 34 PHQs serve as the command structure for ANP throughout the country.¹⁰⁹

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, p. 83 & 86.
But, Major US Aid for Afghan Forces Still Continues: FY2005-FY2020

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 57-59.
Many ANSF Problems Are Our Fault: Waiting Until 2008 to React to the Taliban

As of 7 May 2011

UNCLASSIFIED
Grossly Inadequate Trainers and Training Capacity Through Early 2011

Suitable ANSF Force Growth and Adequate Training Capacity Do Not Occur Until 2011


- November 2011: 171,600
- September 2010: 134,000
- November 2009: 94,958


Critical Shortfalls in ANSF Trainers Existed Before Decision to Create Effective ANSF Forces in 2010 and Continued Through 2012

Only 32% of Trainers Actually in Place on September 1, 2010

Authorized  In Place  Pledged  Shortage
2,796  896  980  920

Following the September 23, 2010 NATO Force Generation Conference, in-place trainers and pledges increased by 18 percent and 34 percent, respectively, which decreased the remaining shortfall of trainers by 35 percent. The total requirement in CJSOR v10 is 2,796, a net growth of 471 personnel.

To address the NATO CJSOR v10 shortfall temporarily, the United States is providing an additional 868 personnel with skills not found in the deployed units. For the fielded ANSF Force, the current shortfall is 16 Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) and 139 Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (POMLTs). In 2011, the shortfalls will increase with the departure of the Canadian brigade in Kandahar and the additional growth of the ANSF. By 2011, the shortfall is projected to be 41 OMLTs and 243 POMLTs.

Afghan Force Strength Still Comes at the Expense of Force Quality At the End of March 2019

The total ANDSF force strength is an indicator of whether the ANA and ANP are able to recruit and retain personnel at levels that meet operational needs. USFOR-A reported that the ANA had 190,423 soldiers at the end of January 2019, and the ANP had 116,384 personnel at the end of December 2018.140 This represents a slight decline from the 308,693 personnel reported as of the end of October 2018 and is approximately 12 percent lower than the maximum authorized force strength of 352,000.

NSOCC-A reported that the Afghan Local Police (ALP) had approximately 28,000 personnel on hand and present for duty. The ALP was created a decade ago as a bilateral initiative of the U.S. and Afghan governments. Therefore, it is not included as part of the 352,000 authorized ANDSF force strength that international donors have agreed to fund.

Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) reported that 2,953 soldiers completed their basic training during the quarter (approximately 70 percent of the total capacity of 4,200 students) of which the actual graduation rate was 99 percent. By comparison, the enrollment rate for the four courses that finished last quarter was 53 percent, of which 86 percent graduated.

Few graduates of basic training go on to complete advanced training for a specialized military role. Utilization rates (percentage of available seats that are filled) at the ANA’s 12 branch schools, where advanced training takes place, were below 50 percent for many specialties during the quarter. However, the MoD Chief of General Staff issued contradictory guidance in November 2017 that all basic training graduates be immediately assigned to their units, which then decide whether or not the soldier should attend advanced training. Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) told the DoD OIG that there are many reasons for low utilization rates at the branch schools. One reason is that corps commanders, facing personnel shortfalls request immediate assignment of new soldiers to their units. CSTC-A said that these training deficiencies “result in under-trained soldiers who are not trained in necessary military occupational specialty skills essential to combat units. This in turn compounds units’ inability to sustain continuous operations and achieve mission success.

CSTC-A said that these training deficiencies “result in under-trained soldiers who are not trained in necessary military occupational specialty skills essential to combat units. This in turn compounds units’ inability to sustain continuous operations and achieve mission success.

In contrast, the DoD stated that the MoD is generally on pace to meet the Afghan government’s goal of doubling the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) to more than 33,000 personnel by 2020. To keep pace with growing training requirements, the ANA Special Operations Command School of Excellence, which provides all training for ASSF personnel, added two new courses and reinstated two others. One element of the expanded training program is the Cobra Strike Maneuver Course, which includes dismounted infantry collective training, vehicle commander training, additional leadership training, and other skills.

Resolute Support noted weaknesses in the maintenance and logistical support provided to ASSF units. This has been exacerbated by persistent deployment of ASSF units for long periods without returning for refit and resupply. Because of misuse and poor support, many ASSF units operate with broken or damaged equipment, and poor readiness.

Seeking New ANSF Leadership

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<td>293 Generals 1,619 Colonels</td>
<td>Wave 1</td>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td>247 Generals 1,335 Colonels</td>
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*Some waivers pending approval

**New Leadership** The increase in ANA offensive military pressure on the enemy throughout winter was a result of a culture shift within the force driven by the new leadership, including replacing five of six Corps commanders, the Chief of General Staff (CoGS), and the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior. Parliament subsequently confirmed the appointments of Minister of Defense Bahrami and Minister of Interior Barmak, empowering both leaders to pursue much-needed reform. For example, soon after his confirmation, Minister Barmak replaced seven Provincial Chiefs of Police (in Farah, Sar-e Pul, Herat, Takhar, Samangan, Khost, and Kabul) and all 18 Kabul District Chiefs of Police. Selection for replacements included a merit-based screening and board process culminating with Presidential approval.

**Inherent Law** A generational change in leadership began within the MoD in January 2018 with the first wave of Inherent Law retirements (including 656 colonels and generals)—and subsequent merit-based promotions—and continued this reporting period when the MoD retired 497 colonels and 61 generals under the second wave of Inherent Law. Similar changes in MoI leadership began this reporting period when the first wave of MoI Inherent Law retired 738 colonels and 142 generals. This generational change of leadership will open senior leadership positions for the next generation of ANDSF leaders selected based on merit rather than patronage. The anticipated rapid turnover of personnel underscores the importance of ministerial commitment to facilitate an orderly transition and oversee the education and training of new leadership.

**Unity of Effort/Unity of Command**

The FY17-18 MoD Optimization program sought to correct command and control shortcoming by decreasing the span of control of some organizations and by increasing the number of civilian positions at the ministerial level. Reducing the top-heavy structure, civilianizing the workforce, and enabling a progressive generation of leaders are all among the optimization goals. These efforts led to more than 900 personnel reductions, which allowed for ASDF and AAF growth. In 2017, the Afghan Border Police transferred to MoD and became the Afghan Border Force (ABF).

**Counter-Corruption**

The Afghan government made tangible progress on important anti-corruption reforms, but more work remains. President Ghani unveiled the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) in September 2017. Corruption remains the top strategic threat to the legitimacy and success of the Afghan government. President Ghani continues to demonstrate his commitment to reform in this critical area by enforcing the investigation and prosecution of corrupt officials through the concerted efforts of the Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF), the Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC), and the Afghan Attorney General’s office.

Train and Assist Forward or Fail:  
2nd SFAB Deploys to Afghanistan as a Leaner Force

The 2nd Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) arrived in Afghanistan during the quarter as part of the Resolute Support mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan security forces. The SFAB, established in 2018, is a brigade of experienced Soldiers with specialized security force assistance capabilities. The Department of the Army told the DoD OIG that the 2nd SFAB has 806 assigned Soldiers, of whom 419 deployed during the quarter. The remaining soldiers arrived by April 15, 2019. The 2nd SFAB is scheduled to complete its mission in Afghanistan in fall 2019.

The 2nd SFAB has three key differences when compared to its predecessor, the 1st SFAB, which departed from Afghanistan in fall 2018. First, USFOR-A reduced the 2nd SFAB to about 60 percent of its deployable strength. The 2nd SFAB includes two infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron, an artillery battery, an engineer battalion, and support battalion. There are 648 trained advisors—54 advisor teams, each comprising 12 Soldiers—spread across the brigade. The 2nd SFAB does not have its own force protection personnel (often referred to as “guardian angels”). Instead, the U.S. Army in theater supplies these forces, at a level determined by the combatant command.

Second, the 2nd SFAB will focus on advising the ANDSF at the corps level, rather than the battalion level, although some advisors will be available to work with the lower-level ANDSF units. By comparison, the 1st SFAB provided persistent advising at the brigade and battalion levels. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that this realignment occurred, in part, due to the SFAB’s smaller size. In addition, the 2nd SFAB’s support battalion will be available to advise ANDSF logistics units, such as the Central Supply Depot and the National Transportation Brigade, on a “point of need” basis.

Third, while the 2nd SFAB deployed to all Train, Advise, and Assist Commands (TAACs) in Afghanistan, the ANA brigades that it advises may differ from the 1st SFAB deployment. The only location where 2nd SFAB personnel are not assigned is Task Force-Southwest, which covers Helmand and Nimroz provinces.

After the 1st SFAB departed from Afghanistan in fall 2018, USFOR-A continued advising operations “at a reduced scale,” using forces that were already in theater. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that these advisors provided periodic advising at the brigade and battalion levels, and had fewer key leader engagements. Some non-SFAB advisors, however, remained assigned to specific ANA brigades on a persistent basis. General Robert Abrams, Commander of U.S. Army Forces Command, said that the Army preferred to have a gap during the quieter winter season than having an immediate nine-month rotation that would have to change over during the 2019 summer fighting season. Some members of the 1st SFAB supported the 2nd SFAB during their training and their transition period in-theater.

The Department of the Army told the DoD OIG that it intends to establish a total of six SFABs by 2022. In addition to its deployment in support of OFS, a smaller unit (139 personnel) from the 2nd SFAB will also advise Iraqi security forces as part of the Operation Inherent Resolve mission. The Department of the Army allocated approximately $9 million of OCO funds to support 1st SFAB transportation, maintenance, unit support, and some training. The 2nd SFAB has been obligated approximately $8.8 million in OCO funds.
Nearly Half the Force is Not Designed to Fight: Afghan Military vs. Police Forces: 2019

According to DOD, the ANA’s total authorized (goal) end strength as of December 2018 was 227,374.\textsuperscript{169} USFOR-A reported that the assigned (actual) strength of the ANA as of January 31, 2019, (not including civilians) was 190,423 personnel, a decrease of 3,951 personnel since last quarter. This quarter’s ANA strength represents a 5,851-person increase from the same period in 2017, but this figure is skewed due to the transfer of 18,050 personnel from the Afghan Border Police (formerly under MOI) to MOD. When adjusting for that transfer, the ANA actually lost 13,051 personnel compared to the same period in 2017.\textsuperscript{170} CSTC-A always offers the caveat that ANDSF strength numbers are Afghan-reported and that RS cannot validate the data for accuracy.\textsuperscript{181}

The ANA’s 190,423 personnel consisted of 83,702 soldiers, 72,627 noncommissioned officers, and 34,094 officers. The ANA’s noncommissioned officer and officer ranks experienced attrition since last quarter (losing 429 and 69 personnel, respectively), but the number of soldiers increased by 168.\textsuperscript{171} This quarter’s assigned strength puts the ANA at 83.7% or 36,051 personnel short, of its goal strength, a slight decrease since last quarter.\textsuperscript{172}

According to CSTC-A, ANA monthly attrition rates averaged approximately 2.2% over the quarter, a slight improvement from the 2.9% recorded over the previous quarter. This percentage accounts for attrition alone, not the total decrease in force strength listed on the previous page, as that percentage change includes any gains made from recruitment occurring over the quarter. CSTC-A reported that attrition figures are calculated by taking an average of monthly ANA attrition rates over the last three months. CSTC-A noted this figure was calculated from Afghan-owned and -reported data provided by the MOD and that CSTC-A cannot independently verify its accuracy.\textsuperscript{173}

According to DOD, the ANP’s total authorized (goal) end strength in December 2018 was 124,626.\textsuperscript{129} The assigned (actual) strength of the ANP, as of December 21, 2018, was 116,384 personnel. This figure represents a decrease of 1,555 personnel since last quarter, and a 12,772-person decrease compared to the same period in 2018. The latter decrease was mostly due to the transfer of 19,050 Afghan Border Police (formerly MOI) personnel to MOD. When adjusting for that transfer, the ANP actually gained 6,178 personnel compared to last year. CSTC-A always offers the caveat that ANDSF strength numbers are Afghan-reported and that RS cannot validate the data for accuracy.\textsuperscript{129} This quarter’s assigned strength puts the ANP at 93.4% (or 8,324 personnel below) of its authorized strength.\textsuperscript{129}

According to CSTC-A, ANP attrition rates this quarter averaged approximately 2.2%, the same average reported last quarter. This percentage accounts for attrition alone, not the total decrease in force strength above as that percentage change would include any gains made from recruitment occurring over the quarter. CSTC-A reported that attrition figures are calculated by taking an average of monthly ANP attrition rates over the last three months. CSTC-A noted this figure was calculated from Afghan-owned and -reported data provided by the MOI.\textsuperscript{129}
As part of the ANDSF Roadmap, the ANASOC division expanded from a division of 11,300 personnel to a corps with four brigades and a National Mission Brigade, totaling 22,994 personnel.
Afghan Police Forces do Shrink Relative to Military Forces: 2015-2018

During the quarter, the ANA continued to recruit and train soldiers to serve in the ANA Territorial Force (ANA-TF), which are locally-recruited forces that seek to “hold” territory while conventional ANA units focus on tactical offensive operations. During the current phase of ANA-TF growth, scheduled to finish in May 2019, the Afghan government plans to establish 55 ANA-TF. The Afghan government plans to establish an additional 50 ANA-TF companies in second phase. By 2020, it intends to have 12,705 ANA-TF soldiers, or 105 ANA-TF companies.

In December 2018, USFOR-A reported that there were 16 fully-trained ANA-TF companies, and an additional 22 companies in training.

This quarter, USFOR-A reported that 14 ANA-TF companies are currently in training and 6 more are planned to enter training, but the number of operational companies was classified.

Since the ANA-TF was first announced in 2017, the DoD OIG has asked USFOR-A how the new Territorial Force differs from the ALP, the 28,000-strong force of locally-recruited units that provide security in Afghanistan’s smaller villages and towns.

Independent researchers have reported that since it was established in 2010, the ALP has provided security in some areas, but exacerbated conflict in other areas, because the ALP “prey upon the people they as a means for patronage, discrimination, and to settle personal disputes. are supposed to guard.” In addition, ALP units were often co-opted by local powerbrokers.

USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that President Ghani established the ANA-TF to move away from the use of private militias and similar groups to address local security challenges. The administration, resourcing, recruiting, training, and deployment of the ANA-TF are all executed by the MoD, which USFOR-A said should provide the ANDSF greater control and accountability of the new force and limit the role of corrupt local actors. While the structure of the ANA-TF may provide the MoD more control over the local forces, it remains unclear if increased MoD oversight will prevent regional and company-level staff from coming under the influence by local powerbrokers. In addition, the ANA-TF has had recruiting challenges, discussed in the Lead IG quarterly report for the fourth quarter of FY 2018, which were caused, in part, by local powerbrokers’ reluctance to participate in the ANA-TF initiative.

SIGAR’s quarterly reports track ANP reconstruction metrics, some of which appear to show that the ANP has sustained itself or even improved in important areas such as organizational structure, the number of security incidents involving the ANP, personnel strength, and personnel accountability since SIGAR’s last High-Risk List was published in January 2017. Challenges, of course, remain in all of these areas.

In late 2017 and early 2018, the ANP’s Afghan Border Patrol (ABP) and Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) were reassigned from the MOI to the MOD. Technically, the ANCOP had been the ANP’s element responsible for high-risk districts. The ABP was meant to be responsible for securing ports of entry along international borders and at airports. But, ANCOP and ABP were often misused as military forces because no other security element had the ability to handle certain missions. For example, on one day in 2010 in Kandahar Province, the ABP attacked and secured key Taliban-controlled villages in Arghandab District. Arghandab is a lush agricultural district more than 60 miles from the Pakistan border. This mission was not related to airport or border security. The ABP was used for fighting in a high-threat district, very far from the border, because Kandahar authorities believed the ABP would succeed where the ANA and other forces had not. In this context, the intent of transferring ANCOP and ABP to the MOD was to move police forces that were focused more on military operations to the MOD, leaving MOI to deal with civil policing.75

Security incidents involving the ANP are also decreasing. According to data compiled by the State Department-sponsored Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), from January 1, 2017, through January 31, 2019, the number of security incidents involving the ANP has been trending downward, despite significant increases during the summers of 2017 and 2018. For example, in January 2017, 152 security incidents involving the ANP were recorded; in contrast, only 72 such incidents were recorded in January 2018 and 41 in January 2019. The vast majority of ACLED-recorded incidents pertaining to the ANP are of military-style armed conflict.76 The exact reasons why ANP armed conflict is declining is unclear, but a decline in police fighting, under any circumstances, is an important step towards a final cessation in hostilities. Further, this downward trend in ANP security incidents has likely helped the ANP sustain its force strength numbers.

ANP strength has improved after adjusting for the transfers of 30,689 ANCOP and ABP personnel from the MOI to MOD, the ANP gained 2,291 personnel since 2017 (ANP assigned strength has declined by 28,398 personnel as of October 31, 2018, due largely to ANCOP and ABP transfers during 2018, in comparison to October 2017). This puts the ANP assigned strength at 94.6% of its authorized strength of 124,626 personnel. The ANP is thereby at nearly full strength, and the January 2019 assigned-to-authorized strength ratio is consistent with the 94% assigned-to-authorized strength reported in January 2017.77

Additionally, since SIGAR published its 2017 High-Risk List, improvements have been made in accounting systems that should verify if these strength numbers are accurate.
Based on its work and analysis, SIGAR has found there is no comprehensive strategy for how the United States and Coalition partners will align its nationwide police advising mission to support Afghan rule of law and civil policing. Throughout the reconstruction effort, the United States has placed more emphasis on reconstructing the Afghan National Army (ANA) than the Afghan National Police (ANP). For years, the ANP were used to provide paramilitary support to ANA counterinsurgency rather than performing core police functions.

This presents a problem and a serious risk: Following a political settlement, Afghan police, rather than the army, are likely to be the element responsible for everyday security and will serve as a direct link between the Afghan government’s authority and the Afghan people. The U.S. Department of Justice has a program to train foreign police forces—the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program—but that program has no independent funding or operational authority and must fully rely on State or DOD. NATO itself does not have a police advising capability, although efforts are underway to create a capability to deploy professional police advisors in future NATO operations. The concept is pending review and approval.

The need to revise the role and raise the normal policing capabilities of the ANP raises questions about the U.S. strategy going forward with allies and the Afghan government to improve civil policing, provide funding, potentially integrate former Taliban fighters into the force, promote observance of the rule of law, and counter the impacts of corruption and narcotics trafficking.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, p. 9.
In December, 25 AAF aircraft, mostly Mi-17 helicopters, were not usable. The AAF had 9 A-29 light attack aircraft based in the United States for pilot training, in addition to 12 usable A-29s in Afghanistan. However, the AAF has not been able to train enough pilots to keep pace with its rapidly growing fleet. The UH-60 program, for example, has not filled all of its pilot classes due to attrition and lack of candidates, USFOR-A said. The DoD said that because the initial fielding of the UH-60s occurred nearly two years earlier than initially planned, the throughput of pilot candidates initially lagged the pace of aircraft fielding. In addition, some UH-60 pilots who were in the United States for training went AWOL. The DoD has ended U.S.-based training for rotary wing pilots and is conducting it in other locations. Training of MD-530 pilots is also unable to keep pace with projected expansion due to low numbers of pilot candidates. The A-29 pilot training program, conducted at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, is training a sufficient number of pilots, USFOR-A said. Continued pilot production will depend on full program resourcing as it transfers to Afghanistan by
The Afghan Air Force fleet continued to grow, in accordance with the AAF Modernization Plan.1Train Advise and Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air) reported that the United States delivered 8 MD-530 helicopters, 6 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, and the first 5 AC-208 light attack aircraft to the AAF in January and February 2019.166 The AC-2018 is a variant of the C-208 transport aircraft that is reconfigured for attack missions and can be flown by C-208 pilots (with some additional training. With the new aircraft that arrived during the quarter, the AAF had 170 aircraft as of February 2019, compared to 148 in December 2018. Of the 170 aircraft in the AAF inventory, 143 were “useable, “which means they were either mission capable or undergoing maintenance.168 (See Figure 5) The 27 AAF aircraft that were not useable were undergoing depot/overhaul maintenance or were damaged beyond repair in accidents. Two MD-530 helicopters were declared total losses due to accidents this quarter.

In late 2018, the DoD decided to stop sending Afghan UH-60 Black Hawk and AC-208 pilots to training in the United States. AC-208 students returned to finish their training in Afghanistan. UH-60 students currently in U.S.-based training and other AAF pilots enrolled in English language courses at the Defense Language Institute will remain in the United States until they complete their courses.170 Training of A-29 pilots will continue at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia until the end of 2019 and then transition to This shift is designed to address high rates of Afghan pilot candidates who have gone absent without official leave during their training in the United States.172 For example, TAAC-Air reported that 40 percent of AC-208 pilot candidates deserted during U.S.-based training. Initial training for UH-60 pilots will now take place in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the United Arab Emirates, while training of AC-208 pilots will take place in Afghanistan.
An Uncertain Afghan Air Force – SIGAR Reporting

Note the Crisis in Training for for Fixed Wing Attack Aircraft

As seen in Table 3.12, the AAF’s current in-country inventory, as of February 2019, includes 160 aircraft (183 of which are operational). Train, Advise, Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air) reported this quarter that the AAF received six more MD-530s and 10 UH-60s in Afghanistan. Additionally, the AAF received its first five AC-208 light attack aircraft this quarter. Five more AC-208s are scheduled to arrive in Afghanistan by late May 2019, and two MD-530s, six UH-60s, and three A-29s are scheduled to arrive by September. Two MD-530s were lost this quarter: one was hit by surface-to-air fire near Ghazni City on February 7 and destroyed in place; another experienced engine failure after a hard landing in Zabul Province on February 10. The latter aircraft is expected to be recovered, but TAAC-South has so far had higher-priority missions.

TAAC-Air reported that the AAF flew 14,308 sorties from December 1, 2018, through March 31, 2019. A sortie is defined as one takeoff and one landing. There were an average of 3,860 sorties per month this quarter, with the most sorties (4,027) flown in March 2019. This is a 10% increase from the 3,264 average sorties per month reported last quarter (August 1–November 30, 2018). As in previous quarters, the Mi-17 flew the greatest number of sorties (6,182), followed by the UH-60 (3,270).

- **UH-60**: The UH-60 program is currently making a new effort to maximize the recruitment and training of pilots and aircrew utilizing a third-country location. The new effort will push all aircraft-qualification training through a third-country and mission-qualification training (which includes combat skills training) will take place in Kandahar. This adjusted parallel effort will allow for qualified aircrew to keep pace with aircraft deliveries in Afghanistan. TAAC-Air is also using smaller class sizes in more frequent intervals to minimize the delay time for students between training programs. Some Mi-17 aircrew will be converted to UH-60 aircrew as the Mi-17 mission draws to a close for the AAF. There remains a continued emphasis on night-vision goggle training and employment for the UH-60 platform.

- **AC-208 and C-208**: The AC-208 pilot training classes that were underway in the United States were disbanded due to the number of trainees who were going absent without leave (AWOL). Those students that did not go AWOL were pulled back to Afghanistan to complete their training; as a result, only one class graduated from the U.S.-based program. The second and third classes will continue and finish their training in Afghanistan. TAAC-Air has a plan to continue the student training and is developing a contract solution to support the effort to train the initial group of AC-208 aircrew. TAAC-Air said the C-208 trainees continue to progress to a self-sustaining level of proficiency.

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<th>AFGHAN AVIATION SUMMARY AS OF FEBRUARY 2019</th>
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<td>Aircraft</td>
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<td>AC-208</td>
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Note: Only qualified pilots and aircrew are listed in this table, except for AC-208 personnel who will be fully qualified in May 2019. “Other Aircrew” includes loadmasters, flight engineers, and special mission operators and vary by aircraft. These figures do not include the aircraft or personnel for the Special Mission Wing which are classified. “Quarter Change” refers to the change in usable aircraft, only AC-208s in this category because the air platform is new this quarter to the AAF’s inventory.

- **A-29**: The A-29 program is still building its pilot force at Moody Air Force Base in the United States. The U.S.-based program will end in late 2020 and the A-29 training efforts will transition to Afghanistan in order to develop the remaining A-29 force. After the required force is built, A-29 pilot training in Afghanistan will still be needed to create new pilots as older pilots leave due to promotions and retirements. The Afghanistan portion of the program will begin with a very small footprint in mid-2019 and is expected to be located in Mazar-e Sharif. TAAC-Air is exploring options to streamline the training timeline for pilots from entry level pilot training to mission qualified training. Night training also continues to be a training priority for this platform.

- **MD-530**: TAAC-Air said it continues to find efficient solutions for the MD-530 training pipeline to ensure that students delivered to the squadron are trained to the best standard possible. Following issues raised last quarter, they are currently exploring options to expand the pilot training pipeline, including options to give contractors that provide training support more flexibility to train students. This would reduce the strain on the already limited Afghan trainer force. As with the UH-60 platform, TAAC-Air is also considering a third-country option to expand and streamline the pilot and aircrew training pipeline for the MD-530.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 96-97.
Military Balance and Size of Threats Show Little or No Progress
The American military says the Afghan government effectively “controls or influences” 56 percent of the country. But that assessment relies on statistical sleight of hand. In many districts, the Afghan government controls only the district headquarters and military barracks, while the Taliban control the rest.

On paper, Afghan security forces outnumber the Taliban by 10 to 1, or even more. But some Afghan officials estimate that a third of their soldiers and police officers are “ghosts” who have left or deserted without being removed from payrolls. Many others are poorly trained and unqualified.

The Afghan government says it killed 13,600 insurgents and arrested 2,000 more last year — nearly half the estimated 25,000 to 35,000 Taliban fighters an official United States report said were active in the country in 2017. But in January, United States officials said insurgents numbered at least 60,000, and Afghan officials recently estimated the Taliban’s strength at more than 77,000.

Lead IG Estimate of Taliban Forces: May 2018

USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that it estimated the Taliban has 20,000 to 30,000 fighters in Afghanistan. An additional 10,000-25,000 fighters periodically join the Taliban for attacks, though only a portion of them are fighting at any given time. USFOR-A derived this estimate through multiple open source assessment, and told the DoD OIG that it made this assessment with “low confidence.”

Weakly defended Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) checkpoints continued to be frequent targets for Taliban attacks, often resulting in casualties on both sides. USFOR-A said that the high number of checkpoints as a major vulnerability for Afghan forces. Despite promises to reduce the number of checkpoints, the ANDSF still maintains hundreds of checkpoints on key transit routes throughout Afghanistan. Local leaders often insist that the checkpoints should remain. Checkpoints can bolster the appearance of security and are also a source of illegal income for local commanders, according to USFOR-A. Almost half of ANDSF casualties during the quarter occurred at checkpoints.

In addition to small-scale attacks on checkpoints, the Taliban mounted several larger attacks against the ANDSF during the quarter, including “high-profile attacks” that involved an improvised explosive device (IED). On January 21, the Taliban attacked a National Directorate of Security (NDS) training facility in Wardak province. Provincial officials said that at least 45 people were killed in the attack, and as many as 70 were wounded.43 On February 16, the Taliban attacked an Afghan Border Force base in Kandahar, killing all Almar district, killing several soldiers and attacking soldiers sent from Maimanah to reinforce them. On March 11, the Taliban attacked a rural outpost in Murghab district of neighboring Badghis province, killing 28 soldiers and reportedly capturing more than 150 others as they fled across the border to Turkmenistan.

USFOR-A assessed that the Taliban “likely lacks the capability to challenge government control” of Maimanah.52 However, as was the case with the Farah and Ghazni attacks, the high-profile attacks that the Taliban mounts against Maimanah and neighboring transit routes can have a positive impact on their efforts, as they provide valuable propaganda opportunities and undermine public confidence in Afghan security forces. Further information on the Taliban threat to regional capitals is provided in the classified appendix to this report.

Afghan media reported this quarter that a Taliban leader surrendered to the Afghan government in Jowzjan province. According to a USFOR-A estimate, 217 Taliban fighters have surrendered since 2018, a small number when compared to the Taliban’s overall estimated force size of up to 50,000 full-time and temporary fighters.60 Many other surrenders were reported by the media but were subsequently disproven.61 USFOR-A said that the reasons for these surrenders are varied, including military operations against the Taliban, lack of supplies, and financial incentives for the families of those who surrender. Overall, USFOR-A said, these surrenders have had “little to no effect on the ANDSF and USFOR-A operations.

The Taliban remains a serious challenge for the Afghan Government in almost every province. The Taliban still considers itself the rightful government of Afghanistan, and it remains a capable and confident insurgent force fighting for the withdrawal of foreign military forces from Afghanistan, establishment of sharia law, and rewriting of the Afghan constitution.

In 2019, negotiations between the US and the Taliban in Doha entered their highest level yet, building on momentum that began in late 2018. Underlying the negotiations is the unsettled state of Afghan politics, and prospects for a sustainable political settlement remain unclear.
Taliban Continues Attacks Despite Peace Talks

As U.S. and Taliban representatives met in Doha, Taliban fighters continued their campaign of violence during the quarter, conducting daily attacks against Afghan government personnel, security forces, and civilians. U.S. Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) told the DoD OIG that the Taliban uses these attacks to undermine public opinion of the Afghan government, exacerbate concerns about a potential withdrawal of international forces, and improve Taliban leverage in the negotiations. Taliban attacks continued through the 2018-2019 winter, following a trend in recent years to sustain attacks during the period between the group’s declared fighting seasons.

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The NDS attack was an example of the Taliban’s commonly observed multi-phase strategy to conduct attacks on government facilities. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG the Taliban stole an ANDSF High Mobility Multipurpose Vehicle (HMMWV or “Humvee”) and converted it into a vehicle-borne IED. On the morning of the attack, they detonated the explosive-laden vehicle near the NDS compound. Two armed fighters, posing as ANDSF soldiers, then attempted to enter the facility amidst the chaos caused by the explosion, and were later killed. The ANDSF later discovered and neutralized a second explosive-laden vehicle near the facility that was intended to support the initial attack.
U.S. Forces Target Taliban Leaders to Sustain Taliban Engagement in Peace Talks

Under General Miller’s command, the United States has been on targeting Taliban leadership. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that “consistent military pressure placed on Taliban senior leadership by Coalition and Afghan forces will potentially sustain Taliban intent to engage in talks.” USFOR-A said that this strategy also limits the willingness of Taliban leaders and their fighters to gather and plan attacks in some areas.

USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that these operations “demonstrated the ability to continue to pressure the enemy to keep them at the negotiation table.” USFOR-A reported that coalition and ANDSF operations “likely are causing the Taliban to shift tactics throughout the country.” In addition, NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) said that the Taliban has been using more defensive tactics, such as IED emplacement, during the quarter. However, it is unclear how much of a factor the strikes against Taliban leaders affect the Taliban’s decision to continue participation in the peace talks.

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USFOR-A routinely operates with the ANDSF as they target Taliban fighters and their leaders. An incident this quarter, however, highlighted the impact of miscommunication among allied forces. In March, U.S. forces conducting ground operations in Uruzgan province reportedly encountered friendly fire from Afghan soldiers at a checkpoint. U.S. forces, unable to ascertain that Afghan security forces were mistakenly shooting at them, could not de-escalate the confrontation and called in a self-defense airstrike. The strike killed five Afghan soldiers.
Taliban Threat to Provincial Capitals Remains

The Taliban remained active in areas on the periphery of several provincial capitals during the quarter. The Taliban did not stage a major attack against a provincial capital, as it did when it attacked the capitals of Farah and Ghazni provinces in 2018. However, USFOR-A’s assessment that the Taliban’s intent to conduct more attacks against provincial centers remains unchanged, in part because the Taliban benefits from the media attention the attacks generate.

Taliban activity in Afghanistan’s northwestern provinces during the quarter illustrates how the group exerts security pressure on provincial capitals. As noted in the previous Lead IG quarterly report, two districts in Faryab province experienced increasing Taliban control between July and October 2018, according to a Resolute Support assessment. During this quarter, the Taliban continued to attack ANDSF positions along the portion of Highway 1 that passes through Faryab and Badghis provinces. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that the Taliban maintains influence in much of Faryab and seeks to isolate Maimanah, the provincial capital. The ANDSF has been challenging the Taliban in Faryab, particularly in Qaisar, Dowlatabad, and Almar districts, but has suffered some widely-publicized defeats. On February 13, the Taliban attacked Almar district, killing several soldiers and attacking soldiers sent from Maimanah to reinforce them. On March 11, the Taliban attacked a rural outpost in Murghab district of neighboring Badghis province, killing 28 soldiers and reportedly capturing more than 150 others as they fled across the border to Turkmenistan.

USFOR-A assessed that the Taliban “likely lacks the capability to challenge government control” of Maimanah. However, as was the case with the Farah and Ghazni attacks, the high-profile attacks that the Taliban mounts against Maimanah and neighboring transit routes can have a positive impact on their efforts, as they provide valuable propaganda opportunities and undermine public confidence in Afghan security.
ISIS-K Makes Tactical Gains

ISIS-K claimed responsibility for multiple attacks in Afghanistan during the quarter, particularly in Kabul, Nangarhar, and Kunar provinces. Many ISIS-K attacks targeted the country’s Shia minority, but they also targeted Taliban fighters, the Afghan government, and civilian organizations. For example, on March 6, ISIS-K suicide bombers attacked a construction company in Nangarhar province, killing 16 civilians. The following day, ISIS-K launched a mortar attack on a Shia memorial service in Kabul attended by several political leaders, killing 11 people.

The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS-K “made tactical gains” against the Taliban and the ANDSF during the quarter. While the ANDSF conducted operations against ISIS-K in eastern Afghanistan, the group expanded the territory it holds in Kunar province. USFOR-A reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS-K is operating in Kabul, as well as Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. USFOR-A said that it is likely that ISIS-K operates in additional provinces of northeastern Afghanistan and that it is “highly likely” that smaller ISIS-K cells operate in Afghan government-controlled and Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan.

USFOR-A assessed that ISIS-K will likely focus future attacks on “targets of opportunity” and high profile attacks that garner media attention and increase public perception of the group’s capability.

U.S. forces continued unilateral counterterrorism operations against ISIS-K and also supported Afghan special forces as they targeted ISIS-K fighters. NSOCC-A told the DoD OIG that successful counterterrorism operations during the quarter included the detention of ISIS-K recruiters and financiers. NSOCC-A told the DoD OIG that as a result of these operations, ISIS-K has been changing its tactics to focus more on defensive operations and IED emplacement.
The presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, particularly al Qaeda and ISIS-K, remains a central focus of the OFS mission and has emerged as one of the key concerns in the ongoing peace negotiations. As the peace talks continue, the questions of whether the Taliban can help influence and deny sanctuary to these groups, and the extent to which an ongoing U.S. counterterrorism presence may be required, have become more prominent.

U.S. and Afghan officials have stated that there are at least 20 terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. USFOR-A provided the DoD OIG estimates of how many fighters these groups have in the region, shown in Table 2. Like its estimates of Taliban force size, it makes these assessments with low confidence. As discussed in the Lead IG quarterly report for October 1 to December 31, 2017, most of these groups do not have global aspirations or reach. For example, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, one of the larger groups, focuses on fighting the Pakistani government.

The DoD identified the Haqqani Network, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and Lashkar-e Tayyiba as groups that present the greatest threat to U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan. ETIM, which aims to establish a so-called “East Turkistan” within China, maintains close ties with the Taliban, al Qaeda, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The DoS disagreed with the characterization of ETIM as a comparable threat to the Haqqani Network and Lashkar-e Tayyiba but did not provide a separate assessment of the group.

Al Qaeda, the group that organized the September 11, 2001 attacks, precipitating U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, is among the smaller terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda did not claim any attacks against U.S. or allied forces during the quarter. USFOR-A assessed that al Qaeda poses “a limited, indirect threat” to U.S. and allied forces through the support it provides for Taliban and Haqqani Network attacks. Specifically, al Qaeda runs training camps, helps plan and fund attacks, and creates and disseminates propaganda highlighting attacks by other groups.

The DIA assessed that ideological differences between ISIS-K and the Taliban prevent them from reconciling. However, the DIA said, some Taliban members who oppose the peace process may join ISIS-K to keep fighting and receive better compensation.

The Afghan Taliban have not been officially designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, in order to facilitate diplomatic contacts and negotiation with the group that would be otherwise illegal were they so designated.

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**Estimates of Terrorist Group Force Size**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terrorist Group</th>
<th>Estimated Number of Fighters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISIS-K</td>
<td>3,000-5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Network</td>
<td>3,000-5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan</td>
<td>3,000-5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Emirate High Council</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al Qaeda</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lashkar-e Tayyiba</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariq Qidar Group</td>
<td>100-300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaat ul-Ahrar</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Jihad Union</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaat Dawa Quran</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**No Credible Information Available for the Following Terrorist Groups**

- Iranian Revolutionary Guard-Quds Force
- Hizbul Mujahidin
- Commander Nazir Group
- Jundullah
- Harakat-ul Jihad Islami/Bangladesh
- Lashkar-I Jhangvi
- Harakat-ul Mujahidin
- Jaish-e- Mohammad

Estimates of Levels of Government and Threat Control and Influence Get Steadily Worse and Then Are Cancelled or Classified
Military Balance, Patterns of Combat Activity, and Levels of Control and Influence

Virtually every piece of data on Afghanistan and the Afghan War has been uncertain since the beginning of the U.S. intervention, and the apparent precision of many reports disguises the fact that they often have no reliable inputs or that the data are different conflict from source to source. Even estimates of basic data like total population, poverty, unemployment, life expectancy, infantry mortality, education and levels are notoriously uncertain.

The estimates of Government versus Taliban control of Afghan Districts and its population have always been a key source of controversy. ISAF and the Resolute Support Command have issued over-optimistic estimates for years, and ones where apparent Government control of a small part of a District like its Capital could disguise strong Taliban or other insurgent influence in most of that District. The same has been true of the estimates of "contested" districts, where Resolute Support issued low-end estimates that many outside experts questioned.

These command estimates became more uncertain and controversial after 2014, when U.S. forces in the field were cut back and U.S. access to much of the country became limited. However, Resolute Support did produce less favorable estimates over time. By early 2018, even the official estimates reflected a stalemate with trends that slightly favored the Taliban, although no one could assess the level of relative uncertainty in the official versus outside estimates.

By the end of 2018, all major estimates indicated that the situation had further deteriorated, although the various estimates still differed. The metrics in this section show that Lead Inspector General (LIG) of the Department of Defense stated in its February 2019 report (p.17) that Afghan Government "control" dropped from 75 to 74 districts (18%) out of a total of 407 between Jul 2018 and October 2018, and that Government "influence" dropped from 151 to 145 districts (36%). At the same time, Government control over the total population stayed constant at 34% of the population, although Government influence over the population dropped from 31% to 29%.

In contrast, the LIG reported that Taliban "control" rose from 10 to 12 districts, although its "influence" dropped from 39 to 38 districts and its mix of control and influence over the population remained constant at 11%. The LIG also reported that the number of "contested" Districts where neither side dominated rose from 132 to 138, and the percentage of the total population that was contested rose from 24% to 26%. Put differently, this meant a total of 188 districts were contested or under Taliban control and influence by late October 2018, and 37% of the population.

Another official U.S. source, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) used a similar set of figures in the report that it issued at the end of January (pp. 71-72). This estimate did, however, put the October 2018 numbers in perspective. It stated that the Government "control" and "influence" over the Districts had dropped
by more than 18% since SIGAR first began receiving such reports from the Resolute Support Command in November 2015. It also stated that the number of contested Districts had risen by nearly 13% and the number under insurgent control or influence had risen by 5%.

SIGAR reporting for the first Quarter of 2019 indicates that Resolute Support has now stopped making such estimates, and suggests that it may have done so because they provided a level of bad news that the U.S. did not want publicize. It is not clear that this is the case. What is clear is that Resolute Support has stopped making such estimates, means there now is no official estimate of progress in the war since late 2018.

Moreover, one of the most respected outside sources, the Long War Journal, estimated on 29 April 2019 that the Taliban now controlled 141 out of 398 (407?) Districts (35%), and 9% of a population that it estimated was some 33 million. (https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan)

In sharp contrasts to Resolute Support, the Long War Journal estimated that the Taliban "contested" control over 42% of the total population, versus Resolute Support's estimate that it had an "influence" of only 26% -- an estimate and one that painted a far more negative picture of the war. This higher level of Taliban success (and Afghan government weakness) is one that many reporters and outside analysts feel may be more correct, but there is no way to establish the facts, and "contested" does not have the same literal meaning as "influence."

In short, there now are no official metrics that begin to provide a reliable way to know who is "winning" or the level of "stalemate." This gap in reporting is further compounded by the fact that other official estimates of progress -- like Enemy Initiated Attacks -- have been little more than meaningless.

There also are no clear alternatives to draw upon. Estimates by the UN of "safe" districts are no longer public. And, public estimates have ever noted which Districts, or how much of the population, has been under power broker or warlord control, had effective governance, or was dominated by narco-trafficking. These omissions are not minor considerations in a war for "hearts and minds" in country whose security problems are compounded by critical civil problems, and by a level of governance and political leadership that the World Bank and Transparency International estimate is one of the worst and most corrupt in the world.
SIGAR on Cancellation of Key Reporting on Afghan Government and Insurgent Control and Influence

This quarter, NATO’s Resolute Support (RS) train-advise-assist mission in Afghanistan formally notified SIGAR that it has discontinued producing one of its most widely cited Afghan security metrics: district, population, and territorial control data. The command said they no longer saw decision-making value in these data. The latest data from the few remaining publicly available measures of the security situation in Afghanistan—enemy-initiated attacks, general ANDSF’s casualty trends, and security incidents—show that Afghanistan experienced heightened insecurity over the winter months.

According to Resolute Support (RS), enemy-initiated attacks rose considerably: the monthly average attacks from November 2018 through January 2019 was up 19% compared to the monthly average over the last reporting period (August 16 to October 31, 2018). USFOR-A said that from December 1, 2018, through February 28, 2019, “the number of ANDSF casualties were approximately 31% higher during this three-month period when compared to the same period one year prior.” The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported 2,234 security-related incidents in Afghanistan from December 1, 2018–February 28, 2019, a 39% increase compared to same period the year before. These trends are notable considering that violence has typically waned during the winter months in Afghanistan over the last several years.

These data align with the U.S. intelligence community’s most recent public assessment that “Afghan forces generally have secured cities and other government strongholds, but the Taliban has increased large-scale attacks, and Afghan security suffers from a large number of forces being tied down in defensive missions, mobility shortfalls, and a lack of reliable forces to hold recaptured territory.”

General Votel echoed this statement in March. When pressed whether current conditions in Afghanistan merit a withdrawal of U.S. forces, General Votel said “The political conditions . . . right now don’t merit that.”

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 73-74.
When President Trump announced his “conditions-based” South Asia strategy in August 2017, members of Congress asked top defense officials: how should the American public measure progress under the strategy? Since then, Resolute Support and the U.S. military has produced several types of data that measure aspects of the OFS mission, many of which are included in this report.

This quarter, the DoD OIG learned that Resolute Support had discontinued two of those measures, the District Stability Assessment and the ANDSF workstrand tracker. These changes represent a shift in recent months toward qualitative measures of progress, which may better reflect the current status of the conflict but may also undermine the American public’s understanding of progress toward U.S. goals in Afghanistan.

...The District Stability Assessment was a measure of an elemental component of the conflict in Afghanistan: control of territory and the people who live there. Using this measure and others, General John Nicholson, the commander of USFOR-A and the Resolute Support mission from 2016 to 2018, tracked progress toward the goal established by President Ghani to have 80 percent of Afghanistan’s population living in areas under Afghan government control or influence.91 The DoD’s Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) later said that the District Stability Assessment was “not indicative of progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan,” in part due to the subjectivity of information used to make the assessment.92 Furthermore, a Lead IG analysis questioned the analytical foundation of the 80 percent goal.93 This quarter, USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that Resolute Support stopped producing the district control assessment because it was no longer of operational use to General Miller.94

The ANDSF workstrand tracker measured Afghan security forces’ progress towards goals of the U.S.-Afghan Compact. The Compact is a list of more than 1,200 activities related to security, reconciliation, rule of law, and other areas of government performance. The tracker summarized these activities into a few dozen lines of efforts (“workstrands”) and measured Afghan government activity toward an undefined goal of becoming “sustainable.”95 Resolute Support plans to replace the tracker with a new tool that is more “manageable,” and better aligned with Resolute Support assessment priorities.96 The DoD, per Section 1211 of the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, is exploring methods to better assess, monitor, and evaluate security cooperation programs in Afghanistan.97

The District Stability Assessment, the workstrand tracker, and other data included in this report, such as enemy-initiated attacks and civilian casualties, are far from perfect measures of what is actually happening in Afghanistan. These measures rely on information inputs that can be incorrect, inconsistent, or subjective. This is especially true with data that is originally gathered by the ANDSF.98 Despite these weaknesses, these measures applied a consistent methodology over time and reveal important trends, such as two years of no change—a stalemate—in the District Stability Assessment and uneven progress across “workstrands” on the tracker.

...Population and district control measure Taliban and Afghan control of territory and, importantly, how many Afghan citizens are affected by that control. Resolute Support reported that it ceased production of its District Stability Assessment in October 2018 because it “was of limited decision-making value” to General Miller.105 Resolute Support has released this data to the public nearly every quarter since 2015. The most recent Resolute Support District assessment in October 2018 found that 63 percent of Afghan citizens lived in areas under government control or influence.

Control of Afghanistan’s districts—and the number of citizens who live in them—has been one of the most commonly cited measures of security in Afghanistan. Both the U.S. Government and independent analysts produce assessments of district control. These assessments use different methodologies and, as a result, produce conflicting assessments of which districts are under Taliban control, under Afghan government control, or contested. For example, the Long War Journal’s July 2018 assessment of district control found that 48 percent of Afghans lived in areas under Afghan government control. The U.S. intelligence community continues to produce their own district control assessments, one of which is provided in the classified appendix to this report.

The reasons for discontinuing or classifying data about U.S. military operations in Afghanistan vary. Military leaders may choose to change quantitative measures or rely on more qualitative assessments of progress to address unreliability in their data, to execute new strategies that are not addressed by existing data, or simply because that is their decision-making style. Some of the data is classified or not releasable to the public because it was originally produced and classified by the Afghan government (such as ANDSF casualty data). SHIFT TOWARD QUALITATIVE MEASURES Since Ambassador Khalilzad began talks with the Taliban in October 2018, U.S. officials have said that progress toward reconciliation is the most important metric of the conflict in Afghanistan. General Miller has said that military pressure on the Taliban is designed to support the ongoing peace talks.99 U.S. military and diplomatic leaders said that Taliban participation in multiple rounds of talks since October 2018 and the initial “agreement in draft” are indications that the strategy is working.100 Progress toward reconciliation is an inherently non-linear and non–quantifiable metric, and the talks could break down at any time, particularly if the Afghan government does not join the talks. Since most U.S. intelligence about Taliban intentions is not shared with the public, it is unclear how U.S. military pressure on Taliban leaders factors into the Taliban’s decision to continue participation in the peace talks. The DoD OUSD(P) told the DoD OIG that “the real measure of success will be a lagging one and qualitative: do the terms of a political settlement ensure our national interest in preventing terrorist attacks on the homeland?”101 Until a political settlement is reached, if at all, the American public and their representatives in Congress may have less information about how ongoing military and diplomatic activities are bringing the United States closer to that goal. The Lead IG agencies will continue to request and analyze available data the progress of the overseas contingency operation.
Resolute Support-LIG: Population and District Control and Influence: 8/16-10/18

HISTORICAL POPULATION CONTROL OR INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

Source: Adapted from Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM’S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS, OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, p. 17.

HISTORICAL DISTRICT CONTROL OR INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

Note: Component numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding. Afghan government and insurgent figures include control and influence.
The most recent Resolute Support District Stability Assessment, conducted in October 2018, found that the percentage of Afghan citizens who live in areas under government control or influence decreased slightly compared to the previous quarter. As shown in Table 3, 63 percent of Afghan citizens were assessed to be living in areas under government control or influence in July, compared to 65 percent in July. The net total of districts assessed as contested increased by six districts, and the net total of districts assessed as under Taliban control or influence increased by one district. The provinces with the greatest number of Afghans living under insurgent influence or control were Faryab, Kunduz, and Helmand.

In late 2017, USFOR-A and the Afghan government stated that a major objective of the South Asia strategy and Afghan Road Map was to increase security to the point that 80 percent of the Afghan population lived in areas under government control or influence by the end of 2019. A previous Lead IG quarterly report questioned the analytical foundation for that goal. The DoD stated this quarter that district and population control “are not indicative of the effectiveness of the South Asia strategy.” The DoD also attributed the lack of large changes in district and population control to the “uncertainty in the models that produce them.”
Since SIGAR began receiving district-control data in November 2015, Afghan government control and influence over its districts has declined by more than 18 percentage points; contested districts have increased by about 13 points; and insurgent control or influence has risen by about five points.111 A historical record of district control is shown in Figure 3.31.

RS identified the provinces with the most insurgent-controlled or -influenced districts as Kunduz (five of seven districts), and Uruzgan (four of six districts), and Helmand (nine of 14 districts).112 DOD reported in December that the provincial centers of all of Afghanistan’s provinces are under Afghan government control or influence.113 See Figure 3.32, for an RS-provided map showing Afghan government and insurgent control or influence by district.

As seen in Table 3.3 on the next page, RS reported that the Afghan government controlled or influenced 360,000 square kilometers (56.1%) of Afghanistan’s total land area of roughly 644,000 square kilometers, down less than half a percentage point since last quarter. The insurgency controlled or influenced 111,000 square kilometers (17.3%) of the total land area, also down by roughly half a percentage point since last quarter. The remaining 171,000 square kilometers (26.6%) was contested by the government and insurgents, a one percentage-point increase since last quarter.114

Resolute Support - LIG: District Stability Assessment 2018 -II

Source: Adapted from Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM’S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS
OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, pp. 22-23.
Since SIGAR began receiving district-control data in November 2015, Afghan government control and influence over its districts has declined by more than 18 percentage points; contested districts have increased by about 13 points; and insurgent control or influence has risen by about five points.\textsuperscript{111} A historical record of district control is shown in Figure 3.31.

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SIGAR versus Long War Journal Estimates of Taliban Control: May 2018

Notes: U.S. government data is as of May 15, 2018, and analysts’ data is as of May 16, 2018. District boundaries are as of 2014.

Long War Journal on Estimates of Taliban Control

Analysis: US military downplays district control as Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan

BY BILL ROGGIO | January 31, 2019 | @billroggio

The Taliban has continued to make incremental gains in Afghanistan’s provinces despite an uptick in US airstrikes during the past year. The US military downplayed the Taliban’s gains, stating that this is “not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia strategy or progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan.” However, the last commander of US forces said less than two years ago that regaining control of 80 percent of Afghanistan’s territory was crucial to defeating the Taliban.

The Taliban has increased its control or influence by seven districts, or 1.7 percent, since the summer, according to a report by the Special Investigator General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR). Taliban control of population has also increased by 1.7 percent between July and Oct. 2018.

SIGAR receives its data directly from Resolute Support, NATO’s mission in Afghanistan, and the US Department of Defense. According to Resolute Support, the Afghan government controls or influences 219 of Afghanistan’s 407 districts (53.8 percent), and insurgents (the Taliban) control or influence another 12.3 percent. The remaining 33.9 percent are contested.

FDD’s Long War Journal, which has tracked the status of Afghanistan’s districts since 2014, believes the security situation in Afghanistan and the status of the districts is worse than is being reported by Resolute Support.

LWJ assesses that the Afghan government controls 35.1 percent of Afghanistan’s 407 districts, and the Taliban controls another 13.0 percent. The remaining 49.6 percent are contested, while seven districts (or 1.7%) cannot be accurately assessed at this time.

A major difference in Resolute Support and LWJ’s methodologies is that LWJ does not assess “influence,” as influence is merely a measure of control. LWJ believes that Resolute Support uses influence to skew the data and provide a rosier picture of the security situation to prop up the Afghan government. On multiple occasions, LWJ has detected Resolute Support gaming the status of districts.

As the Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan, the Afghan National Security Defense Forces continues to shrink. According to SIGAR, the ANSDF “decreased by 3,635 personnel since last quarter and is at the lowest it has been since the RS [Resolute Support] mission began in January 2015.”

The Taliban has also gained ground despite a marked uptick in US airstrikes. The US military “dropped 6,823 munitions in the first 11 months of 2018,” according to SIGAR. “This year’s figure was already 56% higher than the total number of munitions released in 2017 (4,361), and is more than five times the total in 2016.”

Resolute Support says district control is not important. Last Resolute Support commander said it was.

Resolute Support is now downplaying the importance of government control of Afghanistan’s districts. According to SIGAR:

“When providing district and population control data this quarter, DOD and RS reported for the first time that this data is “not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia strategy or progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan.” DOD and RS also reiterated that there is “some uncertainty in models that produce [the data]” and subjectivity in the assessments that underlie it.”

Yet, General John Nicholson, Resolute Support’s last commander, said in Nov. 2017 that the goal of regaining control of 80 percent of Afghanistan’s territory was crucial to defeating the Taliban.” This we believe is the critical mass necessary to drive the enemy to irrelevance, meaning they’re living in these remote outlying areas, or they reconcile, or they die,” Nicholson said, according to Reuters.

Resolute Support’s attempt to downplay the importance of Taliban control is contrary to everything known about counterinsurgency. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has been adept at using areas under its control to further its goal of retaking control of the country. In areas the Taliban controls or contests, it raises taxes, produces opium, and recruits, indoctrinates, and trains fighters. It also uses these areas to stage attacks on districts, towns, and cities under government control.

This is not the first time that Resolute Support and the US military have downplayed the Taliban’s control of Afghan districts. In 2016, after SIGAR noted that the Taliban was slowly gaining ground, Nicholson said that the Taliban was slowly gaining ground, Nicholson said that “the enemy is primarily in more rural areas that have less impact on the future of the country.”

More than two years later, the Taliban continues to use these “rural areas that have less impact on the future of the country” to make gains.

Long War Journal Estimate of Taliban Control in April 2019

Description: For nearly two decades the government of Afghanistan, with the help of U.S. and coalition forces, has been battling for control of the country against the ever-present threat of the Afghan Taliban. FDD’s Long War Journal has been tracking the Taliban’s attempts to gain control of territory since NATO ended its military mission in Afghanistan and switched to an “advise and assist” role in June 2014. Districts have been retaken (by both sides) only to be lost shortly thereafter, largely resulting in the conflict’s current relative stalemate. However, since the U.S. drawdown of peak forces in 2011, the Taliban has unquestionably been resurgent.

Estimates of Combat Activity Reflect More of a Stalemate
Resolute Support Estimate of Violent Incidents vs. District Control: August 1-October 31, 2018

Note: The district map was adapted from the 2012 Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office (AGCHO) shapefile that included 399 districts. Adjustments, some approximate, were made to data for districts that were whole in AGCHO's 399-district set but that were split in RS's 407-district set. See R.L. Helms, District Lookup Tool, https://arcg.is/1bOqGv, accessed 10/14/2018, for differences amongst district sets. This 407-district set was used to aggregate RS-provided district control data and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) incident data. SIGAR used ArcGIS Pro 2.2 for this analysis and all layers were projected to UTM 42N. ACLED data showing political conflict and protest data between 8/1/2018, and 10/31/2018 was used in order to match RS's district-control reporting period. ACLED data was sorted to the district-level by using a geo-precision code of 1 or 2 and incidents were summed. This left 1,658 district-level incidents for analysis. To create the map, incidents were categorized into three classes using the quantile method. The quantile method produces an equal number of observations per class to facilitate comparative analysis, but the interval of the class must therefore be variable.

UN Estimate of Security Incidents: 2015-2018
Incidents: 2016-2018: 1225 Report

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, January 30, 2019, p. 75.
ACLED Reported Security Related Events: 2018

SIGAR also analyzes security incident data from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which records district-level data of political violence and protest incidents across Afghanistan. For consistency with RS’s enemy-initiated attacks data, SIGAR is presenting ACLED data at the provincial level this quarter (see Figure 3.32) and chose a date range for the data in alignment with RS’s reporting period (January 1–December 31, 2018).

ACLED recorded 7,209 security-related events in Afghanistan in 2018, roughly the same as the 7,345 recorded in 2017. The three provinces with the most events were unchanged from 2017 to 2018: Nangarhar, Ghazni, and Helmand. The events occurring in these three provinces accounted for 35% of 2018’s total events. Eight of the top 10 provinces with the most ACLED-recorded security-related events in 2018 were also within the top 10 provinces where RS recorded the most enemy-initiated attacks in 2018 (Helmand, Farah, Faryab, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni, and Nangarhar).

ACLED recorded 2,234 security-related events over the winter months (December 1, 2018–February 28, 2019), a roughly 30% increase compared to the 1,610 events reported during the same period one year prior. The three provinces with the most security-related events were Helmand, Kandahar, and Nangarhar. Much of the increase in events this reporting period compared to the same period the year before was due to increases in events reported in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces.

Source: Excerpted from SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, pp. 76-77.
Resolute Support Estimate of Enemy Initiated Attacks: 2018

ENEMY-INITIATED ATTACKS IN 2018
BY ATTACK TYPE


Provinces. Last quarter’s data showed Farah with the most reported EIA, followed by Helmand and Faryab Provinces. Figure 3.31 shows that the most common method of attack for the EIA in 2018 were direct fire (82% of EIA), followed by IED explosions (12%), and indirect fire (6%). SIGAR will continue to monitor EIA to track trends over time.

For the first time this quarter, SIGAR requested effective enemy-initiated attacks (EEIA) data from RS. Of the 22,969 EIA reported in 2018, RS said there were 10,900 EEIA, meaning about 46% of total EIA resulted in ANA/KP, Coalition, or civilian casualties. RS recorded 2,394 EEIA this reporting period (November 1, 2018-January 31, 2019), about 38% of total EIA for the same period. DOD has previously offered the caveat that ANDSF units do not always report insurgent attacks that do not result in casualties. As such, the number of EIA could be higher than what RS has reported, which would also impact the percentage of EEIA to EIA.

Each type of incident data presented here has advantages and limitations: RS reported enemy-initiated attack data comes from an official source, but is only available unclassified at the provincial level and does not include U.S. and ANDSF initiated attacks on the enemy; Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) events data can be disaggregated to the district level, to a variety of security incident types, and to all the parties to the conflict, but depends entirely on media reporting of security-related events.

Source: Excerpted from SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, April 30, 2019, p. 7476.
Resolute Support labels an enemy-initiated attack as “effective” if it causes a casualty. USFOR-A reported that there were 2,517 effective enemy-initiated attacks in Afghanistan between October and December. This represents a decline in enemy initiated attacks compared to the July to September period (3,093), but a nearly 10 percent increase compared to the same period in 2017 (2,298). During 2018, approximately 49 percent of reported enemy-initiated attacks (10,955 out of 22,495 attacks) were effective. However, the ANDSF often does not report attacks that do not result in casualties, so the actual percentage of enemy-initiated attacks that were effective may be lower.

Source: Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM’S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, p. 17.
Measures of violence provide some insight into the intensity, type, and perpetrators of conflict. Resolute Support collects data on “enemy-initiated attacks” in Afghanistan, which it defines as attacks by the Taliban, ISIS-K, or other enemy groups. Resolute Support labels an enemy-initiated attack as “effective” if it results in a casualty (killed or wounded). Resolute Support reported 5,547 enemy-initiated attacks during the quarter, of which 2,202 (40 percent) were effective, as shown in Figure 3. The number of enemy-initiated attacks during the quarter was 20 percent fewer than last quarter and 7 percent fewer than the same period one year ago. The number of effective enemy-initiated attacks was 7 percent fewer than last quarter and 11 percent fewer than the same period last year.

The majority of enemy-initiated attacks (84 percent) and effective enemy-initiated attacks (76 percent) were the result of direct fire. IEDs were the second most frequent type of enemy-initiated attack (7 percent), accounting for 14 percent of attacks that were labeled effective.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) collects and reports data on “security incidents” in Afghanistan. In contrast to the Resolute Support “enemy-initiated attacks,” the UNAMA reports of “security incidents” include violence initiated by Afghan and international forces (such as airstrikes), in addition to attacks by the Taliban, ISIS-K, and other violent organizations. UNAMA reported that during the period November 16, 2018 to February 7, 2019, it recorded 4,420 security incidents. This represents an 8 percent decrease from a similar period the previous year. As with prior quarters, armed clashes accounted for the majority of security incidents. UNAMA noted that suicide attacks decreased by 61 percent compared to one year ago. UNAMA suggested that this decrease may be a result of successful ANDSF operations in Kabul and Nangarhar province.

Effective Enemy Attacks: 2016-2018: 1225 Report

Estimates of Terrorism in Afghanistan Are Uncertain But Show Little Decline
Terrorism in Afghanistan: Uncertain to Dubious Reporting

The metrics in this section are highly uncertain, and are more a warning of the problems in distinguishing between terrorism and insurgency/counterinsurgency, than a source of useful data and insights.

The continued level of insurgent conflict in Afghanistan makes it difficult to impossible to distinguish between terrorism and insurgent action, a problem compounded in many areas by a high level of social and tribal violence. START does estimate that the Taliban accounted for some 60% of terrorism between 2011 and 2016, but such counts seem to be extremely uncertain.

IHS Janes and START make very different estimates of the level of terrorist attacks/incidents in 2017, and IHS Janes and UNAMA make very different estimates of civilian casualties – a category where there seem to be no clear criteria for separating out casualties from terrorism from casualties caused by insurgent fighting.

Many terrorist attacks are also estimated to have been directed against the Army and the Police, and it is not clear that these is a basis for distinguishing between terrorism and warfare in many such cases. The fact that guns and explosives are used in so many “terrorist” incidents is a further indication of the difficulty in distinguishing between insurgency and terrorism.

What is clear is that Daesh/ISIS – which has not been not a major player in the insurgency – has become a more significant player in terrorism. UN reporting indicates that ISIL strongholds exist in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman. The UN estimates the total strength of ISIL in Afghanistan at between 2,500 and 4,000 militants.

The UN also notes, however, that the Taliban attacked ISIS forces in 2018, and inflicted serious casualties on at least one occasion.

Total 1970-2017: 12,731 Incidents

Total 2011-2016: 10,116 Incidents

Taliban 2011-2016: 6,030 Incidents

SOURCE; START ADVANCED DATABASE,
https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=perpetrator&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=2011&end_yearonly=2017 &dtp2=all&country=4&perpetrator=652,20529&weapon=1,2,6,7,5,8,9,4,12,3,11,13,10, Accessed 29.4.2019
START: Taliban Attack Patterns: 2011-2017

Casualties: Killed & Injured Per Incident
- 6,030 Incidents

Weapon Type – 6,030 Incidents

# Comparative START, HIS Janes, and UNAMA Estimates of Terrorist Attacks and Total Civilian Casualties: 2017-2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
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<td>661</td>
<td>869</td>
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<td>START</td>
<td>1,414</td>
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<td>ND</td>
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<td>UNAMA Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>• Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)</td>
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<td>• Taliban</td>
<td>1,574</td>
<td>1,348</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Daesh/ISKP</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>681</td>
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</table>

**Sources:**
- IHS Janes, 2018 Global Attack Index, Afghanistan;  
UN Assessment of Daesh/ISIS Threat: 2/2019

...while ISIL has transformed into a covert network, including in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, it remains a threat as a global organization with centralized leadership. This threat is increased by returning, relocating or released foreign terrorist fighters.

At present, ISIL strongholds in Afghanistan are in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman. The total strength of ISIL in Afghanistan is estimated at between 2,500 and 4,000 militants... ISIL is also reported to control some training camps in Afghanistan, and to have created a network of cells in various Afghan cities, including Kabul. The local ISIL leadership maintains close contacts with the group’s core in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Important personnel appointments are made through the central leadership, and the publication of propaganda videos is coordinated. Following the killing of ISIL leader Abu Sayed Bajauri on 14 July 2018, the leadership council of ISIL in Afghanistan appointed Mawlawi Ziya ul-Haq (aka Abu Omar Al-Khorasani) as the fourth “emir” of the group since its establishment.

...Throughout 2018, ISIL is assessed to have carried out 38 terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, many of them high profile, including some in Kabul... ISIL targets have included Afghan security forces, the Taliban, North Atlantic Treaty Organization military personnel, diplomats, employees of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, journalists and medical institutions, as well as religious minorities viewed by ISIL as soft targets.

...ISIL suffered a severe setback in northern Afghanistan during the reporting period. In July 2018, 1,000 Taliban attacked ISIL positions in Jowzjan province, killing 200 ISIL fighters, while 254 ISIL fighters surrendered to government forces and 25 foreign terrorist fighters surrendered to the Taliban. One Member State assesses that the ISIL presence in Jowzjan has been eliminated while, elsewhere in the north, a minority of Taliban – approximately 170 fighters in Faryab, 100 in Sari Pul and 50 in Balkh – retain sympathies for ISIL...

...ISIL is seeking to expand its area of activity in Central Asia and has called for terrorist attacks targeting public gatherings, primarily in the Ferghana Valley of the Central Asian region. On 30 July 2018, ISIL claimed responsibility for the killing of four foreign cyclists in Tajikistan. In November, ISIL stated that one of its fighters was responsible for the attack that had sparked the riot in a high-security prison in Khujand, Tajikistan.

...ISIL killed 24 and injured 60 people in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 22 September 2018 Ahvaz attack...
Al Qaeda is operating “across the country” and not confined to one region, the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan confirmed. General Austin Miller, the commander of Resolute Support Mission and US Forces – Afghanistan, confirmed several analyses by FDD’s Long War Journal, which has noted for years that al Qaeda’s footprint spans all regions of Afghanistan. “We have seen al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Yes, in different parts of Afghanistan,” Miller said, according to TOLONews. “In different parts of Afghanistan, we can find them, so it’s not one particular region, it’s across the country.”

FDD’s Long War Journal has tracked al Qaeda’s presence in Afghanistan for well over a decade, using press releases and public statements from the US military, NATO’s command in Afghanistan, and Afghan security services, as well as the jihadist groups’ own martyrdom statements. This data was then geotagged to a map (above) which tracks the terrorist group’s operations and movement, as well as the US and Afghan military’s operations against them. [See Taliban continues to host foreign terrorist groups, despite assurances to the contrary.]

The data clearly show that al Qaeda and allied terrorist groups have been operating on Afghan soil for the past two decades with the approval of the Taliban. These terrorist organizations often operate in areas controlled by the Taliban – and the jihadists killed in coalition or Afghan raids often die alongside members of the Afghan Taliban. Since 2007, NATO, US, and Afghan forces, have launched at least 373 operations against these foreign terror groups in 27 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces.
FDD’s Long War Journal has also created a map, seen above, of al Qaeda’s and the Islamic State’s presence in Afghanistan based primarily on the last two United Nations Security Council reports on al Qaeda and the Islamic State’s presence in Afghanistan. In its latest report, the UNSC warned that both groups maintain a significant presence in Afghanistan. [See UN: Al Qaeda continues to view Afghanistan as a ‘safe haven’.]

The data was supplemented with operational reporting from the US military and Afghan security forces in recent years. The map above shows the presence of al Qaeda and al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), as well as the Islamic State, across 13 Afghan provinces. Al Qaeda and its regional branch, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, are present in all 13 of the shaded provinces. The Islamic State’s Khorasan Province is present in five of the shaded provinces.

The US government, led by Zalmay Khalilzad – the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation – is currently negotiating with the Taliban and has said the terror organization can be an effective counterterrorism partner and prevent Afghanistan from being used as a launchpad for international terrorist attacks.

However, Al Qaeda and the Taliban remain steadfast allies, and Khalilzad is well aware of that fact. While testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in July 2016, he personally described the Taliban as an “extremist organization” with enduring ties to al Qaeda, and said the two would not part ways. [See Khalilzad flip flops on Pakistan, Taliban’s relationship with al Qaeda.]

Miller’s comments about al Qaeda’s presence throughout Afghanistan should call into question the US efforts to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban. The Taliban is clearly supporting al Qaeda to this day, because al Qaeda would not be able to operate “across the country” without the explicit support and approval of the Taliban.

Bill Roggio is a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and the Editor of FDD’s Long War Journal.
Casualty Trends Show Limited Growth in Totals, but Growing Problems in ANSF Losses and ANSF and Coalition Attacks on Civilians
Casualty Trends

The metrics in this section reflect serious differences between UN and largely US sources. The UN and the Resolute Support Command have long differed in making such estimates of civilian casualties. Most of the recent differences come from higher UN estimates of the casualties caused by Coalition and Afghan air attacks, and by ANA land forces, than those issued by the Resolute Support Command, Afghan government, and U.S. official sources.

Civilian casualties from air attacks have become a key source of contention. Resolute Support Command argues that it is careful to minimize civilian losses when it uses airpower, and civilian deaths are very low. The UN argues that they rose sharply in 2018, and have been rising steadily since 2014.

Part of the difference comes from the fact that the UN relies heavily on on-the-ground interviews, and Resolute Support argues that many of those who make claims about civilian casualties are exaggerating them because they support the Taliban or ISIS, or in a search for compensation.

Some of the Resolute Support claims that the Taliban does manipulate such accounts to exaggerate civilian losses, and understate its presence in the target area, seem to be valid. However, the issue cannot be dismissed. An independent analysis of US air attacks on narcotics targets published in April 2019 tended to support the UN estimates. It argued that civilian casualties were substantially higher than Resolute Support admitted, although the BBC analysis also relied heavily on eye-witness accounts after the event.

At the same time, both sets of estimates do not show a major rise in casualty levels after 2015, and the overall civilian levels are surprisingly low in comparison with comparable civilian casualty estimates in Iraq and Syria in other wars. This may reflect the fact that combat is generally more sporadic and localized. The Afghan War has certainly been a long one, but the U.S. has made a major effort to avoid civilian casualties and the number of major battles in civilian areas has been limited.
AFGHAN SECURITY PERSONNEL CASUALTIES

USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that the number of ANDSF casualties during the period December 2018 to February 2019 was approximately 31 percent higher than the same period one year ago. The number of casualties during defensive operations increased by 45 percent while the number of casualties during offensive operations increased by 21 percent. Almost half of the ANDSF casualties during this 3-month period were inflicted during checkpoint security operations.116

USFOR-A classified ANDSF casualty and attrition rates at the request of the Afghan government. However, Afghan political leaders occasionally release some information about ANDSF casualties to the media. In January 2019, President Ghani stated that 45,000 ANDSF members had been killed since he took office in 2014.117

U.S. AND COALITION FORCES CASUALTIES

Four U.S. military personnel died because of combat injuries during the quarter. The DoD announced that a Soldier died of wounds sustained on January 13 in Badghis province; a Soldier died on January 22 as a result of small arms fire in Uruzgan province; and two Soldiers died as a result of wounds sustained in Kunduz province on March 22.

Resolute Support did not report any casualties among its non–U.S. partner forces during the quarter.
Conflicting Estimates of Civilian Casualties
Civilian Casualties by Quarter and Reporting Organization, October-December 2018

Source: Adapted from Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM’S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS
OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, p. 20.
Resolute Support assesses reports of civilian casualties using ANDSF and coalition operational reports, aircraft video footage, records of U.S. and Afghan weapons releases, and other coalition and Afghan government-generated information. Resolute Support reported that it verified 1,472 civilian casualties (372 killed, 1,100 wounded) during the quarter. Most of these civilian casualties were the result of IED and direct fire attacks. The provinces with the greatest number of civilian casualties during the quarter were Kabul, Nangarhar, and Helmand.

UNAMA reported that it had verified 1,773 civilian casualties (581 killed, 1,192 injured) during the quarter. This figure represents a 23 percent decrease from the same period in 2018, which UNAMA attributed, in large part, to a reduction in casualties caused by IEDs. Overall, IEDs and ground engagements remained the most frequent cause of civilian casualties during the quarter. UNAMA concluded that the Taliban was responsible for the largest share of civilian casualties (39 percent), followed by the ANDSF (17 percent), international military forces (13 percent), and ISIS-K (12 percent).

By comparison, UNAMA reported that during the same period in 2018, the Taliban was responsible for a much larger share of civilian casualties (50 percent), followed by ISIS-K (11 percent), ANDSF (11 percent), and international military forces (2 percent).

UNAMA vs. Resolute Support Estimates of Casualties: 2019

UNAMA: Civilian Casualties in Early 2019 Decline Sharply
In a stark change from the final months of 2018, UNAMA documented 1,773 civilian casualties from January 1 through March 31, 2019, a 23% decrease in casualties compared to the same period in 2017 and the lowest number of civilian casualties in the first three months of the year since 2013. The casualties included 581 deaths and 1,192 injuries.\textsuperscript{110}

UNAMA noted that the significant decrease in civilian casualties so far this year was primarily driven by a 76% decrease in casualties caused by suicide IED attacks. Last year’s figures were higher due to many more suicide attacks in early 2018, including the January 27, 2018, attack in Kabul, which was the deadliest incident UNAMA had ever recorded. UNAMA also said the particularly harsh winter conditions during the first three months of this year may have contributed to the decline in civilian casualties, and that it is unclear whether the trend was influenced by any measures undertaken by parties to the conflict to better protect civilians, or by the ongoing talks between some of the parties. UNAMA expressed continued concern about the increase in civilian casualties from the use of nonsuicide IEDs by antigovernment elements (up 21% compared to last year).\textsuperscript{111}

UNAMA reported that progovernment elements caused more civilian deaths than antigovernment elements thus far in 2019 (605 casualties, 305 deaths and 303 injuries). This was attributed to substantial increases in civilian casualties caused by progovernment aerial (41%) and search operations (85%) compared to last year. UNAMA attributed 17% of all civilian casualties to the ANDSF, 13% to international military forces, 2% to progovernment armed groups, and 2% to multiple progovernment forces. As in previous years, antigovernment elements were responsible for the majority of overall civilian casualties during the first quarter of 2019 (953 casualties, 227 deaths and 736 injuries).\textsuperscript{112}

The decrease UNAMA reported for the first three months of 2019 is offset by the high number of civilian casualties seen from October through December 2018 (2,943). Civilian casualties from October 2018–March 2019 were at roughly the same level they were from October 2017–March 2018.\textsuperscript{113}

RS Civilian Casualties Data
RS reported 9,214 civilian casualties in 2018 (2,845 killed and 6,369 wounded). As reported last quarter, September and October were the deadliest months, with 950 and 1,274 civilian casualties respectively. RS’s and UNAMA’s data aligned in that Kabul, Nangarhar, and Helmand Provinces experienced the most civilian casualties in 2018. According to RS, about 21% of 2018’s civilian casualties occurred in Kabul Province (1,976 casualties), 17% in Nangarhar (1,590), and 5% in Helmand (477). As seen in Figure 3.35 on the previous page, RS said the majority of the civilian casualties reported in 2018 were caused by IEDs (50%), followed by direct fire (22%), and indirect fire (7%).\textsuperscript{114}

UNAMA Collection Methodology
According to UNAMA, data on civilian casualties are collected through “direct site visits, physical examination of items and evidence gathered at the scene of incidents, visits to hospital and medical facilities, still and video images,” reports by UN employees, and primary, secondary, and third-party accounts. Information is obtained directly from primary accounts where possible. Civilians whose noncombatant status is under “significant doubt,” based on international humanitarian law, are not included in the figures. Ground-engagement casualties that cannot be definitively attributed to either side, such as those incurred during crossfire, are jointly attributed to both parties. UNAMA includes an “other” category to distinguish between these jointly attributed casualties and those caused by other events, such as unexploded ordnance or cross-border shelling by Pakistani forces. UNAMA’s methodology has remained largely unchanged since 2008.\textsuperscript{115}

RS Collection Methodology
According to DOD, the RS Civilian Casualty Management Team relies primarily upon operational reporting from RS’s Train, Advise, and Assist Commands (TAACs), coalition force headquarters, and ANDSF reports from the Afghan Presidential Information Command Centre to collect civilian-casualty data. Source: DOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 12/2017, p. 27.
International forces in Afghanistan aim for zero civilian casualties, applying that standard to all stages of operations. One civilian death is one too many, and General John Nicholson, Commander of Resolute Support, and United States Forces- Afghanistan, has said “We go to extraordinary lengths to avoid civilian casualties, and we wave off strikes if we identify civilians.”

Since 2009 the United Nations mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, has investigated reports of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. Their work to highlight war’s effect on normal life, and in particular to improve protection for women and children, is tireless and rightly highly regarded. The downward trend recorded in their annual figures for 2017 – the first move down since 2012 – is welcome, especially amid a campaign when insurgents have specifically targeted civilians on a scale never before seen in Afghanistan.

Investigating every civilian death is no less thorough inside the Resolute Support Mission. Using a different methodology than UNAMA, the trend of casualties recorded by the RS Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team (CCMT) is in the opposite direction to that found by UNAMA. While UNAMA found that civilian casualties caused by the conflict fell 9 percent to 10,428 in 2017, RS recorded a rise to 8,319, perhaps explained by more accurate reporting by Afghan forces who, with better training, have become more aware of the effect of the war on the civilian population.

In assessing what accounts for the difference in these figures, there is no doubt who causes most civilian casualties in Afghanistan – insurgents whose hypocrisy was laid bare as they turned to Afghan civilians as their prime target in 2017 after they failed to gain ground against superior Afghan forces. RS investigators calculate that 88 percent of Afghan civilians killed and injured in 2017 were victims of the Taliban, IS-K and other insurgent groups. UNAMA assessed the proportion at 65 percent.

In other areas there were even bigger differences in assessing those killed and injured. In 2017, RS recorded no civilian casualties from international forces on the ground, and 51 from the air – 19 killed and 32 injured. RS assessed another 69 casualties (33 dead and 36 injured) were caused by the Afghan Air Force. UNAMA attributed 246 casualties to international military air strikes (154 deaths and 92 injured), and 309 casualties to the Afghan Air Force, with a further 76 casualties from air strikes attributed to unknown pro-government forces.

So how can these discrepancies be explained?

Both UNAMA and RS have experienced teams who examine every allegation. One explanation lies in different sources that are available to either UNAMA or RS. In the case of ground attacks, the RS team collect and assess operational planning data, and upon completion of operations potential civilian casualties are assessed, with some reported immediately by units involved. For air strikes, RS know whether a plane or unmanned aerial vehicle was involved. Everything is recorded and stored, including gun-tapes from Afghan planes and helicopters, which now carry out most air strikes.

The RS investigation team assess that in several of the cases where casualties were alleged to be from air strikes, no aerial platforms were nearby at the time, and reported explosions may have resulted from concealed IEDs or insurgents firing rockets and mortars. In other cases, RS investigators have access to surveillance information that gives them confidence that civilians were not present at the scene of a strike.

For example, on November 19 2017, in the air campaign under new US authorities striking Taliban revenue streams, a suspected drug lab was struck in northern Helmand. UNAMA relayed information to RS alleging that nine civilians from the same family were killed in the strike. They shared detailed information about three women, two boys and four girls – including a one-year-old. This claim of nine dead was included in the UNAMA report, but not counted by RS. RS investigations disproved the allegation as surveillance of the house over a significant period of time showed no sign of the presence of a family. Local government officials said that no civilians were killed.

While RS shares evidence with UNAMA to enhance understanding, UNAMA investigations rely primarily instead on eyewitness accounts, requiring at least three independent sources per incident. UNAMA proactively search for sources of different genders and from different ethnic groups, evaluating them for credibility. But at times are unable to conduct onsite investigations owing to security constraints, and in order to protect privacy will not share eyewitness identity, which means their accounts are difficult to corroborate.

Resolute Support on RS vs. UNAMA Casualty Estimates - II

This difference in methodology is only one explanation for disparate findings. Of the 99 separate allegations of civilian casualties by international military forces passed to RS by UNAMA, only three air strikes were proved to be confirmed civilian casualty cases to the satisfaction of the RS investigation board.

Another discrepancy results from different definitions for ‘civilian’ and for ‘casualty’. Legal advisers on both sides assess civilians differently. For UNAMA the definition is wide, giving legal protection to people who might be considered combatants under other interpretations of international humanitarian law. And in defining ‘casualties’, UNAMA includes those treated at the scene who return home, while a casualty to RS is someone whose injuries involved treatment at a medical facility.

**Improved protection for civilians in Afghan military operations**

Increasingly Afghan forces, in the air and on the ground, are conducting the campaign without international support. They now have their own forward ground controllers to identify targets, and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms to send accurate information to attack planes. On many occasions Afghan planes return to base without releasing their weapons rather than risking civilian lives (as indeed do the air platforms of international military forces).

UNAMA “acknowledged the significant measures undertaken by the Afghan national security forces to improve the protection of civilians in 2017, especially during ground fighting and related operations.” As well as new policies, UNAMA noted “the adoption of practical measures on the battlefield, including relocation of security bases from civilian areas, and increased constraints on the use of mortars and other indirect fire weapons during ground fighting in civilian-populated areas.”

There were also indications that the “overall increase in air operations may have played a role in constraining and/or deterring large scale attacks against cities by anti-government elements.” And this is in stark contrast to the way the enemy is increasingly prosecuting its campaign. Afghanistan’s prime security concern is large-scale attacks by insurgents who indiscriminately pursue civilians in their homes, schools, hospitals, markets and places of worship, rather than carrying out their fight on the battlefield. Instead of seeking military targets, insurgents led a massacre of 150 civilians, with another 600 injured, while destroying the German Embassy in May 2017.

And already in 2018, the Taliban have stormed the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul with AK-47 assault rifles, killing 22 civilians. IS-K attacked Save the Children in Jalalabad, killing four people and wounding 22 at an organization whose primary aim is to help Afghan children have a better life and future. And in a commandeered ambulance, the Taliban again unleashed their fury upon innocent civilians on the streets of Kabul, killing 103 and injuring 235 more.

There was no dispute over who was responsible for these casualties.

Excerpted from Civilian Casualties, [www.rs.nato/int.media-center/backgrounders](www.rs.nato/int.media-center/backgrounders), April 2018.
UNAMA Estimates of Total Civilian Casualties: 2009-2018

Total Civilian Deaths & Injured
January to December 2009 - 2018

UNAMA Estimates of Causes of Casualties: 2018

### Civilian Casualties by Incident Type

- Ground Engagements: 23%
- Consistent Improvised Explosive Devices: 42%
- Suicide & Complex Attacks: 26%
- Aerial Operations: 9%
- Targeted Killings: 8%
- Other: 6%
- Explosive Remnants of War: 5%

### Civilian Casualties by Parties to the Conflict

- Taliban: 37%
- Daesh/ISKP: 20%
- Undetermined: 13%
- Undetermined or multiple: 7%
- Afghan national security forces: 6%
- International Military forces: 4%
- pro-Government armed groups: 2%
- Unknown/Other: 1%

### Responsible Party (attributed by UNAMA)

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<tr>
<th>Responsible Party (Attributed by UNAMA)</th>
<th>Civilians killed</th>
<th>Civilians injured</th>
<th>Total civilian casualties</th>
<th>Percent of overall civilian casualties</th>
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<td>1,348</td>
<td>2,724</td>
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<td>74</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>223</td>
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In the first quarter of 2019, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continued to document high levels of harm to civilians from the armed conflict. From 1 January to 31 March 2019, UNAMA documented 1,773 civilian casualties (581 deaths and 1,192 injured), including 582 child casualties (150 deaths and 432 injured). This represents a 23 per cent decrease in overall civilian casualties as compared to the same period last year and is the lowest for a first quarter since 2013.

The overall reduction of civilian casualties was driven by a decrease in civilian casualties by suicide improvised explosive device (IED) attacks. UNAMA notes the particularly harsh winter conditions during the first three months of the year, which may have contributed to this trend. It is unclear whether the decrease in civilian casualties was influenced by any measures taken by parties to the conflict to better protect civilians, or by the ongoing talks between parties to the conflict.

UNAMA is very concerned by the continued targeting of civilians and increase in civilian casualties from the use of non-suicide IEDs by Anti-Government Elements, as well as significant increases in civilian casualties from aerial and search operations, which drove an overall increase in civilian casualties by Pro-Government Forces. Civilian deaths attributed to Pro-Government Forces surpassed those attributed to Anti-Government Elements during the first quarter of 2019.

Ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties, causing approximately one-third of the total. A single mortar attack incident by Daesh/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) on 7 March 2019 in Kabul caused approximately one-fifth of all civilian casualties from ground engagements (see below). The use of IEDs was the second leading cause of civilian casualties. Contrary to 2017 and 2018 trends, the majority of IED civilian casualties were caused by non-suicide IEDs rather than suicide IEDs. Aerial operations were the leading cause of civilian deaths3 and the third leading cause of civilian casualties, followed by targeted killings and explosive remnants of war. Civilians living in Kabul, Helmand, Nangarhar, Faryab and Kunduz provinces were most affected (in that order).

Source: UNAMA, QUARTERLY REPORT ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT: 1 JANUARY TO 31 MARCH 2019, 24.2.2019, pp. 1-2
Uncertainty in Afghan Popular Perceptions of the War
Afghan Perceptions

The polling metrics in this section, and those that follow, present significant problems. Afghan perceptions are difficult to poll. Direct interviews involve serious risks, and efforts to poll by telephone present the problem that most Afghans do not have phones, and those that do are likely to be wealthier and more urban.

The Asian Foundation has, however, established a long record of success in polling Afghan perceptions. These polls still indicate that most Afghan hope for a successful outcome of the war, but this year’s poll shows a sharp drop in popular confidence that Afghanistan is moving in the right direction, and far less optimism among every other ethnic group than among Pashtuns.

The key reasons for this pessimism are broadly based. Some 61% of the population felt pessimistic, and more than 70% cited security, 30%-48% cited the economy, and 30%-34% cited governance as among the top two reasons.

The polls also show that the percent of Afghans who fear for their safety has increased by 31% since 2006. It also shows a high rate of fear when traveling, and when encountering International forces, and an even higher rate when encountering ISIS/Daesh and Taliban forces.

Broad popular perceptions of the ANA and ANP are relatively good, however, although most Afghan recognize they are still heavily dependent on outside support.

The same is not true of perceptions of the Afghan government – which are shown later in this report. Satisfaction with the government has dropped steadily since 2007, as has confidence in the government.

All levels of government and the justice system is seen are highly corrupt, although they have improved since 2016. To a lesser degree, key elements of the ANSF are also seen as corrupt – in spite of the generally favorable attitudes towards the security services.
Popular Confidence

**NATIONAL MOOD: DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY**

**FIG. 1.1: Q-1.** Overall, based on your own experience, do you think things in Afghanistan today are going in the right direction, or do you think they are going in the wrong direction?

**NATIONAL MOOD, BY ETHNICITY**

Reasons for Pessimism (61% of Population)

(Ask if answer to Q-1 is “wrong direction.”) What are two reasons you think that Afghanistan is going in the wrong direction?
Popular Sense of Security - I

A district center may be under government control, but incidents of violence and harassment, such as a car bomb or a Taliban threat letter, can lead to a deteriorating sense of security. Feelings of insecurity may prevent Afghans from going to the market, sending a child to school, or engaging in other routine activities. In December 2018, The Asia Foundation released its annual Survey of the Afghan People, which has documented a 31 percentage point increase in fear for personal safety since 2006. In 2018, 71 percent of Afghans reported some or a lot of fear for their personal safety. Fear varied according to where Afghans live, their gender, ethnicity, and with whom they interact, as shown below.

Source: Adapted from Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM’S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS, OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, p. 17.
 Popular Sense of Security - II

**FEAR FOR PERSONAL SAFETY**

![Graph showing fear for personal safety over time](image)

**FEAR WHILE DOING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES**

![Graph showing fear for different activities](image)

**TYPES OF CRIME OR VIOLENCE, BY RURAL AND URBAN**

![Bar chart showing types of crime or violence](image)

**FIG. 2-1: Q-21. How often do you fear for your own personal safety or security or for that of your family these days? Would you say you always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never fear for you and your family’s safety?**

**FIG. 2-6: Q-25. (Ask if answer to Q-24 is yes.) If it is ok to ask, what kinds of violence or crimes did you or someone in your family experience in the past year?**

Afghan Perceptions of Security Provider

PERCEPTIONS OF THE AFGHAN NATIONAL POLICE

PERCEPTION THAT ANA AND ANP NEED FOREIGN SUPPORT

PERCEPTIONS OF THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY

SECURITY PROVIDER IN LOCAL AREA, BY RURAL AND URBAN

FIG. 2.9: Q-15. Which group would you say is most responsible for providing security in this village/guzar? And the second most?

Narcotics Exports Keep Growing and Are The Critical Foreign Currency Earner in the Afghan Economy
Afghanistan plays a critical role in the global supply of opiates. It is clear that massive U.S. efforts to make major cuts in Afghan production have only had sporadic success, and have become less success with time as Afghanistan has become more dependent on opiate exports as a key source of income and hard currency. It is also clear from UNDOC and SIGAR reporting that weather, plant diseases, and demand have been far more important in determining the size of the opium crop than efforts at eradication and persuading farmers to find substitute crops.

The metrics in this section highlight both the growth of opium production and the issues surrounding its role in shaping Afghan macroeconomics. The work by SIGAR on this subject is particularly important because it indicates that opium is major source of Afghan economic growth, and is Afghanistan’s most important export. It also shows a high correlation between opium production and Taliban control and influence and indicates that opium plays a key role in financing the war as well as in areas where power brokers still operate with some degree of independence from the central government.

The importance of opium has been understated in the past because international bodies like the World Bank and IMF did not fully assess the impact of opium on the Afghan economy, and because various estimates of the value of the crop focused on farm gate prices rather than the massive rise in income and profits once the product left the farm -- and particularly after it was processed. It also took time to realize how important opium income was becoming to the Taliban, and there is still a tendency to ignore how important opium is as cause of corruption and income to Afghan power brokers and officials in the Afghan government and security forces.
The Macroeconomics of Narcotics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTRASTING MACROECONOMIC OBSERVATIONS, INCLUDING AND EXCLUDING THE OPIUM ECONOMY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation Including the Opium Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan's 2017 economic growth rate was a robust 7.2%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depending on the level of opium exports, Afghanistan's 2017 merchandise trade deficit may have been between zero and $2.3 billion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan's real growth rate in 2015 was -2.4%. By 2017, it had risen to 7.2%, an average annual growth rate increase of nearly five percentage points.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Any presentation or analysis of Afghanistan’s economic output (and by extension its growth rate) without accounting for the opium trade provides an incomplete picture of the Afghan economy. By value, opium poppy is the most important crop in Afghanistan, generating between $4–6.5 billion of potential exports in 2017—the equivalent of 20–32% of Afghanistan’s licit GDP—according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).460 The drug trade’s impact on the political economy of Afghanistan has been deeply corrosive. Corruption associated with the opium economy undermines state legitimacy and public institutions, particularly in the security and justice sectors.461 Opium production has also directly worked against security goals by financing insurgent groups.462 Nevertheless, from a purely economic perspective, it has also brought significant benefits, supporting Afghanistan’s balance of payments and bolstering aggregate demand (although it does not directly contribute to Afghan government revenues).463 Additionally, from a livelihoods perspective, opium-poppy cultivation can substantially impact rural households through both employment and increased purchasing power.464 According to the UNODC, opium-poppy weeding and harvesting provided up to 365,000 jobs in rural areas in 2017.465 In poppy-growing areas, opium has a strong multiplier effect, creating secondary jobs as farmers accrue capital to spend on food, medical care, and other consumer products.466

While visiting Kabul this quarter, SIGAR’s Research and Analysis Directorate asked USAID’s Office of Economic Growth whether it accounts for opium in evaluating the performance of Afghanistan’s economy. Despite the potential for the inclusion of opium to generate contradictory conclusions about Afghanistan’s growth and trade picture, EOG stated it does not, claiming that opium statistics are speculative.467 But the extent to which opium-related economic figures are actually speculative, relative to other economic data from Afghanistan is debatable. One economic expert on Afghanistan—a former World Bank economist—wrote in 2008, “data on the opium economy are generally no worse, and in many respects better, than the data available on the rest of Afghanistan’s economy.”468 While this statement may be dated, the World Bank readily compares the size of the opium economy with the size of the licit agricultural economy in its most recent (August 2018) macroeconomic update on Afghanistan, implying data-quality equivalency (though again, the Bank does not incorporate the opium economy into its GDP estimates and projections for Afghanistan).469 On the topic of licit economic figures, the IMF said in May 2018, “Data provision has significant shortcomings, hampering evidence-based policy decisions. The national accounts, the BOP, CPI, and inter-sectoral consistency are areas of concern.”470 In other words, poor data quality pervades many areas of the licit macroeconomy.

The opium economy contracted in 2018: due to high levels of supply that resulted in price reductions, income earned by farmers fell from an estimated $1.4 billion in 2017 to just over $600 million in 2018—a 56% reduction, according to the UNODC.471 The UNODC added that the area under opium-poppy cultivation declined by 20% in 2018, year-on-year—a decrease of approximately 65,000 hectares—driven in part by the ongoing drought.472 Nonetheless, the estimated 2018 figure of 263,000 hectares was the second-highest number recorded since systematic monitoring began in 1994.473 Opium, in other words, is not going away. Ultimately, the significance of narcotics to Afghanistan’s economy is far from speculative and is likely to complicate assessments of Afghanistan’s macroeconomy for years to come.

Key UNDOC 2018 Narcotics Survey Results - I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fact sheet – Afghanistan opium survey 2018</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Change from 2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net opium poppy cultivation (after eradication)</td>
<td>328,000 ha (301,000 - 355,000)</td>
<td>-29%</td>
<td>265,000 ha (242,000 - 283,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of poppy free provinces</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of provinces affected by poppy cultivation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eradication</td>
<td>750 ha</td>
<td>-46%</td>
<td>406 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average opium yield (weighted by cultivation)</td>
<td>27.3 kg/ha</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>24.4 kg/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential production of opium</td>
<td>9,000 mt (8,000 -10,000)</td>
<td>-29%</td>
<td>6,400 mt (5,600 - 7,200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average farm-gate price (weighted by production) of fresh opium at harvest time</td>
<td>US$ 131/kg</td>
<td>-42%</td>
<td>US$ 76/kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average farm-gate price (weighted by production) of dry opium</td>
<td>US$ 155/kg</td>
<td>-39%</td>
<td>US$ 94/kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total farm gate value of opium production</td>
<td>US$ 1.4 billion</td>
<td>-56%</td>
<td>US$ 0.6 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Potential opium yield and production decreased in 2018, reducing the potential amount of heroin produced from Afghan opium.

Potential opium production was estimated at 6,400 (5,600 – 7,200) tons in 2018, a decrease of 29% from its 2017 level (9,000 tons). The decrease in production was due to decreases in area under opium poppy cultivation and opium yield per hectare.

The average opium yield in 2018 was estimated at 24.4 kilograms per hectare, which was 11% lower than in 2017. Yields in the Central, Eastern and Northern regions decreased notably by 47%, 29% and 19% respectively. Yields decreased by 8% in the Southern region and remained stable in the Western and North-eastern regions.

The Southern region continued to produce most of the opium in Afghanistan (68% of national production), followed by the Western (11%), Eastern and Northern regions (8% each). The North-eastern and Central regions accounted for 5%.

After accounting for consumption of raw opium in the region of Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, it can be estimated that 5,000 to 5,300 tons of opium are potentially available for heroin production in and outside of Afghanistan. This can potentially yield some 360 to 610 tons of heroin of export quality (between 30 and 70 per cent purity) or 250 to 300 tons of pure heroin base.

At 263,000 hectares, the area under opium poppy cultivation decreased by 20% when compared to 2017. This decrease can be attributed to an heavy drought in the Northern region and parts of the Western region, and possibly to low and decreasing prices in regions less affected by the drought. Remote sensing data of the Northern region and Badghis (Western region) showed that crops failed at major scale in rain-fed land due to less and late rain. Irrigated areas were also affected, since reduced snowfall in the winter restricted the water available for irrigation in spring. The impact of the drought on opium poppy cultivation appeared to be limited in the Southern region. Here the moderate reduction in opium poppy cultivation could be potentially linked to the low and continuously falling opium prices.

The area under opium poppy cultivation remained at very high levels in 2018 (it is the second highest level since beginning of the monitoring), in spite of decreasing prices and a seemingly saturated opium market. Opium poppy has become a crucial component of the Afghan economy that secures the livelihoods of many Afghans who engage in cultivation, work on poppy fields or partake in the illicit drug trade. In rural areas, a considerable share of the population earned income from opium poppy cultivation. In addition to farming households, opium provides daily wage labor to many local and migrant workers hired by farmers. In 2017, opium poppy weeding and harvesting provided for example the equivalent of up to 354,000 full-time jobs to rural areas.

With viable alternatives lacking, many communities— not only farmers— have become dependent on the income from opium poppy to sustain their livelihoods. Afghan farmers continue to grow opium poppy at large scale, even with prices at an all-time low (after adjusting for inflation). This indicates the degree of dependence and the lack of better alternatives to opium poppy.

The continuing improvement of agricultural productivity also plays a role, including the use of solar panels for powering irrigation pumps and fertilizers and pesticides, which may have made opium poppy cultivation increasingly profitable even under unfavorable natural conditions and falling prices. Solar panels for irrigation seem to have replaced diesel pumps in many areas. These panels require a sizable initial investment but have lower running costs than diesel-powered pumps.

There is, however, no single explanation for these continuing high levels of opium poppy cultivation. The multiple drivers are complex and geographically diverse, as many elements continue to influence farmers’ decisions regarding opium poppy cultivation. Rule of law-related challenges, such as political instability, lack of government control and security, as well as corruption, have been found to be among the main drivers of illicit cultivation. Socio-economic drivers also impact farmers’ decisions. Scarcity of employment opportunities, lack of quality education and limited access to markets and financial services continue to contribute to the vulnerability of farmers towards opium poppy cultivation.
UNDOC Map of Major Opium Production Areas in 2018

Control of Narcotics Production

While insurgent activity and high-activity districts account for the majority of opium-poppy cultivation, SIGAR found that only 40% of opium poppy was cultivated in insurgent activity or high-insurgent districts in 2017; this rose to 48% of opium-poppy cultivation in 2018.\textsuperscript{815}

According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, Afghanistan has approximately 7.3 million hectares of irrigated or rain-fed agricultural land suitable for cultivating annual crops such as wheat or opium poppy, among others.\textsuperscript{816} RS-defined district control data from October 2018 indicates that most agricultural land is in government-influenced districts (145 districts, 2.66 million hectares), followed by contested (138 districts, 2.20 million hectares), government-controlled (74 districts, 1.14 million hectares), insurgent activity (38 districts, 960 thousand hectares), and high insurgent activity districts (12 districts, 374 thousand hectares).\textsuperscript{817}

If opium-poppy cultivation were spread evenly across agricultural areas, one would expect that the amount of opium poppy cultivated should be highest in government-influenced districts and lowest in high insurgent activity districts because of the disparity in their respective land areas. However, SIGAR found that most opium poppy is cultivated in contested districts (71,973 hectares), followed by insurgent activity (64,481 hectares), high insurgent activity (59,449 hectares), and at the bottom, government-influenced (54,557 hectares), and government-controlled districts (12,130 hectares).\textsuperscript{818}

The mismatch between expected opium-poppy cultivation and measured opium-poppy cultivation can be explained by the intensity in which high insurgent activity districts cultivate opium poppy. Figure 3.48 on shows that at least 21% of the agricultural area in high insurgent activity districts was planted with opium poppy during the 2018 opium-poppy season. In contrast, only about 1% of the agricultural area in government-controlled districts was sown with opium poppy during the same time period. The remaining control types (insurgent activity, 9%; contested, 4%; and government-influenced, 4%) fall between these two extremes.\textsuperscript{819}

In short, the agricultural economy in high insurgent activity districts is about 21 times more specialized in opium-poppy cultivation than in government-controlled districts. The cause of this difference is unknown, but likely factors may include security or governance tactics used on all sides, the more rural character of insurgent districts, and varying types of control along the opium-supply chain (opium-poppy cultivation versus opium export).\textsuperscript{820}

\textbf{Note:} Percentages are unweighted averages.

Location of Narcotics Production Relative to Control and Influence

Note: The district map was adapted from the 2012 Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office (AGCHO) shapefile that included 399 districts. Adjustments, some approximate, were made to data for districts that were whole in AGCHO’s 399 district set but that were split in RS’s 407 district set. See R.L. Helms, District Lookup Tool, https://arcg.is/1bOjQv accessed 10/14/2018, for differences amongst district sets. This year, UNODC recognized a total of 406 districts in comparison to RS’s 407 districts. Efforts were made to fit UNODC districts and cultivation data into RS’s districts in the following manner: UNODC recognizes but RS does not recognize Baghlan and Baghlan-i-Jadeed (RS includes Baghlan in Baghlan-i-Jadeed). Ghormach in Farah (RS recognizes Ghormach in Badghis), Kohistan in Kapisa (unable to locate Kohistan; district ignored because it had no opium-poppy cultivation), Ali Kahl and Shamul in Paktia (ignored due to zero opium-poppy cultivation in Paktia), and Hisa-i-Duwumi in Panjshir (ignored due to zero opium-poppy cultivation in Panjshir). UNODC does not recognize but RS does recognize Marjah in Helmand (UNODC opium-poppy cultivation data split evenly between RS’s Nad Ali and Marjah), Dand in Kandahar (all UNODC opium-poppy cultivation data accounted for in RS’s Dand instead of Kandahar District), Bad Pash in Laghman (ignored due to zero opium-poppy cultivation in Mehtar Lam from which Bad Pash was separated in 2011), Deiaram in Nimroz (a municipality formerly recognized as part of Khash Rod, ignored due to its urban environment), Mizakah in Paktia (ignored due to zero opium-poppy cultivation in Paktia), Abshar in Panjshir (ignored due to zero opium-poppy cultivation in Panjshir), Chinaru in Urugzan Province (broken off of Tarin Kot, due to the prevalence of agriculture in RS’s Tarin Kot, all UNODC opium-poppy cultivation estimates remained in RS’s Tarin Kot). In addition to UNODC opium-poppy cultivation estimates and RS-defined district control data, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization’s (FAO) 2010 Land Cover Database of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was used to determine total district-level irrigated and rainfed agricultural area. To produce the map, SIGAR used ArcGIS Pro 2.2, all layers were projected to UTM 42N, and hectares of opium-poppy cultivation were divided by total district agricultural area to derive a percent of district agriculture devoted to opium-poppy cultivation. The percent of opium-poppy cultivation was then symbolized using the quantile method which produces an approximately equal number of observations per class to facilitate comparative analysis, but the interval of the class must therefore be variable.

*Dishu District in the south of Helmand Province registered a seemingly impossible 132% of agriculture devoted to opium-poppy cultivation. This anomaly is most likely due to a rapid increase in total agricultural area between 2010, when FAO collected its land cover data, and 2018 when UNODC recorded their most recent opium-poppy cultivation estimates. Because the percentage of agriculture devoted to opium-poppy in Dishu was approximately 47% higher than the next highest intensity district, Dishu District was excluded from averages. But Dishu opium-poppy and agricultural land area were included in total area calculations.

Source: SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, Reconstruction Update, January 30, 2019, pp. 185.
The Civil “Threat” and Key Causes of Instability – Incompetent, Divided, and Corrupt Governance
The Civil “Threat” and Causes of Instability - Governance

The rise of violent extremism in the Islamic world has many causes, but it is clear that a close correlation exists between broad failures in governance, economics, and coping with population growth; and the emergence of large-scale violence, and a shift from terrorism to insurgency. Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan are all case examples.

Ideology, religion, leadership, and politics are all important additional causes, and there is no convincing way to weight the relative impact of any given cause or even to provide useful metrics in some cases. However, the following structural causes of instability – ones that help define the term “failed state” – have clearly been important factors in causing the collapse of various governments and shaping the rise of violence and extremism:

- Sectarian, Ethnic, Tribal discrimination, and violence
- Charismatic, competent violent opposition leader(s)/groups
- Repression and failed authoritarian rule.
- Dysfunctional democracy and civil political structures.
- Excessive/clumsy/abusive use of force -- state terrorism
- Corrupt and ineffective structures of governance and government services.
- Failed rule of law, justice system, basic law enforcement and social order.
- Gross poverty, economic injustice, failure to develop and modernize, lack of reform. Near economic collapse, inflationary crisis.
- Unemployment pressure, lack of stable career options, population pressure.
- Alienation of youth, middle class.
- Rising violence makes the most violent side the “winner.”
- Urban instability, violence

It is all too easy to focus on the latest short-term political or military crisis in cases like Afghanistan, focus on religion or culture in an broad sense, or assume that suppressing terrorism or insurgency will bring stability. There is also a natural tendency to “demonize” the insurgents, and “sanctify” the host country government, and to support military campaigns with favorable estimates of civil progress.
It is important to recognize, however, that Afghanistan has not had any lasting period of political stability, effective Governance, or economic development since the King’s cousin, Daoud Khan, overthrew King Mohammed Zahir Shah in July 1973 – nearly 46 years ago.

It is equally important to recognize that the Afghan government did not become communist because of a Soviet invasion. Afghanistan had its own communist coup when the Afghan military carried out the Saur revolution in April 1978, and Nur Muhammed Taraki became the head of state. The Soviet invasion in December 1979 only came this communist dictatorship became so repressive and extreme that it triggered a major counter coup, and another Afghan communist, Hafizullah Amin, overthrew and killed Taraki in September 1979.

The end result was a period of devastating civil conflict that lasted from 1979 to 1996. While Russia withdrew in 1989, and the “communist” Najibullah regime collapsed in 1992, the result was to bring power brokers and warlords to power who engaged in their own civil wars. These battles between warlords further crippled every aspect of Afghan governance and development and produced estimates of some 550,000 to two million dead between 1979 and 1992.

The rise of the Taliban, and its first major successes in 1994, were followed by its taking Kabul in 1996. The Taliban not, however, then still had to fight a civil war. It did not take control of the entire country by the time the U.S. invaded in 2001, made no progress in economic development, and was as repressive as the Saur, Taraki/Amin, Najibullah and warlord regimes. By the time the Taliban regime fell in December 2001, Afghanistan had now been governed by three radically different types of regime and had been in a continuous state of civil war for 23 years.

The efforts from 2001 onwards to create a more modern, peaceful, and democratic Afghan government have had some successes, but also many critical failures. A new Afghan constitution created a political system with a dominant president and a legislature with too little power and control over the country’s money to be effective – as well as a legislature that had little real responsibility to its constituencies. Local and regional power brokers, surviving warlords, ethnic factions, and gross levels of corruption crippled efforts at progress, divided the country, and left it open to a return by the Taliban.

There were many Afghan politicians and officials that did attempt serious and honest reform – including President Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah. However, corruption and a failed election process left serious doubt about the resulting legitimacy of each successive election. The resulting divisions in Afghan politics, and response to this corruption, created the divided government that still rules and has now stayed in office years longer than its elected term. It also helps explain why a long series of reform pledges and plans -- and anti-corruption efforts -- have produced some successes, but have only had a limited overall impact.

The World Bank metrics in this section clearly show this lack of overall progress in governance since 1996, and highlight the lack of progress since 2001. The Asia Foundation polling metrics show the lack of popular confidence in the
government, and confirm the rising popular resentment of the government’s gross overall corruption. SIGAR metrics show the continuing role of power brokers and warlords – and the previous metrics have shown the level of national dependence on narco-trafficking.

The corruption metrics are particularly important because high ratings of corruption in developing states throughout the world have proved to be seem to be a good indicator of the probability that extremist, terrorism, and insurgents will become a serious problem, although the links between correlation and causation are unclear.

What is less obvious is the impact of the long series of poorly coordinated post-Taliban efforts to create an effective rule of law; and a mix of Afghan military, national police, and local police that could offer justice, conflict resolution, and security. The previous metrics showing the extreme turbulence and instability in U.S. aid efforts highlight these problems to some degree, but the chronology of such efforts – and even the metrics issued at the time – is so complex and poorly documented that it is hard to summarize.

What is clear from the metrics in previous sections is that truly serious efforts to create Afghan security force did not get serious funding in country until 2008 – after the Taliban return. This funding then crashed the next year – only to suddenly peak in 2011 in ways where actual delivery in terms of in-country progress could not have an impact until nearly 2014 – after massive U.S. and allied force cuts.

The metrics in the section on Afghan forces that use NTM-A briefing materials developed under Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, IV -- the first commander of NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and who served from November 2009 to October 2011 -- raise other key issues that are all too easy to forget. They show that the U.S. and other ISAF nations did begin to properly man the Afghan forces train and assist effort until 2010, and that major gaps in the quality and quantity of trainer still exist in 2011 – some ten years after U.S. intervention.

As the SIGAR data point out – and as SIGAR has reported in depth in previous Quarterly reports, there still is no stable or adequate training program for Afghan police and local forces. The critical problems in Afghan governance are compounded by erratic efforts to create effective Afghan security forces.
Civil Reasons why Secularism Fails and Ideological Extremism Rises in Heavily Islamic States

• Sectarian, Ethnic, Tribal discrimination, and violence
• Charismatic, competent violent opposition leader(s)/groups
• Repression and failed authoritarian rule.
• Dysfunctional democracy and civil political structures.
• Excessive/clumsy/abusive use of force -- state terrorism
• Corrupt and ineffective structures of governance and government services.
• Failed rule of law, justice system, basic law enforcement and social order.
• Gross poverty, economic injustice, failure to develop and modernize, lack of reform. Near economic collapse, inflationary crisis.
• Unemployment pressure, lack of stable career options, population pressure.
• Alienation of youth, middle class.
• Rising violence makes the most violent side the “winner.”
• Urban instability, violence
Afghanistan: Failed Governance

The Inner, thicker blue line shows the selected country’s percentile rank on each of the six aggregate governance indicators. The outer, thinner red lines show the indicate margins of error.


Afghan Perceptions of Government

**FIG. 5.1: Q-52.** Thinking of the different levels of government in Afghanistan, do you think that overall the [insert item] is doing a very good job, a somewhat good job, a somewhat bad job, or a very bad job? (a) Provincial government; (b) Government ministers; (c) Government officials; (d) Community shuras/jirgas; (e) Media; (f) NGOs; (g) Religious leaders; (h) Parliament; (i) Provincial councils; (j) Your member of parliament.

**FIG. 5.2: Q-52.** Thinking of the different levels of government in Afghanistan, do you think that overall the [insert item] is doing a very good job, a somewhat good job, a somewhat bad job, or a very bad job? What is your opinion of the Provincial government?

**FIG. 5.3: Q-51.** I would like to ask you about some officials, institutions, and organizations. As I read out each, please tell me how much confidence you have in them to do their jobs. Do you have a lot, some, not much, or no confidence at all?

Asia Foundation, Survey of the Afghan People, 2018, [https://www.transparency.org/country/AFG](https://www.transparency.org/country/AFG), pp. 113-115
Afghan Perceptions of Corruption

PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION AS A PROBLEM IN AFGHANISTAN

PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION AS A PROBLEM IN DAILY LIFE

EXPERIENCES WITH CORRUPTION, BY INSTITUTION

In January 2019, the DoS declined to certify to the U.S. Congress that the Afghan government was pursuing an effective counter-corruption agenda. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 requires the Secretary of State to certify that the government of Afghanistan is meeting certain good-governance conditions prior to obligation of Economic Support Fund and International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funding in Afghanistan. Among the conditions are the requirement that the Afghan government is “effectively implementing a whole-of-government, anti-corruption strategy that has been endorsed by the High Council on Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption...and is prosecuting individuals alleged to be involved in corrupt or illegal activities in Afghanistan.”

In a memorandum describing its decision not to grant the certification, the DoS stated that although the Afghan government had taken some steps to combat corruption, it was not effectively implementing a whole-of-government anti-corruption strategy, nor was it doing enough to prosecute corrupt individuals. The memorandum cited several reasons for the decision including: President Ghani’s dismissal of the acting director of the Major Crimes Task Force; the failure of the government to execute outstanding anti-corruption warrants; and President Ghani’s appointment of former Herat Governor Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani to the upper house of Parliament, shielding Nuristani from arrest on corruption charges.

Although the DoS declined to certify Afghanistan’s counter-corruption efforts, it will, via a waiver to the legal certification requirement, disburse the related funding to the Afghan government.

The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that there was limited improvement at the Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC), Afghanistan’s anti-corruption court. The DoS stated that this quarter was the court’s most productive to date, with seven cases tried. Since the court’s inception, the ACJC has secured 158 convictions against defendants including 8 deputy ministers and 15 general officers. In January 2019, the ACJC convicted former Deputy Minister of Finance Abdul Razaq Wahidi and seven other defendants of misuse of authority for actions committed during Wahidi’s tenure at the Ministry of Finance. The ACJC acquitted one defendant and sentenced Wahidi to three years and the remaining defendants to between one-and-a-half to four-and-a-half years in prison.

However, the DoS and DoD advisors who advise the Afghan government continue to report significant weaknesses in the Afghan government’s counter-corruption initiatives. CSTC-A rule of law advisors reported a “lack of political will to investigate and prosecute high-level corruption cases.” They said that warrant execution remains a problem across all Afghan government agencies. Defendants sentenced by the ACJC have frequently evaded their punishment, and the Afghan government has often declined to enforce ACJC sentences. The DoS said it did not know how many of the ACJC sentences were enforced by the Afghan government but noted that all 109 individuals registered in the ACJC case management system as convicted and sentenced to prison terms had been subsequently reported incarcerated by Afghan authorities.

“Kabulstan” versus Afghanistan: Power Brokers

Powerbrokers, Politics, and Security Afghanistan has a long history of powerbrokers who control government and security in various parts of the country. Even with a central government in Kabul, powerbrokers remain a key feature of Afghanistan’s political life and security structure. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported to the DoD OIG that powerbroker activities “primarily revolve around cooperation and support for the political process as a means of leverage to benefit their individual illicit activities and political goals.”... These individuals, who include current members of parliament, national government leaders, and regional leaders, may shape the outcome of the upcoming presidential elections, scheduled to take place in July 2019. The DIA assessed that powerbrokers are weaker than they were 4 years ago, “but remain powerful enough to challenge Kabul’s authority.”...

Powerbrokers can also affect security because of their connection to regional militias. These militias include local protection forces for ethno-tribal or criminal interests, forces that cooperate with the Afghan government to provide local security, and units that are fully integrated into the ALP. In September 2018, Resolute Support assessed that 70 ALP personnel nationwide were working for powerbrokers, down from 219 the previous quarter....

The assassination of Kandahar police chief Abdul Raziq on October 18 highlighted the role that powerbrokers can play in regional stability and instability. The Afghan government postponed elections in the province amid fear that Raziq’s death would create a power vacuum. Similarly, in July, President Ghani arrested the leader of a pro-government militia commander in Faryab province, sparking violence and protests. The commander was aligned with 1st Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum, who recently formed a political alliance to oppose President Ghani in the upcoming election. The crisis, USFOR-A said, “degraded ANDSF operations in the area and likely contributed in part to successful Taliban attacks in the Northwest.”...

Source: Adapted from Lead Inspector General, OPERATION FREEDOM’S SENTINEL, LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS, OCTOBER 1, 2018–DECEMBER 31, 2018, pp. 31-32.
Lead IG Commentary on Afghan Elections

Presidential Election Rescheduled for September 2019
In March, Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission (IEC) postponed the presidential election from July 20, to September 28, 2019. The IEC said that the delay was necessary to give the commission more time to organize the ballot and address identified problems from the October 2018 parliamentary elections. This is the second time that the presidential election has been delayed. In December 2018, the IEC moved the date of the election from April to July 2019.

During the quarter, the Afghan government and the international community took steps to attempt to address the many problems that occurred during the parliamentary elections in October 2018. In particular, many observers faulted the IEC for poorly executing the election, including problems with the development of voter lists, use of biometric identification machines, and coordinating with the ANDSF to ensure security. The full results of the election still had not been finalized or released as of the end of the quarter. In February, President Ghani dismissed all 12 IEC commissioners and members of the Electoral Complaints Commission. That month, the Afghan Attorney General’s office prosecuted 313 people accused of elections-related violations and was investigating all of members of the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission in charge of the 2018 election. By March 1, the government reconstituted the electoral commissions with new members. The DoS told the DoS OIG that the new commissioners are focused on finalizing the results of the October 2018 election and planning for the September 2019 presidential election.

Also in February, President Ghani approved amendments to the electoral law, including a new system to appoint members of the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission, new regulations for the use of technology in elections, and amended vetting requirements for district- and village-level candidates. While these amendments address some of the concerns from the October parliamentary elections, they do not provide certainty that the new IEC members will be more capable than their predecessors in organizing the 8 million-person voter roster or ensuring security of the elections.

U.S. and international organizations are also supporting the Afghan government and the IEC in preparing for the presidential elections. The DoS reported to the DoS OIG that it provides funding to the UN Electoral Support Project, which is reviewing the previous election and tailoring its assistance to help the Afghan election authorities overcome identified deficiencies in the elections process. USAID reported to the USAID OIG that the agency would support the presidential elections through funding of international initiatives, including the UN Electoral Support Project.

USAID will also continue to provide financial support to its Strengthening Civic Engagement in Elections initiative, which supports civil society organizations that monitor Afghan elections. USAID reported that it fielded 6,500 domestic observers for the October 2018 parliamentary elections through this program.

USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that it is using lessons learned from its review of the October 2018 elections as it supports the ANDSF in its security planning for the presidential elections. In particular, USFOR-A is advising the ANDSF as it undertakes joint planning with the IEC for election-related security operations. USFOR-A reported that the ANDSF is not making significant changes to its security plans, but will seek to improve its operations in line with the lessons learned from the October elections.

The number of Afghans who were newly displaced by conflict in Afghanistan during the quarter declined compared to the previous quarter and compared to the same period the previous year, as shown in Figure 6. Approximately 62,000 people were newly displaced in Afghanistan during the quarter, in addition to the 668,000 people who were displaced in 2018.230 The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) projected that these figures will decline to approximately 500,000 new IDPs by the end of 2019, a 25 percent reduction from last year’s levels.

Afghans continued to return from Iran and Pakistan in the first three months of 2019, but their numbers are declining compared to the previous year. Approximately 800,000 people returned to Afghanistan in 2018 from nearby countries, primarily Iran, where devaluation of the Iranian currency led to a shortage of employment opportunities for Afghans.232 During the quarter, 96,000 Afghans returned from Iran, compared to more than 150,000 during the same quarter one year ago. OCHA projects that the decline in returnees from Afghanistan will continue, estimating that the number of returnees from Iran will drop by more than 200,000 people in 2019.233 In contrast, the number of returnees from Pakistan is expected to rise, but by only 14,000 people.234

As the numbers of IDPs and returnees declined during the quarter, OCHA projected that humanitarian needs in Afghanistan will increase in 2019. OCHA projected that that 6.3 million Afghans will require humanitarian assistance in 2019, nearly double the number from 2018. Of these people, 3.6 million are projected to suffer emergency levels of food insecurity, up from 1.9 million reported in the previous year.235 As of April 7, 2019, the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan was 12 percent funded ($71.5 million out of $611.8 million requested).
The Civil “Threat” and Key Causes of Instability – Economics and “Poverty”
The Civil “Threat” and Causes of Instability – Economics and “Poverty”

The data on Afghan economics and poverty -- key possible reasons why Afghans become alienated from the governance or become insurgents -- are uncertain. Some U.S. government reporting also seems to have deliberately exaggerated Afghan progress, and in credited aid and the Afghan government with effects that were largely the result of lower levels of civil conflict.

The metrics that follow, however, still provide a broad indication of just how serious Afghanistan’s problems remain in spite of aid, and a long series of reform plans and pledges. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest and least developed states in the world.

The CIA World Factbook stated in May 2019, that,

Despite improvements in life expectancy, incomes, and literacy since 2001, Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid. Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Corruption, insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and the Afghan Government's difficulty in extending rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth. Afghanistan's living standards are among the lowest in the world. Since 2014, the economy has slowed, in large part because of the withdrawal of nearly 100,000 foreign troops that had artificially inflated the country’s economic growth.

The international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, pledging over $83 billion at ten donors' conferences between 2003 and 2016. In October 2016, the donors at the Brussels conference pledged an additional $3.8 billion in development aid annually from 2017 to 2020. Even with this help, Government of Afghanistan still faces number of challenges, including low revenue collection, anemic job creation, high levels of corruption, weak government capacity, and poor public infrastructure.

In 2017 Afghanistan's growth rate was only marginally above that of the 2014-2016 average. The drawdown of international security forces that started in 2012 has negatively affected economic growth, as a substantial portion of commerce, especially in the services sector, has catered to the ongoing international troop presence in the country. Afghan President Ashraf GHANI Ahmadzai is dedicated to instituting economic reforms to include improving revenue collection and fighting corruption. The government has implemented reforms to the budget process and in some other areas. However, many other reforms will take time to implement and Afghanistan will remain dependent on international donor support over the next several years.
As for poverty, World Bank field teams no longer have access to much of the country, but concluded earlier that poverty began to rise again from 2008 onwards. Continuing refugee and displacement into urban areas with higher costs and few jobs has almost certainly made the problem worse.

Formal poverty levels can also be a misleading indication of unrest or instability since the truly poor and subsistence workers face major problems in leaving their farms or jobs. The same can be true of the unemployed, although this may benefit the Afghan forces – which often are the only employment available to many young Afghan men. (Some reporting indicates that the Taliban and other insurgent groups seem to be able to offer better pay than the Afghan forces). Employed young men, particularly those with poorly paid employment and career opportunities– particularly young people – may actually to be more demanding, easier to radicalize, and have the resources to becoming active threats.

Four other problems affect these data and metrics:

- First, pledges of reform and development are not actual reform and development, and forecasts based on such plans and pledges notoriously go unmet. Only real progress counts. No one can eat, wear, or live in plans or promises.
- Second, far too many assessments of Afghan economic progress are based on estimates that do not involve active data collection in the field except for government budget data and international payments data.
- Third, development plans and economic and poverty data are only reported in broad national terms. They It does not address the differences by ethnicity, sect, tribe, region, or class that can feed extremism. terrorism, and insurgency – or a failure to actively support the government.
- Fourth, these issues are further compounded by a failure to address and quantify the practical realities of corruption, and the extent to which it leads to the failure of development, rises in cost, and the need for educated and skilled workers to become “corrupt” as a critical part of the pay and privileges in given positions and jobs.
In December, 25 AAF aircraft, mostly Mi-17 helicopters, were not usable. The AAF had 9 A-29 light attack aircraft based in the United States for pilot training, in addition to 12 usable A-29s in Afghanistan. However, the AAF has not been able to train enough pilots to keep pace with its rapidly growing fleet. The UH-60 program, for example, has not filled all of its pilot classes due to attrition and lack of candidates, USFOR-A said. The DoD said that because the initial fielding of the UH-60s occurred nearly two years earlier than initially planned, the throughput of pilot candidates initially lagged the pace of aircraft fielding. In addition, some UH-60 pilots who were in the United States for training went AWOL. The DoD has ended U.S.-based training for rotary wing pilots and is conducting it in other locations.

Training of MD-530 pilots is also unable to keep pace with projected expansion due to low numbers of pilot candidates. The A-29 pilot training program, conducted at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, is training a sufficient number of pilots, USFOR-A said. Continued pilot production will depend on full program resourcing as it transfers to Afghanistan by
Like the data on unemployment, poverty data could be a key indicator of the causes of extremism, terrorism, insurgency, and civil conflict. In practice, the data are so bad, so rarely reported, and often so dated that there is no way to tell. (See World Bank, *Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle*, 2018)

Many countries simply do not report. Others report meaninglessly low levels for what seem to be political purposes and to avoid negative public reactions.

A few countries in the attached table—Afghanistan and Yemen—do report what seem to be credible figures, but most estimates are far too low, and are often based on long outdate levels of poverty that do not reflect real world income needs, particularly in urbanized areas or ones dependent on market prices.

These data also present the same problems as the other data shown in this survey. They report nation-wide figures and do not display inequities in income distribution, or by ethnicity, sect, tribe, or region.

### Comparative Poverty Estimates in Countries with Failed State Wars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>CIA (%)</th>
<th>World Bank Extreme Poverty (%)</th>
<th>IMF Multi-Dimensional Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Afghanistan</td>
<td>54.5% (2017)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>56.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Algeria</td>
<td>23% (2006)</td>
<td>0.4% (2017)</td>
<td>2.11% (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Egypt</td>
<td>27.8% (2016)</td>
<td>1.4% (2015)</td>
<td>5.22% (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Iran</td>
<td>18.7% (2007)</td>
<td>0.4% (2014)</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Iraq</td>
<td>23% (2014)</td>
<td>2.2% (2012)</td>
<td>14.6% (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Libya</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>1.97% (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Somalia</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>82.22% (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Yemen</td>
<td>54% (2014)</td>
<td>40.9% (2014)</td>
<td>47.77% (2013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ND= No data. * Poverty level is a real world $7.30 per person. ** CIA rough estimate.
Comparative Human Development Estimates in Countries with Failed State Wars

The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions.

The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age.

The standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita. The HDI uses the logarithm of income, to reflect the diminishing importance of income with increasing GNI. The scores for the three HDI dimension indices are then aggregated into a composite index using geometric mean.

The HDI simplifies and captures only part of what human development entails. It does not reflect on inequalities, poverty, human security, empowerment, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>World Rank</th>
<th>Human Development Score 2017</th>
<th>Change in Ranking 2012-2015</th>
<th>Average Annual HDI Growth 1990-2017 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Afghanistan</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Algeria</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.754</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>0.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Iran</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Iraq</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Libya</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Somalia</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Syria</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tunisia</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.735</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Yemen</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>0.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflecting slow recent growth, poverty has increased significantly, resulting in 55 percent of the population living below the national poverty line in 2016–2017, compared to 38.3 percent in 2012–2013 – an increase of 5 million.

Living standards are also threatened by continued drought conditions, which are negatively impacting wheat harvests, generating food insecurity in many areas of the country.

The displacement crisis also continues, with more than 1.7 million Afghans internally displaced and more than 2 million returning to Afghanistan – mostly from Pakistan and Iran – since 2015.

Few Afghans have access to productive or remunerative employment. A quarter of the labor force is unemployed, and 80 percent of employment is vulnerable and insecure, comprising self- or own account employment, day labor, or unpaid work.

Almost three-quarters of the population are below the age of 30, and roughly 25 percent are between the ages of 15 and 30. This large youth cohort of approximately 8 million is entering the labor market with little education and few employment opportunities.
Economic recovery is slow as continued insecurity is curtailing private investment and consumer demand. Agricultural growth has been constrained by unfavorable weather conditions in the past years. The fiscal position has remained strong, driven by improvements in revenue performance, although the government remains heavily reliant on donor grants.

Poverty has increased amid slow growth, security disruptions to services, and poor agricultural performance due to severe drought. Afghanistan faces numerous political challenges as it fights the insurgency. Presidential elections are due in September 2019. The ongoing direct peace talks between the United States and Taliban has increased hope for an intra-Afghan peace negotiations and peaceful settlement of the 40 years long war, but it has also added uncertainty and concerns among the Afghan people. The process gained some momentum after the Kabul Conference in February 2018 in which President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani made an unconditional offer for negotiations with Taliban, followed by a brief first-ever ceasefire in June. The Government of Afghanistan is hosting a Consultative Loya Jirga in late April 2019 to renew the road map of peace.

...The security situation has worsened. Civilian casualties are at their highest since 2002, with an unprecedented level of conflict-induced displacement. Since 2007, the number of injuries and deaths has increased five-fold, and in 2016 and 2017, more than 1.1 million Afghans were internally displaced due to conflict. Between January – December 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded 3,804 civilian. UNAMA attributed 37 percent of civilian casualties to Taliban, 20 percent to Daesh, while unidentified anti-government elements have been called responsible for six percent of the civilian casualties. The return of almost 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees, primarily from Pakistan and Iran during 2016-2017 remains a huge pressure on the country’s economy and institutions. Internal displacement and large-scale return within a difficult economic and security context poses risks to welfare, not only for the displaced, but also for host communities and the population at large, putting pressure on service delivery systems and increasing competition for already scarce public services and economic opportunities.

The Government of Afghanistan continues to pursue its ambitious reform agenda. On 27–28 November 2018, the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan was co-hosted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United Nations. Delegates from 61 countries and 35 international organizations, and representatives of civil society, the private sector and the media attended in the conference. Participants at the conference renewed their partnership and cooperation for Afghanistan’s peace, prosperity and self-reliance. The conference was held between two pledging conferences: the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (2016) and the next pledging conference expected to be held in 2020.

In October 2016, the government presented the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. At the conference, attended by representatives of around 70 countries and 30 international organizations, development aid of $3.8 billion per year was committed.

Recent Economic Developments

In Afghanistan output growth has slowed to an estimated 1.0 percent in 2018, down from 2.7 percent in the previous year. The decline was because of: a severe drought that affected wheat production and livestock pasture and, heightened political uncertainty and election-related violence, which dampened business confidence. Despite the lower agriculture output, inflation remained moderate at 0.6 percent on average in 2018, due to lower regional food prices and appreciation of exchange rate against major trading partners.
Poverty is estimated to have increased and deepened. The severe drought resulted in lower income for rural households and large internal displacement in the country. The rate of economic growth lagging population growth, leading to declining per capita incomes. The drought negatively impacted livelihoods of many of the 82 percent of the poor living in rural areas, including those reliant on poppy cultivation (poppy production declined by 30 percent). Reflecting widespread hardship, drought-induced displacement reached record levels of 298,000 individuals.

Weaker exports and a moderate increase in imports have widened the trade deficit to around 35.9 percent of GDP in 2018. Nominal exports, after strong growth of 28 percent in 2017, declined by four percent in 2018, potentially reflecting a strengthening of the Afghani against trade partner currencies and economic disruption in important neighboring economies. Imports increased by 0.7 percent, led by a strong increase in vegetable imports. The current account narrowed, reflecting the widening trade deficit and declining grants. Aid flows almost entirely financed the trade deficit.

Fiscal management remained strong. An overall fiscal surplus of around 0.7 percent of GDP was achieved in 2018. Despite slow growth, domestic revenues reached a record high of Afs 189.7 billion, an increase of 12 percent from 2017 levels. Strong revenue growth was supported by improved tax administration, with estimated arrears collection of Afs 10.5 billion and a surge in non-tax revenues. Budget execution increased from 83 percent in 2017 to 92 percent in 2018, with the development budget execution rate reaching 93 percent.

Reflecting high levels of uncertainty, credit-to-the-private sector declined by four percent in 2018 and is now equal to just three percent of GDP. The credit intermediation function of the banking system has remained extremely weak, with private sector credit equal to just 12.8 percent of bank assets in 2018. Excess liquidity of banks reached 63 percent of total bank assets. The central bank has recently taken action to facilitate access to credit, including expanding the list of eligible collateral and the coverage of the Public Credit Registry.

Few Afghans have access to productive or remunerative employment. A quarter of the labor force is unemployed, and 80 percent of employment is vulnerable and insecure, comprising self- or own account employment, day labor, or unpaid work. Almost three-quarters of the population are below the age of 30, and roughly 25 percent are between the ages of 15 and 30. This large youth cohort of approximately 8 million is entering the labor market with little education and few employment opportunities. A natural consequence of the poor security situation and limited development resources, job creation has been unable to keep up with population growth, and good jobs are few and far between.

Though increasing over time, just over half (54 percent) of young Afghans are literate. Labor force participation rates of young Afghan women are particularly low due to higher rates of inactivity and unemployment. Young Afghans (age 15–24) have a high unemployment rate of 31 percent, while 42 percent are neither in employment, education, or training. Progress with education is threatened by the security situation. The net attendance rate in secondary education fell from 37 percent to 35 percent between 2013 and 2016, driven by declining attendance among girls.

**Economic Outlook**

Growth in 2019 is expected to remain sluggish but slightly recover, largely due to improved weather conditions. Growth in the industry and service sectors will remain subdued amidst continued political uncertainty surrounding the upcoming presidential elections, discussions over continued international security support, and a potential peace agreement with the Taliban. Over the medium-term, growth is projected to gradually accelerate to around 3 percent by 2021, assuming a stable political transition following the presidential election and subsequent improvement in investor confidence.
A slight fiscal deficit is expected in 2019. Revenue mobilization is expected to stall, reflecting: i) exhaustion of revenue potential from measures implemented in 2018, including amnesty programs; and ii) weakening customs revenues in the context of political instability and weakened governance.

The current account is expected to gradually deteriorate over the medium-term, because of declining international grants. A substantial deficit in the range of 4-6 percent of GDP is expected by 2021-22. International reserves are expected to remain at comfortable levels (from the current level of over one year’s import cover down to less than 10 months’ import cover by 2021).

The short-term growth outlook is subject to significant downside risks. Continued violence and political instability could further dampen investment and growth. Election-related disruptions to revenue collection and expenditure discipline could undermine fiscal management and confidence. Any rapid decline in international aid flows would drive difficult fiscal and external adjustments and undermine the capacity of government to maintain basic services. On the other hand, ongoing peace talks may unlock substantial investment and growth if they lead to a comprehensive and sustained improvement in security.

Without accelerated reform and an improved security situation, growth is likely to remain slow with limited progress in reducing poverty from current very high levels. Reforms are required immediately to both improve general investment confidence and mobilize existing economic potential, especially in agriculture and extractives. Continued international assistance in security and development is critical to preserve development gains achieved over the last seventeen years. Clear commitment to sustained support from international partners would help to reduce current levels of uncertainty, supporting increased confidence and investment.

Last Updated: Apr 02, 2019
Afghan Health and Economy – CIA Summary : June 2019

• Despite improvements in life expectancy, incomes, and literacy since 2001, Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid.

• Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs.

• Corruption, insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and the Afghan Government's difficulty in extending rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth.

• Afghanistan's living standards are among the lowest in the world. Since 2014, the economy has slowed, in large part because of the withdrawal of nearly 100,000 foreign troops that had artificially inflated the country's economic growth.

• The international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, pledging over $83 billion at ten donors' conferences between 2003 and 2016. In October 2016, the donors at the Brussels conference pledged an additional $3.8 billion in development aid annually from 2017 to 2020. Even with this help, Government of Afghanistan still faces number of challenges, including low revenue collection, anemic job creation, high levels of corruption, weak government capacity, and poor public infrastructure.

• In 2017 Afghanistan's growth rate was only marginally above that of the 2014-2016 average. The drawdown of international security forces that started in 2012 has negatively affected economic growth, as a substantial portion of commerce, especially in the services sector, has catered to the ongoing international troop presence in the country.

• Afghan President Ashraf GHANIS Ahmadzai is dedicated to instituting economic reforms to include improving revenue collection and fighting corruption. The government has implemented reforms to the budget process and in some other areas. However, many other reforms will take time to implement and Afghanistan will remain dependent on international donor support over the next several years.

Afghan Health and Economy – CIA Factoids: June 2019

Health
• Life expectancy total population: 52.1 years (2018 est.) country comparison to the world: 223 -- lowest in world

• Infant mortality: 108.5 deaths/1,000 live births (2018 est.) Highest in the world: 1

Economic Strains
• $2,000 per capita PPP income (2018) Country comparison to the world: 209 (20th lowest)

• 23.9% unemployment (2017 est.) Country comparison to the world: 194 (23rd worst)

• 54.5% Population below poverty line: (World Bank 55%, $1.90 a day)

Budget Gap:
• revenues: 2.276 billion (2017 est.)

• expenditures: 5.328 billion (2017 est.)

Trade Imbalance
• Exports: $784 million (2017 est.) -- including opium (India & Pakistan)

• Imports: $7.616 billion (2017 est.) – imports 9.7 times exports

Afghanistan: World Bank Ease of Doing Business Rankings:

Better, But Only 167th in the World in 2019

Afghanistan: Conflicting Health Claims – Maternal Mortality

With the status of the battlefield looking grim, American officials say that at least the coalition has improved Afghan living standards — although often they use exaggerated claims there, too. The most blatant example may be maternal mortality, one of the most important indicators of a society’s health. In 2002, American officials reported that 1,600 Afghan mothers died for every 100,000 live births, a rate comparable to Europe during the Middle Ages. By 2010, the United States Agency for International Development said the rate had improved drastically, falling to 327.

Researchers noted that not since the world discovered antibiotics has any nation seen such a big improvement in maternal health. The long-running security and development challenges Afghanistan faces are factored into health researchers’ estimates of maternal mortality. The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group cited a study indicating that 1,575 women died out of 100,000 births in 2010. Other estimates cited by the group put the figure at 885 to 1,600 of 100,000 — meaning that nearly one in a hundred Afghan women will die giving birth. The rate in the United States is 24 in 100,000.
Afghanistan: Conflicting Health Claims – Maternal Mortality

USAID points to a similarly drastic improvement in life expectancy, to 63 years in 2010, up from 41 years in 2002. But the figures were adjusted to ignore a high death rate in early childhood, which skewed results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What U.S. Government Says</th>
<th>What Health Researchers Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63 years</td>
<td>48 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan life expectancy</td>
<td>Afghan life expectancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: USAID (U.S. data, from 2010); World Health Organization (researchers’ data, from 2009)

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, estimated in 2009 that Afghan life expectancy was 48 years. Even the C.I.A. does not agree with USAID’s number, estimating in 2017 that Afghans typically live to age 51.
**Afghanistan: World Bank Poverty Warning I**

**POVERTY IS INCREASING**

Slow down in growth due to political and security transition has been associated with an increase in poverty.

- 39% of Afghans are poor in 2013-14
- up from 36% in 2011-12

1.3 million more poor than in 2011-12.

**INCREASE IN POVERTY DUE TO DETERIORATING SECURITY AND LABOR MARKET CONDITIONS**

- Continuous increase in incidents and civilian casualties associated with conflict
- 3X increase in male unemployment since 2011-12 due to deteriorating security and withdrawal of international forces

**INCREASE IN POVERTY CONCENTRATED IN RURAL AREAS**

- No change in urban poverty while rural poverty increased by 14% in two years, up to 44% in 2013-14.
- Collapse of service sector employment and consequent reduction off farm employment options for the poor.

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World Bank, Rahimi, Ismail; Redaelli, Silvia, Afghanistan poverty status update : progress at risk (Vol. 2) : Infographics (English), May 2, 2017
Afghanistan: A Labor Market Crisis

JOBS WERE LOST DURING THE TRANSITION PHASE

- Slow down in growth has been accompanied by deteriorating labor market conditions:
  - 1.92 million unemployed in 2013-14
  - 3x increase in rural areas
  - 2x increase in urban areas

JOBS CRISIS ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING FOR YOUTH

- 1 in 2 unemployed Afghans is 14 to 24 years old.
- 500,000 male youth are unemployed, 2/3 live in rural areas

COLLAPSE OF SERVICE SECTOR IN RURAL AREAS

- 76% of jobs destroyed were in the rural service sector
- 4 out of 5 of the jobs that were created between 2007-08 and 2011-12 were lost by 2013-14

URBAN/RURAL DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION

- Male youth who are unemployed have different education profile depending on where they live:
  - Majority in rural areas has no education
  - Majority in urban areas has higher education

Afghanistan: World Bank Poverty Warning III

**Education Outcomes at Risk**

**INCREASED CONFLICT RESULTED IN LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

- Attendance rates fell from 56% in 2011-12 to 54% in 2013-14.

**CONFLICT KEEPS CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL, PARTICULARLY GIRLS IN RURAL AREAS**

- Girls have difficulty attending school due to conflict.
- Children in rural areas are falling behind.

**POOR CHILDREN MORE LIKELY TO BE OUT OF SCHOOL**

- School attendance: non-poor vs. poor.
  - 62% vs. 48%.

**Attendance increased for non-poor by 1.8% from 2011-12 to 2013-14**

**but decreased by 6% for poor children**

USAID’s Strategy for Afghanistan

USAID Country Development and Cooperation Strategy Focuses on Private Sector and Exports

In September 2018, USAID released its first Country Development and Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) for Afghanistan. The CDCS is USAID’s overarching strategy for programming to support Afghanistan’s path to becoming more inclusive, economically viable, and self-reliant. USAID’s previous strategy in Afghanistan, the USAID/ Afghanistan Plan for Transition 2015-2018, focused on Afghan-led sustainable development and expanding sustainable agriculture-led economic growth. The CDCS for Afghanistan emphasizes private sector and export-led economic growth. USAID has 34 programs, totaling approximately $1.277 billion, which support this CDCS objective, including programs that emphasize trade shows, a carpet export center, agricultural development and marketing, and livestock.

USAID told the USAID OIG that its assistance to Afghan firms in fiscal year 2018 resulted in approximately $278 million in export deals. USAID assistance to Afghan firms during the quarter resulted in more than $23 million in export deals. In addition, USAID reported that Afghan exports by air (excluding exports by ground) increased from 267 tons in January 2018 to 1,028 tons in November 2018.

On balance, USAID’s export promotion efforts have been insufficient in improving Afghanistan’s trade deficit. The International Monetary Fund reported that exports—by both ground and air—totaled only $891 million in 2018 compared to $7.4 billion in imports. The World Bank reported that trade deficit increased to 35.9 percent of GDP in 2018; the trade deficit was almost entirely financed by international assistance. According to World Bank data, Afghanistan’s projected economic growth of 3 percent for 2019 does not match Afghanistan’s population growth, especially among youth who are in need of employment.

Afghan exporters faced an additional hurdle during the quarter when Pakistan closed its airspace on February 27, 2019, following escalating tensions with India, causing Afghanistan and India to seek other routes for the export and import of products. As a result, trade transaction costs increased, affecting the economies of both countries. Pakistan reopened its airspace for most flights on March 27, 2019.

The Civil “Threat” and Key Causes of Instability: Demographic Pressures and the “Youth Bulge”
The Civil “Threat” and Causes of Instability – Demographics and the Youth Bulge

Population pressure, the number of young men and women seeking jobs and that are satisfied with them, and the high ratio of dependents in countries with young populations are three key indicators of a nation’s success or failure. Polls show that security, employment, and corruption are also key indicators of popular support for governments, and may well be key warning indicators of the potential radicalization of young men.

The Afghan metrics in this section sound such a warning. They show that in spite of its long history of war, Afghanistan still has acute population pressure, and one of the largest “youth bulges” in the world. These metrics also help illustrate some of the pressures to move out of rural areas and into urban areas, and the motive to either join the security forces as the only available form of employment – or to join the Taliban or ISIS if they pay more or offer both pay and more local security.

Finally, these data need to be put in the practical context of why young (or any) Afghans should be satisfied with the quality and level of their government. It is one thing to read about reform plans at a distance. It is another to live with the actual lack of progress on the scene.
Afghan Population and Internal Divisions

Ethnic groups: Ethnic groups starting with the largest Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, other (includes smaller numbers of Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Pashai, and Kyrgyz) (2015). Current statistical data on the sensitive subject of ethnicity in Afghanistan are not available, and ethnicity data from small samples of respondents to opinion polls are not a reliable alternative; Afghanistan's 2004 constitution recognizes 14 ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, and Pashai

Religions: Muslim 99.7% (Sunni 84.7 - 89.7%, Shia 10 - 15%), other 0.3% (2009 est.)

Languages: listed in rank order based on prevalence, starting with the most-spoken language, include Afghan Persian or Dari (official) 77% (Dari functions as the lingua franca), Pashto (official) 48%, Uzbek 11%, English 6%, Turkmen 3%, Urdu 3%, Pashayi 1%, Nuristani 1%, Arabic 1%, Balochi 1% (2017 est.) Shares sum to more than 100% because there is much bilingualism in the country and because respondents were allowed to select more than one language. The Turkic languages Uzbek and Turkmen, as well as Balochi, Pashayi, Nuristani, and Pamiri are the third official languages in areas where the majority speaks them

Source: Adapted from the CIA World Factbook database as of 3.5.19 and NGIA and GAO material

- 78% more growth between 2019 and 2050.

### Demographic Overview - Custom Region - Afghanistan

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Midyear population (in thousands)</td>
<td>8,150</td>
<td>9,829</td>
<td>12,431</td>
<td>15,044</td>
<td>13,568</td>
<td>19,445</td>
<td>22,491</td>
<td>26,335</td>
<td>29,121</td>
<td>32,564</td>
<td>35,780</td>
<td>41,117</td>
<td>45,665</td>
<td>54,717</td>
<td>63,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate (percent)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>-5.9</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fertility</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate (births per woman)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Births (in thousands)</strong></td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>1,153</td>
<td>1,093</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>1,256</td>
<td>1,327</td>
<td>1,383</td>
<td>1,386</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>1,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mortality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (years)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 births)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths (in thousands)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net migration rate (per 1,000 population)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>-82</td>
<td>-51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net number of migrants (in thousands)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>-1,235</td>
<td>-695</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-1,017</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>-95</td>
<td>-49</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Information: Afghanistan

Afghan Urbanization: World Bank

CIA: urban population: 25.5% of total population (2018); rate of urbanization: 3.37% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)
Population of Kabul is 4.01 million out of total population of 34.94-37.05 million in July 2018. The second-largest city is Kandahar, with less than 400,000 people.

World Bank: Afghanistan is undergoing a rapid urban transition. While the current share of its population living in cities is comparatively low (25.8 percent in 2014 compared to 32.6 percent across South Asia), Afghanistan’s urbanization rate is among the highest in the region. Jun 21, 2017

Here are 10 key findings for Afghanistan made in a World Bank report:

• Afghanistan’s urban population grew by almost 4.5 percent a year between 2000 and 2010. Within the region, only Bhutan and Maldives experienced faster growth rates of urban population.

• Much of Afghanistan’s urban population growth has been attributable to natural growth rather than rural-urban migration. As a consequence, the share of the population living in officially classified urban settlements has been growing at a much slower pace of just over 1.2 percent a year between 2000 and 2010.

• As of mid-2014, there were, according to UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates, 683,000 people internally displaced by conflict in Afghanistan, more than half of which were living in urban areas.

• In 2010, 27.6 percent of Afghanistan’s urban population lived below the national poverty line, while, in 2005, almost 89 percent of the urban population lived in slums.

• An analysis of nighttime lights data shows that Afghanistan experienced growth in urban area of almost 14 percent a year between 1999 and 2010, the fastest in the South Asia region. Urban area grew at more than three times the speed of urban population, suggesting an increasing prevalence of lower-density sprawl. The existence of sprawl, poverty and slums reflects messy urbanization.

• According to the Agglomeration Index, an alternative measure of urban concentration, the share of Afghanistan’s population living in areas with urban characteristics in 2010 was 29.4 percent. This compares to an urban share of the population based on official definitions of urban areas of 23.2 percent, suggesting the existence of at least some hidden urbanization.

• In Afghanistan, as in Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan, the shift out of agriculture has been associated with a large decline in the proportion of GDP derived from manufacturing. This implies that urbanization in Afghanistan since 2000 has been led by services rather than by manufacturing -- something of a departure from expected trends based on the historical experiences of today’s developed nations.

• Afghanistan’s expanding urban population presents it with a considerable affordable housing challenge. In the best case scenario in which urban population density remains constant, meeting this challenge will require expanding the amount of developable urban land by 6,959 km\(^2\) – or just over 350 percent – between 2010 and 2050.

• Analysis of World Health Organization outdoor air pollution in cities data reveals that, from a global sample of 381 developing-country cities, 19 of the 20 with the highest annual mean concentrations of PM\(_{2.5}\) are in South Asia. Kabul has the most polluted air amongst Afghan cities in the sample, with an annual mean concentration of 86 mg/m\(^3\), which is higher than the recorded annual mean concentration for Beijing.

• Afghanistan completed its last census in 1979, and that was a partial count. A lack of data hampers rigorous descriptive analysis of urbanization and related economic trends for the country.

## Afghanistan: Population 0-24 Years of Age and Dependency ratio: 1950-2050

### Youth Pressure on Total Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Both Sexes Population</th>
<th>Male Population</th>
<th>Female Population</th>
<th>Percent Both Sexes</th>
<th>Percent Male</th>
<th>Percent Female</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>14,778,266</td>
<td>7,538,888</td>
<td>7,239,378</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>104.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>18,975,565</td>
<td>9,655,145</td>
<td>9,320,420</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>103.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>22,303,139</td>
<td>11,335,684</td>
<td>10,967,455</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>103.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>26,391,583</td>
<td>13,409,453</td>
<td>12,982,130</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>103.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2040</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>29,509,248</td>
<td>14,996,229</td>
<td>14,513,019</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>103.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2050</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>31,262,668</td>
<td>15,894,542</td>
<td>15,368,126</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>103.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CIA Estimate as of 2018

**Age structure:**
- 0-14 years: 40.92% (male 7,263,716 / female 7,033,427)
- 25-54 years: 30.68% (male 5,456,305 / female 5,263,332)
- 55-64 years: 3.95% (male 679,766 / female 699,308)
- 65 years and over: 2.61% (male 420,445 / female 491,085)

**Dependency ratios:**
- Total dependency ratio: 88.8 (2015 est.)
- Youth dependency ratio: 84.1 (2015 est.)
- Elderly dependency ratio: 4.7 (2015 est.)
- Potential support ratio: 21.2 (2015 est.)

Afghanistan: Youth Bulge (15-24 years of age) and Employment

The Afghanistan economy struggles to create enough jobs to accommodate its fast growing labor force. Slowdown in economic growth has focused attention on Afghanistan’s chronic excess of labor. With a fertility rate steadily above five children per woman, Afghanistan has the fastest growing population, the highest dependency rate, and the biggest "youth bulge" in South Asia. Afghanistan's demographic profile poses tremendous challenges to public finances and the labor market. In particular, high dependency rates squeeze private savings, which hampers investment and growth while straining spending on social services, notably health and education. In the labor market, an estimated 400,000 jobs need to be created every year to accommodate new workers; this is a daunting challenge in the absence of economic growth and with constrained budgets for public investment.

The Total Fertility Rate in Afghanistan is 5.3 children per woman (DHS, 2015). Together with Timor-Leste, Afghanistan remains the only country outside Africa where the TFR is above 5 children per woman (UNDESA 2015). According to UNDESA (2015), Afghanistan is endowed with the third largest youth bulge in the world, after Uganda and Chad, as more than one fifth of the population is aged between 15 and 24. The Afghan population is expected to double in size from 28.4 million in 2010 to 56.5 million in 2050. It is estimated that, even under optimistic growth and labor-intensity of growth scenarios, the Afghan labor market will not be able to match labor supply growth until 2027.

"Unemployment" and "poor economy" are the biggest problems cited by Afghans in the most recent opinion polls. Evidence supports these perceptions of a bleak labor market. According to ALCS data, in 2013-14, 22.6 percent of the Afghan labor force was unemployed. Almost one in every four people participating in the labor market, or 1.9 million individuals, are either working less than eight hours per week or do not have a job and are actively looking for one.

Unemployment was particularly severe among youth (27.9 percent) and women (36.8 percent). Nationwide, almost half of the unemployed are below the age of 25 (45.6 percent), reflecting Afghanistan's struggle to create jobs for its growing labor force amidst the economic recession that accompanied the transition phase.

As of 2013-14, approximately 877 thousand youth were unemployed; two-thirds were young men, about 500 thousand, and four in five of these unemployed young men lived in rural areas (Figure 14).

There are stark differences in the education profiles of unemployed youth; while unemployed male youth in urban areas are more likely to be educated-54 percent have secondary education or above-the opposite holds in rural areas, where 54 percent of unemployed male youth have no formal education and 37.1 percent are illiterate.