



**Congressional  
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

---

# Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy

July 18, 2019

**Congressional Research Service**

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R45818



## Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy

Afghanistan has been a significant U.S. foreign policy concern since 2001, when the United States, in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led a military campaign against Al Qaeda and the Taliban government that harbored and supported it. In the intervening 18 years, the United States has suffered approximately 2,400 military fatalities in Afghanistan, with the cost of military operations reaching nearly \$750 billion. Congress has appropriated approximately \$133 billion for reconstruction. In that time, an elected Afghan government has replaced the Taliban, and most measures of human development have improved, although Afghanistan's future prospects remain mixed in light of the country's ongoing violent conflict and political contention.

R45818

July 18, 2019

**Clayton Thomas**  
Analyst in Middle Eastern  
Affairs

Topics covered in this report include:

- **Security dynamics.** U.S. and Afghan forces, along with international partners, combat a Taliban insurgency that is, by many measures, in a stronger military position now than at any point since 2001. Many observers assess that a full-scale U.S. withdrawal would lead to the collapse of the Afghan government and perhaps even the reestablishment of Taliban control over most of the country. Taliban insurgents operate alongside, and in periodic competition with, an array of other armed groups, including regional affiliates of Al Qaeda (a longtime Taliban ally) and the Islamic State (a Taliban foe and increasing focus of U.S. policy).
- **U.S. military engagement.** The size and goals of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan have evolved over the course of the 18-year war, the longest in American history. Various factors, including changes in the security situation and competing U.S. priorities, have necessitated adjustments. While some press reports indicate that the Trump Administration may be considering at least a partial withdrawal, U.S. officials maintain that no decision has been made to reduce U.S. force levels.
- **Regional context.** Afghanistan has long been an arena for, and victim of, regional and great power competition. Pakistan's long-standing, if generally covert, support for the Taliban makes it the neighbor whose influence is considered the most important. Other actors include Russia and Iran (both former Taliban foes now providing some measure of support to the group); India (Pakistan's main rival); and China.
- **Reconciliation efforts.** U.S. officials have long contended that there is no military solution to the war in Afghanistan. Direct U.S.-Taliban negotiations, ongoing since mid-2018, on the issues of counterterrorism and the presence of U.S. troops could offer greater progress than past efforts. However, U.S. negotiators caution that the Taliban's continued refusal to negotiate with the Afghan government could preclude the stated U.S. goal of a comprehensive settlement.
- **Afghan governance and politics.** Afghanistan's democratic system has achieved some success since its post-2001 establishment, but corruption, an evident failure to provide sufficient security and services, and infighting between political elites has undermined it. The unsettled state of Afghan politics complicates ongoing efforts to negotiate a settlement: the presidential election has been postponed twice and is now scheduled for September 2019.
- **U.S. and foreign assistance.** Military operations have been complemented by large amounts of development assistance; since 2001, Afghanistan has been the largest single recipient of U.S. aid. Most of that assistance has been for the Afghan military (a trend particularly pronounced in recent years), but aid has also supported efforts to build Afghan government capacity, develop the Afghan economy, and promote human rights.

# Contents

Purpose and Scope.....	1
Overview .....	2
U.S. Military Operations .....	3
September 11 and Start of Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2009) .....	3
Obama Administration: “Surge” and Drawdown (2009-2014).....	5
Bilateral Accords: Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) .....	7
Resolute Support Mission (2015-Present).....	8
Alterations to the Drawdown Schedule and Rules of Engagement .....	8
Developments during the Trump Administration.....	9
Security Dynamics: The Taliban and Other Armed Groups.....	11
Taliban Insurgency.....	11
Haqqani Network.....	14
Islamic State-Khorasan Province.....	15
Al Qaeda .....	16
Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).....	17
Regional Dimension .....	19
Pakistan .....	19
Iran .....	22
India .....	24
Russia.....	24
China.....	26
Persian Gulf States .....	27
Multilateral Fora.....	28
Reconciliation Efforts.....	28
Afghan Government Initiatives.....	28
U.S.-Taliban Talks.....	30
Developments under the Trump Administration.....	31
Afghan Governance and Politics .....	32
Constitution and Political System .....	32
Politics of Ethnicity and Elections .....	33
Aid, Economic Development, and Human Rights .....	37
U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan .....	37
Aid Conditionality and Oversight.....	38
Other International Donors and Multilateral Trust Funds.....	39
Economic and Human Development.....	40
Infrastructure.....	41
Agriculture .....	42
Mining and Gems.....	43
Oil, Gas, and Related Pipelines.....	43
Education .....	44
Trade .....	44
General Human Rights Issues .....	44
Status of Women .....	45
Religious Freedoms and Minorities .....	47

Human Trafficking.....	47
Outlook.....	48

## Figures

Figure 1. Afghanistan at a Glance .....	1
Figure 2. U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan.....	11
Figure 3. Control of Districts in Afghanistan Jan. 2016 to Jan. 2019 .....	12
Figure 4. Insurgent Activity in Afghanistan by District .....	13
Figure 5. Map of Ethnicities in Afghanistan (2003).....	34
Figure 6. U.S. Funding for Reconstruction and Related Activities by Category.....	38
Figure 7. SIGAR: Cumulative Contributions to ARTF, LOTFA, and NATO ANA TF .....	40

## Tables

Table C-1. SIGAR Assistance FY2002-FY2019 (\$million).....	55
--	----

## Appendixes

Appendix A. Historical Timeline, 1747-2001 .....	51
Appendix B. Soviet War in Afghanistan.....	53
Appendix C. U.S. Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan (SIGAR).....	55

## Contacts

Author Information.....	58
-------------------------	----

## Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this report is to provide information and analysis for Congress on Afghanistan and the nearly two-decade U.S. project there. Topics covered include U.S. military engagement and security dynamics; the regional context; reconciliation efforts; Afghan politics and governance; foreign assistance; and social and economic development. Supplementary materials, including a historical timeline and background on the Soviet war in Afghanistan, are included as appendices. This information is meant to provide background and context for lawmakers as they consider administration budget requests, oversee U.S. military operations and aid programs, and examine the U.S. role in South Asia and the world. For a more frequently updated treatment of current events in Afghanistan and developments in U.S. policy, refer to CRS Report R45122, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief*, by Clayton Thomas.

**Figure I. Afghanistan at a Glance**



<b>General</b>	Area: 652,230 sq. km. (251,827 sq. mile), slightly smaller than Texas
<b>People and Society</b>	<p>Population: 34,940,837 (July 2018 est.)</p> <p>Languages: Dari (official) 77%, Pashto (official) 48%, Uzbek 11%, English 6%, Turkmen 3%, Urdu 3%, others (e.g., Pashayi, Nuristani, Balochi), 1% (2017 est. of most widely spoken languages; shares sum to more than 100% because there is much bilingualism in the country and respondents were allowed to select more than one.)</p> <p>Religions: Muslim 99.7% (Sunni 84.7 - 89.7%, Shia 10 - 15%), other 0.3% (2009 est.)</p> <p>Median Age: 19 years</p> <p>Life expectancy: Male: 50.6 years Female: 53.6 years (2018 est.)</p> <p>Infant mortality rate (per 1000 births): 108.5 (2018 est.)</p> <p>Maternal mortality rate: 396 deaths per 100,000 live births (2015 est.)</p> <p>Adult literacy: 38.2% (2015 est.) Male: 52%, Female: 24.2%</p>

<b>Economy</b>	<p>GDP: growth rate: 2.7% (2017 est.) per capita: \$2,000 (2017 est.)</p> <p>Unemployment: 23.9% (2017); Youth: 17.6% (2017)</p> <p>Population below the poverty line: 54.5% (2017 est.)</p> <p>Exports: \$784 million (2017 est.); India 56.5%; Pakistan 29.6%; commodities: fruits and nuts, carpets, wool, cotton, precious and semi-precious gems</p> <p>Imports: \$7.2 billion (December 2017 est.); China 21%, Iran 20.5%, Pakistan 11.8%, (2017); commodities: machinery and other capital goods, food, textiles, petroleum products</p>
----------------	---

**Source:** Graphic created by CRS. Fact information from CIA World Fact Book.

## Overview

The U.S. and Afghan governments, along with partner countries, remain engaged in combat with a robust Taliban-led insurgency. While U.S. military officials maintain that Afghan forces are “resilient” against the Taliban,<sup>3</sup> by some measures insurgents are in control of or contesting more territory today than at any time since 2001.<sup>4</sup> The conflict also involves an array of other armed groups, including active affiliates of both Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS, ISIL, or by the Arabic acronym *Da'esh*).

Since early 2015, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led mission in Afghanistan, known as “Resolute Support Mission” (RSM), has focused on training, advising, and assisting Afghan government forces. Combat operations by U.S. counterterrorism forces, along with some partner forces, have increased since 2017. These two “complementary missions” make up Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS).<sup>5</sup>

Simultaneously, the United States is engaged in a diplomatic effort to end the war, most notably through direct talks with Taliban representatives (a reversal of previous U.S. policy). In January 2019, U.S. and Taliban negotiators

### By the Numbers: U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>

**15,000:** Current U.S. troop level (8,475 as part of NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, remainder counterterrorism)

**898,696:** Total number of U.S. troops deployed since 2002 (as of March 2018)

**2,419:** U.S. military fatalities (including 10 to date in 2019)

**\$133 billion:** Total U.S. reconstruction spending since FY2002

**\$5.4 billion:** U.S. foreign assistance in FY2018 (including \$4.7 billion in ASFF, \$500 million in ESF, and \$95 million in INCLE)

**\$745 billion:** Cost of U.S. military operations since 2002

**\$46.3 billion<sup>2</sup>:** FY2019 request for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS)

<sup>1</sup> Figures from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports, media accounts, and Pentagon data. Cost of Afghanistan military operations figure from the Department of Defense (DOD) Cost of War report as of December 31, 2018. ASFF is Afghanistan Security Forces Fund; ESF is Economic Support Fund; INCLE is International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement.

<sup>2</sup> The Administration’s FY2020 budget requests \$18.6 billion in direct war costs for OFS, and \$35.3 billion in “Enduring Theater Requirements and Related Missions,” though it is not clear how much of that latter figure is for Afghanistan versus operations or activities elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> Lolita C. Baldor and Matthew Pennington, “Attack in Afghanistan is Reminder of Formidable Task,” *Washington Post*, October 20, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 30, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> “Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Quarterly Report to Congress, July 1 to September 30, 2018,” Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, November 19, 2018.

reached a draft framework, in which the Taliban would prohibit terrorist groups from operating on Afghan soil in return for the eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces, though lead U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad insists that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.”<sup>6</sup> As of July 2019, negotiations do not directly involve representatives of the Afghan government, leading some Afghans to worry that the United States will prioritize a military withdrawal over a complex political settlement that preserves some of the social, political, and humanitarian gains made since 2001. A major complicating factor underlying the negotiations is the unsettled state of Afghan politics; Afghanistan held inconclusive parliamentary elections in October 2018 and the presidential election, originally scheduled for April 2019, has been postponed until September 2019. The Afghan government has made some notable progress in reducing corruption and implementing its budgetary commitments, but faces domestic criticism for its failure to guarantee security and prevent insurgent gains.

The United States has spent more than \$132 billion in various forms of reconstruction aid to Afghanistan over the past decade and a half, from building up and sustaining the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to economic development. This assistance has increased Afghan government capacity, but prospects for stability in Afghanistan still appear distant. Some U.S. policymakers hope that the country’s largely underdeveloped natural resources and geographic position at the crossroads of future global trade routes might improve the economic life of the country, and, by extension, its social and political dynamics. Nevertheless, in light of the ongoing hostilities Afghanistan’s economic and political prospects remain uncertain at best.

## U.S. Military Operations

### September 11 and Start of Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2009)

On September 11, 2001, the United States suffered a series of coordinated terrorist attacks executed by the Islamist terrorist group Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda leadership was based in Afghanistan and protected by the Taliban government that ruled most of that country (see textbox below). U.S. President George W. Bush articulated a policy that equated those who harbor terrorists with terrorists themselves, and asserted that a friendly regime in Kabul was needed to enable U.S. forces to search for Al Qaeda members there.

#### Taliban: Rise to Power

In 1993-1994, Afghan Islamic clerics and students, mostly of rural, Pashtun origin, formed the Taliban movement. Many were former anti-Soviet fighters known as *mujahideen* who had become disillusioned with conflict among *mujahideen* parties that arose after the Soviet withdrawal and who had moved into Pakistan to study in Islamic seminaries (“madrassas”) mainly of the conservative “Deobandi” school of Islam.<sup>7</sup> Taliban practices were also consonant with conservative Pashtun tribal traditions. The Taliban’s leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, had been a *mujahideen* fighter during the Soviet occupation, though the party with which he was affiliated was generally seen as moderately Islamist at that time. Like Omar, most of the senior figures in the Taliban regime were Ghilzai Pashtuns, one of the major Pashtun tribal confederations; most modern Afghan rulers have been from the Durrani tribal confederation.

The Taliban viewed the post-Soviet government of Burhanuddin Rabbani as weak, corrupt, and anti-Pashtun. The four years of civil war between the *mujahideen* groups (1992-1996) created popular support for the Taliban as they

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Constable and Paul Sonne, “U.S.-Taliban Talks Appear Closer to Pact after Marathon Negotiations in Qatar,” *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> The Deobandi school began in 1867 in a seminary in Uttar Pradesh, in British-controlled India, that was set up in reaction, in part, to British colonial administration and educational system.

were seen as less corrupt and more able to deliver stability.<sup>8</sup> The Taliban began by taking control of the southern city of Kandahar in November 1994 and the movement captured Kabul on September 27, 1996.

The Taliban lost international and domestic support as it imposed strict adherence to Islamic customs in areas it controlled and employed harsh punishments, including public executions, to enforce strict Islamic practices, including bans on television, Western music, and dancing. It prohibited women from attending school or working outside the home, except in health care, and publicly executed some women for alleged adultery. In March 2001 the Taliban blew up the monumental sixth century Buddha statues carved into hills above Bamiyan city, considering them idols.

The Taliban's hosting of Al Qaeda's leadership gradually became the overriding U.S. concern with the Taliban. Omar reportedly forged a political and personal bond with Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who relocated to Afghanistan from Sudan in May 1996. Omar refused U.S. demands to extradite bin Laden. After the August 7, 1998, Al Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the Clinton Administration increased pressure on the Taliban to extradite bin Laden by imposing U.S. sanctions on Afghanistan, achieving adoption of some U.N. sanctions as well, and firing cruise missiles at Al Qaeda training camps in eastern Afghanistan.

On September 14, 2001, in Congress, S.J.Res. 23 (P.L. 107-40), passed 98-0 in the Senate and with no objections in the House, authorized the use of military force, stating that:

[t]he President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 or harbored such organizations or persons in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.

The Administration also sought United Nations (U.N.) backing for military action. On September 12, 2001, the U.N. passed Security Council Resolution 1368, expressing the Council's "readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the September 11 attacks."<sup>9</sup>

When the Taliban refused the Bush Administration's demand to extradite Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the Administration launched military operations against the Taliban to "disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime."<sup>10</sup>

Combat operations in Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001, with the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Initial military operations initially consisted primarily of U.S. air strikes on Taliban and Al Qaeda forces, facilitated by the cooperation between reported small numbers (about 1,000) of U.S. special operations forces and Central Intelligence Agency operatives. The purpose of these operations was to help Afghan forces opposed to the Taliban (led by an armed coalition known as the Northern Alliance) advance by directing U.S. air strikes on Taliban positions. In October 2001, about 1,300 Marines were deployed to pressure the Taliban in the southern province of Kandahar, but there were few pitched U.S.-Taliban battles.

Northern Alliance forces—despite promises that they would not enter Kabul—did so on November 12, 2001, to widespread popular approval.<sup>11</sup> The Taliban subsequently lost the south and east to U.S.-supported Pashtun leaders, including Hamid Karzai. The Taliban regime ended on December 9, 2001, when Taliban head Mullah Omar and other leaders fled Kandahar, leaving

<sup>8</sup> See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> This was widely interpreted as a U.N. authorization for military action in response to the attacks, but it did not explicitly authorize Operation Enduring Freedom or reference Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, which allows for responses to threats to international peace and security.

<sup>10</sup> George W. Bush, Presidential Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> David Rohde, "Taliban Troops Abandon Capital Without a Fight," *New York Times*, November 13, 2001.



it under tribal law. A provisional government was set up (see “Constitution and Political System,” below) and on May 1, 2003, U.S. officials declared an end to “major combat.”

From 2003 to mid-2006, U.S. and international troops (as part of the U.N.-mandated and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, ISAF) trained nascent Afghan forces and fought relatively low levels of insurgent violence with focused combat operations mainly in the south and east.<sup>12</sup> By late 2005, U.S. and partner commanders considered the insurgency mostly defeated and NATO assumed lead responsibility for security in all of Afghanistan during 2005-2006. Those optimistic assessments proved misplaced when violence increased in mid-2006. NATO-led operations during 2006-2008 cleared Taliban fighters from some areas but did not prevent subsequent reinfiltration by the Taliban, nor did preemptive combat and increased development work produce durable success. Taking into account the deterioration of the security situation, the United States and its partners decided to increase force levels.

### **Obama Administration: “Surge” and Drawdown (2009-2014)**

Upon taking office, the Obama Administration declared that the Afghanistan mission was a high priority, but that the U.S. level of effort there would eventually need to be reduced. The Administration convened a 60-day inter-agency “strategy review,” chaired by former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel and co-chaired by then-Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke and then-Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy. In response to that review, President Barack Obama announced a “comprehensive” strategy on March 27, 2009, that would require the deployment of an additional 21,000 U.S. forces.<sup>13</sup>

In June 2009, U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, who headed U.S. Special Operations forces from 2003 to 2008, became the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan. In August 2009, General McChrystal delivered a strategy assessment recommending that the goal of the U.S. military should be to protect the population rather than to search out and combat concentrations of Taliban fighters, warning of the potential for “mission failure” in the absence of a fully resourced, comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy. His assessment stated that about 44,000 additional U.S. combat troops would be needed to provide the greatest chance for success.<sup>14</sup>

The assessment set off debate within the Administration and launched another policy review. Some senior U.S. officials argued that adding many more U.S. forces could produce a potentially counterproductive sense of U.S. occupation.<sup>15</sup> President Obama announced the following at West Point on December 1, 2009:

- 30,000 additional U.S. forces (a “surge”) would be sent to “reverse the Taliban’s momentum” and strengthen the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF); and

---

<sup>12</sup> These included Operation Mountain Viper (August 2003); Operation Avalanche (December 2003); Operation Mountain Storm (March-July 2004); Operation Lightning Freedom (December 2004-February 2005); and Operation Pil (October 2005).

<sup>13</sup> “White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan,” The White House, March 27, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Commander NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan, and U.S. Forces, Afghanistan, “Commander’s Initial Assessment,” August 30, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> See Steve Coll, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America’s Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Penguin Press, 2018), p. 398.

- beginning in July 2011, there would be a transition to Afghan security leadership and a corresponding drawdown of U.S. forces.<sup>16</sup>

The troop surge brought U.S. force levels to 100,000, with most of the additional forces deployed to the south. When the surge was announced, the Afghan Interior Ministry estimated that insurgents controlled 13 of the country's 356 districts and posed a "high-risk" to another 133.<sup>17</sup> The Taliban had named "shadow governors" in 33 out of 34 of Afghanistan's provinces, although some were merely symbolic.<sup>18</sup>

Operations by U.S., NATO, and Afghan forces throughout 2010 and 2011 reduced areas under Taliban control substantially and the transition to Afghan security leadership began on schedule in July 2011. In concert with the transition, and asserting that the killing of Osama bin Laden represented a key accomplishment of the core U.S. mission, President Obama announced on June 22, 2011 that:

- U.S. force levels would fall to 90,000 (from 100,000) by the end of 2011.
- U.S. force levels would drop to 68,000 by September 2012.

In his February 2013 State of the Union message, President Obama announced that the U.S. force level would drop to 34,000 by February 2014, which subsequently occurred. Most partner countries drew down their forces at roughly the same rate and proportion as the U.S. drawdown, despite public pressure in some European countries to more rapidly reduce or end military involvement in Afghanistan. During 2010-2012, the Netherlands, Canada, and France ended their combat missions, but they continued to train the ANDSF until the end of 2014.

On June 18, 2013, NATO and Afghanistan announced that Afghan forces were now taking the lead on security throughout all of Afghanistan. As international forces were reduced in 2014, Afghan and international officials expressed uncertainty about U.S. and partner plans for the post-2014 period.<sup>19</sup> On May 27, 2014, President Obama clarified Administration plans by announcing the size of the post-2014 U.S. force and plan for a U.S. military exit according to the following timeline:

- The U.S. military contingent in Afghanistan would be 9,800 in 2015, deployed in various parts of Afghanistan, consisting mostly of trainers in the NATO-led "Resolute Support Mission" (RSM).
- The U.S. force would decline to about 5,000 by the end of 2016 and consolidate in Kabul and at Bagram Airfield.
- After 2016, the U.S. military presence would be consistent with normal security relations with Afghanistan (about 1,000 military personnel) under U.S. Embassy authority (without a separate military chain of command in country). Their mission would be to protect U.S. installations, process Foreign Military Sales (FMS) of weaponry to Afghanistan, and train the Afghans on that weaponry.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan," The White House Office of the Press Secretary, December 1, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Tait, "Government map shows dire Afghan security picture," Reuters, August 5, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Nick Shifrin, "Intel Official: 'Time Is Running Out' in Afghanistan," ABC News, December 27, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Markey, "Planning for Withdrawal in Afghanistan May Be Smart, But It's Not Wise," *Defense One*, April 15, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," May 27, 2014. Available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/27/statement-president-afghanistan>.

During 2014, the United States and its partners prepared for the end of the ISAF mission. U.S. airpower in country was reduced, ISAF turned over the vast majority of about 800 bases to the ANDSF, and the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) were turned over to Afghan institutions.<sup>21</sup>

### **Bilateral Accords: Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)**

On May 1, 2012, President Obama and then-President Hamid Karzai signed an **Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)** between Afghanistan and the United States.<sup>22</sup> The signing followed a long negotiation that focused on resolving Afghan insistence on control over detention centers and a halt to or control over nighttime raids on insurgents by U.S. forces. In addition to provisions designating Afghanistan as a Major Non-NATO Ally, the agreement committed the two countries to negotiating a **Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)** that would detail the terms of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> The BSA was approved by a *loya jirga* (consultative assembly) called by then-President Karzai in November 2013, though he then refused to sign; the agreement was eventually signed by President Ashraf Ghani as one of his first acts after taking office in September 2014.<sup>24</sup> The BSA was considered as an executive agreement was not submitted for congressional approval.

The BSA governs the United States' post-2014 presence in Afghanistan through the end of 2024 "and beyond" unless terminated by mutual written agreement or by either country with two years' written notice. The agreement does not set (or otherwise refer to) U.S. and partner force levels, but lays out the parameters and goals of the U.S. military mission and provides for U.S. access to Afghan bases. The BSA also stipulates that "the United States shall have the exclusive right to exercise jurisdiction over such [U.S.] persons in respect of any criminal or civil offenses committed in the territory of Afghanistan." The BSA does not commit the United States to defend Afghanistan from attack from another country, but states that "the United States shall regard with grave concern any external aggression or threat" thereof. Some Afghan figures, including Karzai (who remains active in Afghan politics), advocate revising the BSA, but such efforts do not appear to have the support of the current Afghan government.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) consisted of U.S. or partner forces, civilian officials, and international aid workers to help with reconstruction and to extend the writ of the Kabul government. First formed in December 2002, PRTs performed activities ranging from resolving local disputes to coordinating local reconstruction projects, although PRTs in combat-heavy areas focused on counterinsurgency. During his presidency, Karzai consistently criticized the PRTs as holding back Afghan capacity-building and repeatedly called them "parallel governing structures."

<sup>22</sup> For the text of this agreement, see <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/196855.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> For the text of this agreement, see <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/244487.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> The SPA replaced an earlier, more limited strategic partnership agreement established on May 23, 2005, when President Karzai and President Bush issued a "joint declaration." The declaration provided for U.S. forces to have access to Afghan military facilities to prosecute "the war against international terror and the struggle against violent extremism." Karzai's signing of the declaration was supported by a consultative *jirga* in Kabul in May 2005. The *jirga* supported an indefinite presence of international forces to maintain security but urged Karzai to delay a firm decision to request such a presence.

<sup>25</sup> Ankit Panda, "Afghan Chief Executive: US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement Here to Stay," *Diplomat*, September 27, 2018.

## Resolute Support Mission (2015-Present)

The NATO-led ISAF ended at the close of 2014, and was replaced by Resolute Support Mission (RSM) on January 1, 2015. The legal framework for NATO's presence is based on a Status of Forces Agreement signed between the Afghan government and NATO in September 2014 and ratified by the Afghan parliament in November 2014.<sup>26</sup> That agreement defines RSM as a “non-combat training, advising and assistance mission,” though combat operations by some U.S. forces, in support of Afghan forces, continue.

### NATO Contribution

The current train, advise, and assist mission in Afghanistan, Resolute Support Mission (RSM), is led by NATO, and NATO partners have been heavily engaged in Afghanistan since 2001. At its height in 2012, the number of NATO and non-NATO partner forces reached 130,000, around 100,000 of whom were American. As of June 2019, RSM is made up of around 17,100 troops from 39 countries, of whom 8,475 are American. This represents an increase of about 3,000 troops from NATO and other partner countries. At the NATO summit in July 2018, NATO leaders extended their financial commitment to Afghan forces to 2024 (previously 2020), a commitment NATO reaffirmed in June 2019.<sup>27</sup>

## Alterations to the Drawdown Schedule and Rules of Engagement

Concerns about Taliban gains after 2015 led to several changes to the U.S. mission in the final two years of the Obama Administration.

- On March 24, 2015, in concert with the visit to Washington, D.C. of President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, President Obama announced that U.S. forces would remain at a level of about 9,800 for all of 2015, rather than being reduced to 5,500 by the end of the year, as originally announced.
- In January 2016, the Obama Administration authorized U.S. commanders in Afghanistan to attack the local Islamic State affiliate, Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP, more below) forces.
- In June 2016, President Obama authorized U.S. forces to conduct preemptive combat. According to then-Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter on July 12, 2016, U.S. forces were enabled to “anticipate battlefield dynamics and ... deploy and employ their forces together [with the ANDSF] in a way that stops a situation from deteriorating [or] interrupts an enemy in the early stages of planning and formulating an attack.”
- On July 6, 2016, President Obama again adjusted planned U.S. force levels, stating that the level would drop to 8,400 at the end of 2016, rather than to the 5,500 that was previously announced.
- The communique of the NATO summit in Warsaw, Poland (July 8-9, 2016), announced that other NATO countries would continue to support RSM beyond

<sup>26</sup> The text of this agreement is available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_116072.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_116072.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>27</sup> Brussels Summit Declaration, issued July 11, 2018; “NATO Reaffirms Commitment To Support Afghan Forces,” *Tolo News*, June 4, 2019.

2016, both with force contributions and donations to the ANDSF (the latter until 2020).<sup>28</sup> No force or budget levels were specified in the declaration.

## Developments during the Trump Administration

In a national address on August 21, 2017, President Donald Trump announced a “new strategy” for Afghanistan and South Asia. Despite expectations that he would describe specific elements of his new strategy, particularly the prospects for additional troops, President Trump declared “we will not talk about numbers of troops or our plans for further military activities.”<sup>29</sup> Some policymakers characterized the strategy as “short on details” and serving “only to perpetuate a dangerous status quo.”<sup>30</sup> Others welcomed the decision, contrasting it favorably with proposed alternatives such as a full withdrawal of U.S. forces (which President Trump conceded was his “original instinct”) or heavy reliance on contractors.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond additional troops, the strategy also gave broader authority for U.S. forces to operate independently of Afghan forces and “attack the enemy across the breadth and depth of the battle space,” expanding the list of targets to include those related to “revenue streams, support infrastructure, training bases, [and] infiltration lanes.”<sup>32</sup> This was exercised in a series of operations, beginning in fall 2017, against Taliban drug labs. These operations, often highlighted by U.S. officials, sought to degrade what is widely viewed as one of the Taliban’s most important sources of revenue, namely the cultivation, production, and trafficking of narcotics.<sup>33</sup> Some analysts have questioned the impact of these strikes, which ended in late 2018.<sup>34</sup>

### U.S. Force Levels and Recent Congressional Action

Since 2001, U.S. military personnel levels in Afghanistan have evolved, due to a combination of changes in U.S. strategy, operational demands, and the Afghanistan security situation. **Figure 2** illustrates the levels of deployed uniformed U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan between October 2001 and present.

The size of the NATO-led military presence in Afghanistan peaked at around 130,000 international troops, of which nearly 100,000 were American, between 2010 and 2012. Scheduled drawdowns under the Obama Administration (many of which were delayed or otherwise altered) brought the number of U.S. forces to about 11,000 by January 2017.<sup>35</sup> At a February 2017 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, then-U.S. commander General John Nicholson indicated that the United States had a “shortfall of a few thousand” troops that, if filled, could help break the “stalemate.”<sup>36</sup> In June 2017, President Trump delegated to then-Secretary of Defense Mattis

<sup>28</sup> Warsaw Summit Communique, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 9, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the debate around the merits of revealing troop levels, see Jon Donnelly, “Analysis: Why Won’t Trump Discuss Troop Numbers?” *CQ News*, August 23, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Kheel, “Dems: Trump ‘has no strategy’ for Afghanistan,” *The Hill*, August 21, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, “Sending more troops to Afghanistan is a good start,” *Long War Journal*, August 21, 2017; Philip Rucker and Robert Costa, “‘It’s a hard problem’: Inside Trump’s decision to send more troops to Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, August 21, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Defense Press Briefing by General Nicholson via teleconference from Kabul, Afghanistan, November 20, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan estimated in a February 6, 2018, Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing that 65% of Taliban revenues are derived from narcotics.

<sup>34</sup> Kyle Rempfer, “Doubts Rise Over Effectiveness of Bombing Afghan Drug Labs,” *Military Times*, February 5, 2018. In November 2018, the United Nations reported that the total area used for poppy cultivation in 2018 was 263,000 hectares, the second-highest level recorded since monitoring began in 1994. “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, November 19, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Helene Cooper, “U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed,” *New York Times*, August 30, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Statement for the record by General John W. Nicholson, Commander, U.S. Forces – Afghanistan before the Senate

the authority to set force levels, reportedly limited to around 3,500 additional troops; Secretary Mattis signed orders to deploy those additional personnel in September 2017.<sup>37</sup> With the increase to in-country U.S. forces, most observers and analysts put the total number of U.S. troops in the country at around 14,000, though U.S. commanders and media reports sometimes cite a figure of 15,000.

Official troop level data has been unavailable since the Trump Administration stopped publishing information about troop deployments in Afghanistan and other conflict zones starting with the December 30, 2017 quarterly report from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC).<sup>38</sup> Some Members of Congress have since engaged with administration officials at hearings, written letters to administration officials, and introduced legislative measures that would require the Secretary of Defense to rescind the decision to withhold information, but DMDC quarterly reports, as well as other U.S. government releases, still lack deployment data for Afghanistan (as well as Syria and Iraq).<sup>39</sup>

Some reports from late 2018 and early 2019 indicated that President Trump may be contemplating ordering the withdrawal of some U.S. forces from Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> Still, U.S. officials maintain that no policy decision has been made to reduce U.S. force levels. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, legislation has been introduced both supporting and opposing such moves:

- In February 2019, the Senate passed S. 1, which includes language (Section 408) warning against a “precipitous withdrawal” of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and Syria.<sup>41</sup>
- In March 2019, S.J.Res. 12, the “AFGHAN Service Act,” was introduced and would, among other provisions, require the removal of all U.S. forces from Afghanistan within a year of enactment.
- In April 2019, H.R. 2060, the “Ensuring a Secure Afghanistan Act,” was introduced, among other provisions, to prohibit the use of funds to reduce the number of U.S. forces below 10,000 unless the Director of National Intelligence certifies to Congress that various conditions have been met, including the Taliban’s disavowal of Al Qaeda and commitment to protect women’s rights.

---

Armed Services Committee on the Situation in Afghanistan, February 9, 2017.

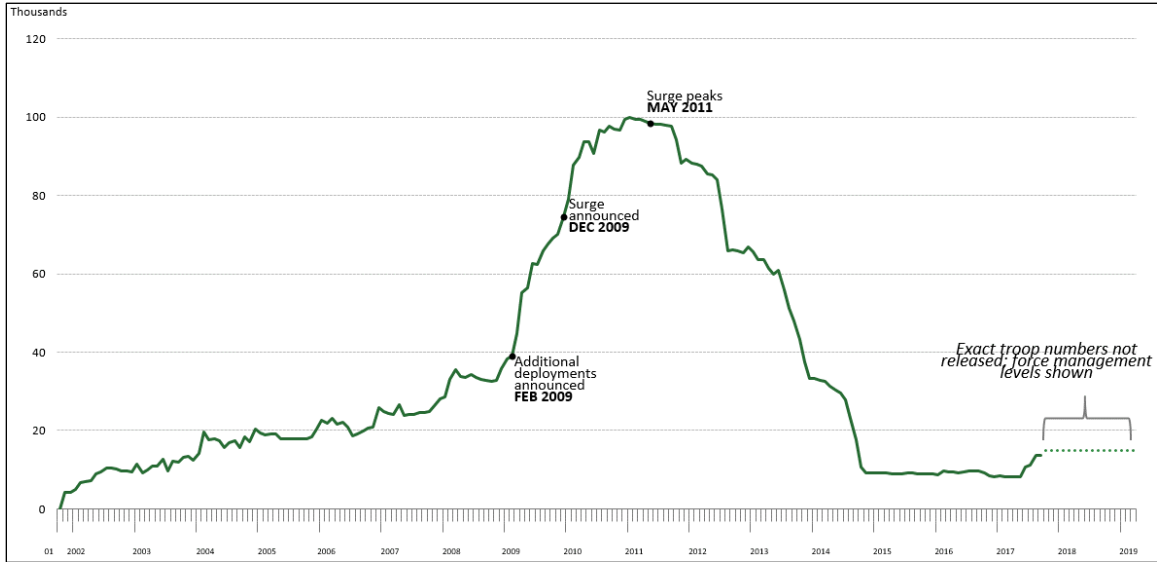
<sup>37</sup> Tara Copp, “Mattis Signs Orders to Send about 3,500 More US Troops to Afghanistan,” *Military Times*, September 11, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> As of September 30, 2017, the last month for which data for Afghanistan was provided, the total number of active duty and reserve forces in Afghanistan was 15,298. Defense Manpower Data Center, *Military and Civilian Personnel by Service/Agency by State/Country Quarterly Report*, September 2017.

<sup>39</sup> David Welna, “Pentagon Questioned Over Blackout On War Zone Troop Numbers,” NPR, July 3, 2018; see also House Rules Committee Amendment 255 to H.R. 5515, submitted May 21, 2018 (not made in order).

<sup>40</sup> Dan Lamothe and Josh Dawsey, “Trump Wanted a Big Cut in Troops in Afghanistan. New U.S. Military Plans Fall Short,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Zengerle, “Senate Breaks from Trump with Syria Troops Vote,” Reuters, February 4, 2019.

**Figure 2. U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan**

**Source:** Department of Defense “Boots on the Ground” monthly reports to Congress, media reports.

**Notes:** Reported DOD figures through October 2017 include all active and reserve component personnel physically located in Afghanistan as of the first calendar day of each month.

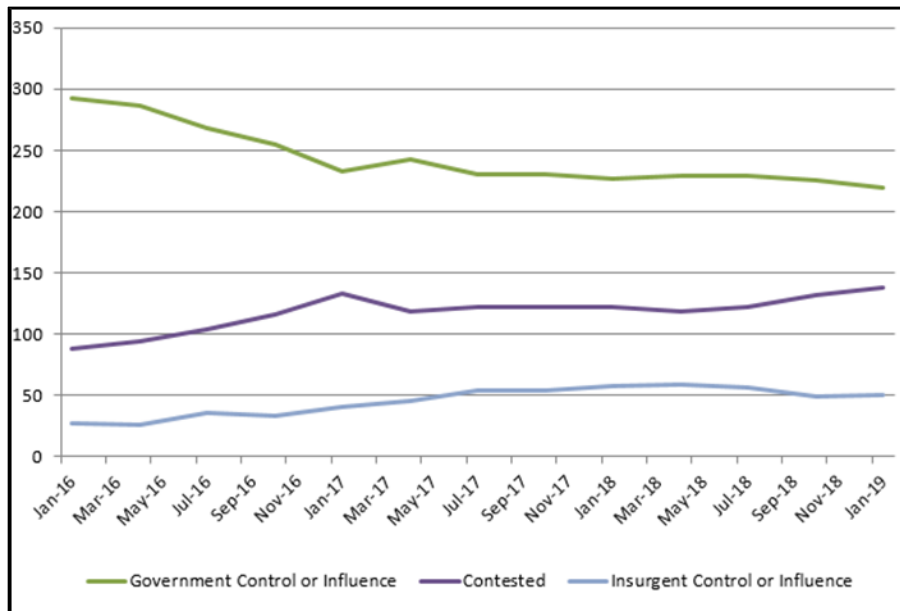
## Security Dynamics: The Taliban and Other Armed Groups

Decades of instability, civil war, and weak central government control have contributed to the existence of a complex web of militant groups in Afghanistan. While the Taliban are by far the largest and best-organized, they operate alongside (and sometimes in competition with) other armed groups, including regional affiliates of both the Islamic State and Al Qaeda.

### Taliban Insurgency

While U.S. commanders have asserted that the ANDSF performs well despite taking heavy casualties, Taliban forces have retained, and by some measures are increasing, their ability to contest and hold territory and to launch high-profile attacks. U.S. officials often have emphasized the Taliban’s failure to capture a provincial capital since their week-long seizure of Kunduz city in northern Afghanistan in September 2015, but Taliban militants briefly overran two capitals, Farah and Ghazni, in May and August 2018, respectively. Then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis described the Taliban assault on Ghazni, which left hundreds dead, as a failure for the Taliban, saying “every time they take [a city] ... they’re unable to hold it.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Media Availability with Secretary Mattis en route to Bogota, Colombia, Department of Defense, August 16, 2018; W.J. Hennigan, “Exclusive: Inside the U.S. Fight to Save Ghazni From the Taliban,” *Time*, August 23, 2018.

**Figure 3. Control of Districts in Afghanistan Jan. 2016 to Jan. 2019**

**Source:** SIGAR Quarterly Reports.

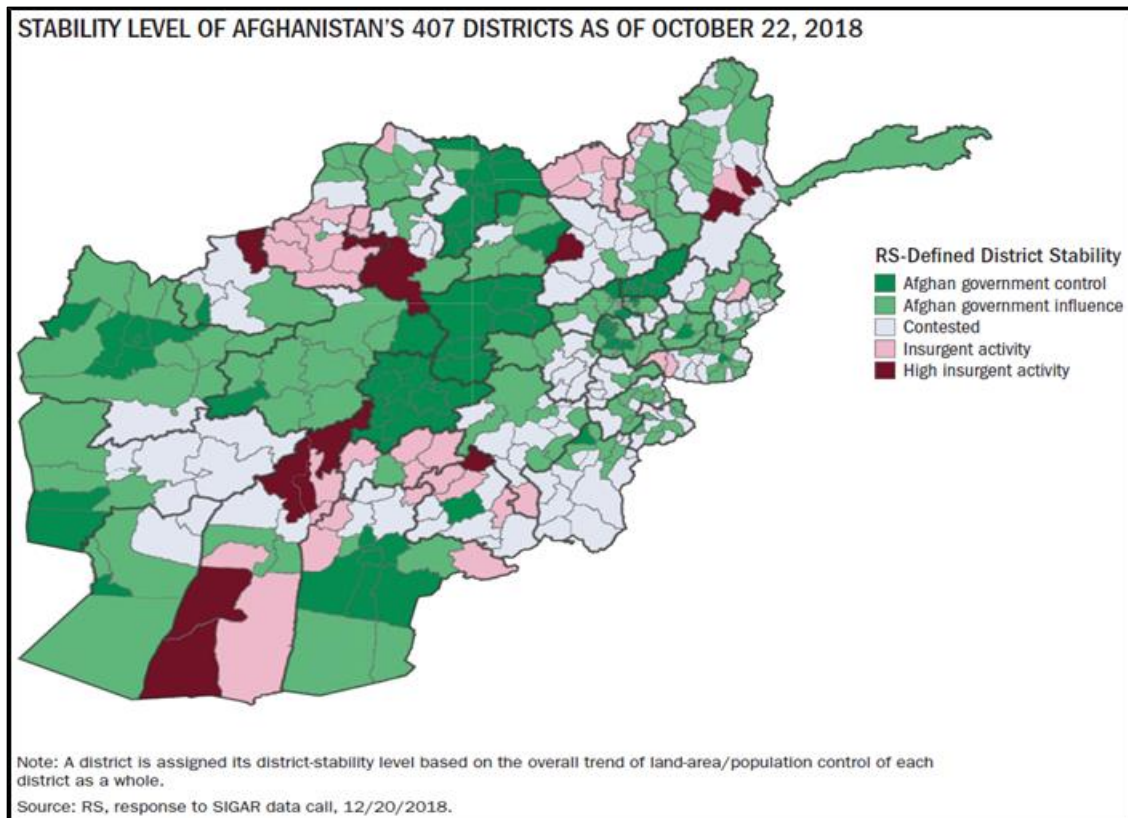
**Notes:** The y-axis represents the number of districts, of which the U.S. government counts 407 in Afghanistan.

Since at least early 2017, U.S. military officials have stated that the conflict is “largely stalemated.”<sup>43</sup> Arguably complicating that assessment, the extent of territory controlled or contested by the Taliban has generally grown since 2016 by most measures (see **Figure 3**). In November 2015, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) began publishing in its quarterly reports a district-level assessment of stability in Afghanistan produced by the U.S. military. This assessment estimated the extent of Taliban control and influence in terms of both territory and population, and was typically accompanied by charts portraying those trends over time as well as a color-coded map of control/influence by district (see **Figure 4**). That data showed a gradual increase in the share of Afghan districts controlled, influenced, or contested by insurgents (46% as of October 2018, the last month such data was evidently collected, compared to 28% in November 2015). According to SIGAR’s April 30, 2019 quarterly report, the U.S. military is “no longer producing its district-level stability assessments of Afghan government and insurgent control and influence.” SIGAR reports that it was told by the U.S. military that the assessment is no longer being produced because it “was of limited decision-making value to the [U.S.] Commander.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ellen Mitchell, “Afghanistan War at a Stalemate, Top General Tells Lawmakers,” *The Hill*, December 4, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, April 30, 2019.



**Figure 4. Insurgent Activity in Afghanistan by District**

**Source:** SIGAR, January 30, 2019, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress.

The Taliban have demonstrated considerable, and some observers would argue growing, tactical capabilities.<sup>45</sup> Due to the high levels of casualties inflicted by the Taliban, the Trump Administration has reportedly urged Afghan forces to pull out of some isolated outposts and rural areas.<sup>46</sup> Reports indicate that ANDSF fatalities have averaged 30-40 a day in recent months, and President Ghani confirmed in November 2018 that Afghan forces had suffered more than 28,000 fatalities since 2015.<sup>47</sup> So-called “green on blue” attacks (insider attacks on U.S. and coalition forces by Afghan nationals) are a sporadic, but persistent, problem—several U.S. servicemen died in such attacks in 2018, as did 85 Afghan soldiers.<sup>48</sup> In October 2018, General Miller was present at an attack inside the Kandahar governor’s compound by a Taliban infiltrator who killed a number of provincial officials, including the powerful police chief Abdul Raziq; Miller was unhurt but another U.S. general was wounded.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Alec Worsnop, “From Guerilla to Maneuver Warfare: A Look at the Taliban’s Growing Combat Capability,” Modern War Institute, June 6, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neft and Helene Cooper, “Newest U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan Mirrors Past Plans for Retreat,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Rod Nordland, “The Death Toll for Afghan Forces Is Secret. Here’s Why,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2018; Ankit Panda, “Ghani: Afghan Police, Army Death Toll Since 2015 at More Than 28,500,” *Diplomat*, November 16, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Sisk, “85 Afghan Troops Killed in Insider Attacks This Year, Report Finds,” *Military.com*, November 5, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Pamela Constable and Sayed Salahuddin, “U.S. commander in Afghanistan survives deadly attack at governor’s

The May 2016 death of then-Taliban head Mullah Mansour in a U.S. drone strike demonstrated Taliban vulnerabilities to U.S. intelligence and combat capabilities, although his death did not appear to have a measurable effect on Taliban effectiveness; it is unclear to what extent current leader Haibatullah Akhundzada exercises effective control over the group and how he is viewed within its ranks.<sup>50</sup>

#### Taliban Leaders

**Mullah Mohammad Omar**, 1994-2013 (died in hiding of natural causes in April 2013; death confirmed by the Taliban in July 2015)

**Mullah Akhtar Mansour**, 2015-2016 (killed in a May 2016 U.S. drone strike in Pakistan)

**Haibatullah Akhundzada**, 2016-present

### Haqqani Network

Founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a *mujahideen* commander and U.S. ally during the war against the Soviet occupation, the Haqqani Network is a semiautonomous wing of the Afghan Taliban. As such, it has been cited by U.S. officials as a potent threat to U.S. and allied forces and interests, as well as a “critical enabler of Al Qaeda.”<sup>51</sup>

Jalaluddin Haqqani served as a minister in the Taliban regime, and after 2001 reestablished a presence in the Pakistani tribal territory of North Waziristan. By 2006, he was credited as “the architect of the Taliban’s current attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.”<sup>52</sup> Within a few years, Jalaluddin’s son Sirajuddin took over the group’s operations, becoming increasingly influential in setting overall insurgency strategy, and was selected as deputy leader of the Taliban in 2015.<sup>53</sup> The Taliban announced the death of Jalaluddin, who reportedly had been ill for years, in September 2018.

The Haqqani network is blamed for a number of major attacks, including a devastating May 2017 bombing in Kabul’s diplomatic district that left over 150 dead and sparked violent protests against the government. The Haqqani network has historically targeted Indian interests in Afghanistan, reinforcing perceptions by some observers and officials that the group often acts as a tool of Pakistani foreign policy.<sup>54</sup> In September 2011, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Haqqani network acts “as a veritable arm” of Pakistan’s main intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). Additionally, it reportedly holds captive two professors (Timothy Weeks, an Australian, and American citizen Kevin King, who is reportedly seriously ill)<sup>55</sup> kidnapped from the American University of Afghanistan in August 2016; and a journalist (Paul Overby) seized in 2014 after crossing into Afghanistan to try to interview the Haqqani leadership.<sup>56</sup>

---

compound that kills top Afghan police general,” *Washington Post*, October 18, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Dupee, “Red on Red: Analyzing Afghanistan’s Intra-Insurgency Violence,” *CTC Sentinel*, January 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Successive DOD reports. For example, “Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” Department of Defense, December 2015.

<sup>52</sup> “Jalaluddin Haqqani,” *PBS Frontline*, October 3, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Two of Sirajuddin’s brothers, Badruddin and Nasruddin, were killed by U.S. and Pakistani operations in 2012-2013. Another, Anas, is held by the Afghan government and has been sentenced to death.

<sup>54</sup> The network claimed responsibility for two attacks on India’s embassy in Kabul (July 2008 and October 2009), and is widely suspected of conducting the August 4, 2013, attack on India’s consulate in Jalalabad.

<sup>55</sup> “Afghan Taliban say kidnapped U.S. professor is seriously ill,” Reuters, October 30, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> American citizen Caitlan Coleman, along with her Canadian husband Joshua Boyle and the three children to whom she gave birth during the family’s five-year captivity, were freed in October 2017 by what the Pakistani military called

The faction's participation in a political settlement potentially could be complicated by its designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under the Immigration and Naturalization Act. That designation was made on September 9, 2012, after the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress enacted S. 1959 (Haqqani Network Terrorist Designation Act of 2012, P.L. 112-168 requiring an Administration report on whether the group met the criteria for FTO designation.

## Islamic State-Khorasan Province

Beyond the Taliban, a significant share of U.S. operations are aimed at the local Islamic State affiliate, known as Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP, also known as ISIS-K), although experts debate the degree of threat the group poses.<sup>57</sup>

ISKP (also referred to as ISIS-K) has been active in Afghanistan since mid-2014. ISKP was named as an FTO by the State Department on January 14, 2016. The group's presence in Afghanistan crystallized from several small Afghan Taliban and other militant factions that announced affiliation with the organization in 2013; ISKP presence grew further as additional Taliban factions defected to the group and captured some small areas primarily in eastern Afghanistan. ISKP has reportedly received financial assistance from the core organization formerly located in the self-declared "caliphate" in parts of Iraq and Syria.<sup>58</sup> Estimates of the number of ISKP fighters generally range from 1,000 to 3,000.

To address the ISKP threat, U.S. commanders have had authorization since December 2015 to combat ISKP fighters by virtue of their affiliation with the Islamic State, whether or not these fighters pose an immediate threat to U.S. and allied forces. U.S. operations have repeatedly targeted the group's leaders, with three killed in less than a year: Hafiz Saeed Khan died in a July 2016 U.S. airstrike and successors Abdul Hasib and Abu Sayed were killed in April and July 2017, respectively. ISKP has survived these leadership losses and appears to be a growing factor in U.S. and Afghan strategic planning. ISKP was the target of the much publicized April 2017 use of a GBU-43 (also known as a Massive Ordnance Air Blast, or MOAB), reportedly the first such use of the weapon in combat. A number of U.S. military, as well as CIA personnel, have been killed in anti-ISKP operations.<sup>59</sup>

ISKP and Taliban forces have sometimes fought over control of territory or because of political or other differences.<sup>60</sup> In April 2018, a U.S. air strike killed the ISKP leader (himself a former Taliban commander) in northern Afghanistan, Qari Hekmatullah. NATO described neighboring Jowzjan province as "the main conduit for external support and foreign fighters from Central Asian states into Afghanistan."<sup>61</sup> ISKP also has claimed responsibility for a number of large-scale

---

an "intelligence-based operation" conducted in conjunction with the United States. Adam Goldman, "American Woman and Family Held for 5 Years in Afghanistan Freed From Militants," *New York Times*, October 12, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Kyle Rempfer, "Is ISIS Gaining 'Serious' Ground in Afghanistan? Russia Says Yes. The US Says No," *Military Times*, March 26, 2018. Khorasan refers to a historical region that includes parts of what is now Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Gordon, "Islamic State Building 'Nests' in Afghanistan, U.S. Says," *New York Times*, December 19, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Pentagon identifies Special Forces soldier killed battling Islamic State in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, August 18, 2017; Adam Goldman and Matthew Rosenberg, "A Funeral of 2 Friends: C.I.A. Deaths Rise in Secret Afghan War," *New York Times*, September 6, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Amira Jadoon, et al., "Challenging the ISK Brand in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Rivalries and Divided Loyalties," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 11, Issue 4, April 26, 2018; Najim Rahim and Rod Nordland, "Taliban Surge Routs ISIS in Northern Afghanistan," *New York Times*, August 1 2018.

<sup>61</sup> NATO Resolute Support Media Center, "Top IS-K commander killed in northern Afghanistan," April 9, 2018. American officials are reportedly tracking attempts by IS fighters to enter Afghanistan and use Afghan territory as a

attacks, many targeting Afghanistan's Shia minority. ISKP is also reported to have ambitions beyond Afghanistan; an unnamed U.S. intelligence official was quoted in June 2019 as saying that, absent sustained counterterrorism pressure, "Afghanistan's IS affiliate will be able to carry out a large-scale attack in the U.S. or Europe within the next year."<sup>62</sup>

### Al Qaeda<sup>63</sup>

While the Al Qaeda attacks of September 11 precipitated U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, the group has been a relatively minor player on the Afghan battlefield since. However, the relationship between Al Qaeda and the Taliban has important implications for U.S.-Taliban negotiations and a potential settlement.

From 2001 until 2015, Al Qaeda was considered by U.S. officials to have only a minimal presence (fewer than 100 members) within Afghanistan, operating mostly as a facilitator for insurgent groups and mainly in the northeast. However, in late 2015 U.S. Special Operations forces and their ANDSF partners discovered and destroyed a large Al Qaeda training camp in Kandahar Province—a discovery suggesting a stronger Al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan than had been generally understood. In April 2016, U.S. commanders publicly raised their estimates of Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan to 100-300, and said that relations between Al Qaeda and the Taliban had become increasingly close; Afghan estimates are generally higher.<sup>64</sup> The United Nations reports that Al Qaeda, while degraded in Afghanistan and facing competition from ISKP, "remains a longer-term threat."<sup>65</sup>

U.S. efforts to find remaining senior Al Qaeda leaders reportedly focus on bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri, who is presumed to be on the Pakistani side of the border. While most successful U.S. strikes on high-ranking Al Qaeda operatives have taken place in Pakistan, several have been killed in Afghanistan in recent years, including operative Abu Bara Al Kuwaiti (October 2014, in Nangarhar Province); and Al Qaeda's commander for northeastern Afghanistan, Faruq Qahtani (October 2016).

Al Qaeda is allied with the Taliban; bin Laden pledged allegiance to Taliban founder Mullah Omar and bin Laden successor Ayman al-Zawahiri has done the same with Omar's two successors, in turn.<sup>66</sup> According to a January 2019 U.N. report, Al Qaeda "continues to see Afghanistan as a safe haven for its leadership, based on its long-standing, strong ties with the Taliban."<sup>67</sup> Some observers have noted operational cooperation between Al Qaeda and the

---

base from which to plan and conduct international operations. Helene Cooper, "U.S. Braces for Return of Terrorist Safe Havens to Afghanistan," *New York Times*, March 12, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Kathy Gannon, "Islamic State expands reach in Afghanistan, threatening West," Associated Press, June 10, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> For additional information on Al Qaeda- and Islamic State-related groups, see CRS In Focus IF10604, *Al Qaeda and Islamic State Affiliates in Afghanistan*, by Clayton Thomas.

<sup>64</sup> Press briefing by Resolute Support Mission Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland. April 14, 2016; Mujib Mashal and Eric Schmitt, "Afghan Security Crisis Sets Stage for Terrorists' Resurgence," *New York Times*, December 2, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2018/705, July 27, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Jocelyn, "Ayman al-Zawahiri pledges allegiance to the Taliban's new emir," FDD's Long War Journal, August 13, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Security Council, Twenty-third report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2019/50, January 15, 2019.

Taliban, particularly in the east, in recent years.<sup>68</sup> The AQ-Taliban alliance may complicate U.S. demands that the Taliban foreswear support for terrorism as part of a potential U.S. troop withdrawal deal; some analysts have recommended that “as part of any final deal, the Taliban should be required to state, in no uncertain terms, its official position” on Al Qaeda.<sup>69</sup>

Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is an affiliate of Al Qaeda based in and including members from various terrorist groups in South and Central Asia. Zawahiri announced the group’s formation in 2014. In June 2016, the State Department designated the group as an FTO and its leader, Asim Umar, as a specially designated global terrorist. The large terrorist training camp found in Kandahar in 2015 was attributed by U.S. military officials to AQIS.

## Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF)

The primary objective of the post-2015 NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan is training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in their struggle against the Taliban and other armed groups.

Funding the ANDSF costs an estimated \$6 billion per year, of which the U.S. has provided about \$4.5 billion in recent years. At the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016, U.S. partners pledged \$1 billion annually for the ANDSF during 2017-2020. U.S. officials assess that Afghanistan is contributing its pledged funds—\$500 million (as calculated in Afghan currency)—despite budgetary difficulties. At the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, Afghanistan agreed to assume full financial responsibility for the ANDSF by 2024, though current security dynamics and economic trends make that unlikely.

The Department of Defense (DOD), SIGAR, and others have reported on deficiencies of the ANDSF, citing challenges such as absenteeism, high casualties, illiteracy, inconsistent leadership, and a deficit of logistical capabilities, such as airlift, medical evacuation, resupply, and other associated functions.<sup>70</sup> ANDSF units and personnel also have been associated with credible allegations of child sexual abuse and other potential human rights abuses.<sup>71</sup>

A number of metrics related to ANDSF performance have been classified in recent years. In October 2017, SIGAR reported that “in a significant development,” U.S. officials “classified or otherwise restricted information” SIGAR had previously reported, such as casualty rates, personnel strength, and attrition within the ANDSF. U.S. officials have cited a request from the Afghan government as justification for the decision.<sup>72</sup> Personnel figures and attrition rates for some ANDSF components have since been made available in SIGAR reports.

Other public information about ANDSF capabilities is also generally not encouraging. Media reports indicate that ANDSF fatalities have averaged 30-40 a day in recent months, and President

---

<sup>68</sup> Hollie McKay, “Al Qaeda in Afghanistan: How terror group survives, thrives,” *Fox News*, June 16, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Jocelyn and Bill Roggio, “Trump’s Bad Deal with the Taliban,” *Politico*, March 18, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Most estimates put the rate of illiteracy within the ANDSF at over 60%, but reliable figures may not exist. SIGAR reported in January 2014 that means of measuring the effectiveness of ANDSF literacy programs were “limited,” and that judgment seems not to have changed in the years since. That SIGAR report described the stated goal of 100% proficiency at a first grade level and 50% proficiency at a third grade level as “unattainable” and “unrealistic.” A follow up report at the end of 2014 reiterated concerns about the availability and reliability of literacy data, saying that “no one appeared to know the overall literacy rate of the [ANDSF].”

<sup>71</sup> See SIGAR Report 17-47, “Child Sexual Assault in Afghanistan: Implementation of the Leahy Laws and Reports of Assault by Afghan Security Forces,” June 2017 (released on January 23, 2018).

<sup>72</sup> Merrit Kennedy, “U.S. Military Withholds Key Measures Of Afghan War,” *NPR*, October 31, 2017.

Ghani stated in January 2019 that more than 45,000 security personnel had paid “the ultimate sacrifice” since he took office in September 2014.<sup>73</sup> Partly in response to those casualty rates, Afghan forces are reportedly shuttering small checkpoints (where the majority of successful Taliban attacks take place) in favor of larger bases in more secure territory.<sup>74</sup> U.S. advisors have long advocated for such moves, although critics claim that these steps effectively cede swaths of the country to the Taliban.<sup>75</sup>

The major components of the ANDSF are:

*Afghan National Army (ANA).* The Afghan National Army has been built from scratch since 2002—it is not a direct continuation of the national army that existed from the nineteenth century until the Taliban era. That army disintegrated during the 1992-1996 *mujahideen* civil war and the 1996-2001 Taliban period. Of its authorized size of 195,000, the ANA (all components) had about 190,000 personnel as of January 2019. Its special operations component, known as the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) numbers nearly 21,000. The ASSF is trained by U.S. Special Operations Forces, and U.S. commanders say it might be one of the most proficient special forces in the region.<sup>76</sup> Afghan special forces are utilized extensively to reverse Taliban gains, and their efforts reportedly have reportedly made up 70% to 80% of the fighting in recent years.<sup>77</sup> A December 2018 DOD report assessed that ASSF “misuse increased to unsustainable levels” in late 2018, saying that the ASSF’s deployment for such missions as static defense operations (in lieu of the conventional ANA) undermines anti-Taliban efforts.<sup>78</sup>

*Afghan Air Force (AAF).* Afghanistan’s Air Force is emerging as a key component of the ANDSF’s efforts to combat the insurgency. The AAF has been mostly a support force but, since 2014, has increased its bombing operations in support of coalition ground forces, mainly using the Brazil-made A-29 Super Tucano. The force is a carryover from the Afghan Air Force that existed prior to the Soviet invasion, though its equipment was virtually eliminated in the 2001-2002 U.S. combat against the Taliban regime. Since FY2010, the United States has appropriated about \$8.4 billion for the AAF, including \$1.7 billion in FY2019. Still, equipment, maintenance, logistical difficulties, and defections continue to plague the Afghan Air Force, which has about 104 aircraft including four C-130 transport planes and 46 Mi-17 (Russian-made) helicopters.<sup>79</sup> DOD plans to purchase up to 159 UH-160 Black Hawk helicopters for the AAF have been complicated by shortages of Afghan engineers and pilots.<sup>80</sup>

*Afghan National Police (ANP).* U.S. and Afghan officials believe that a credible and capable national police force is critical to combating the insurgency. DOD reports on Afghanistan assess that “significant strides have been made in professionalizing the ANP.” However, many outside

<sup>73</sup> “Afghanistan’s Ghani says 45,000 Security Personnel Killed Since 2014,” BBC, January 25, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> J.P. Lawrence, “Afghan military looks to bigger bases while closing checkpoints in hostile Taliban territory,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 11, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Helene Cooper, “Newest U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan Mirrors Past Plans for Retreat,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Author conversations with U.S. commanders in Afghanistan, visiting Washington DC, September 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Helene Cooper, “Afghan Forces Are Praised, Despite Still Relying Heavily on U.S. Help,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> “Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” Department of Defense, December 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Successive appropriations provisions have prohibited U.S. funding of any additional C-130s until DOD provides a report on Afghanistan’s airlift requirements.

<sup>80</sup> Phillip Walter Wellman, “Afghanistan’s Black Hawk program is short of pilots to fly them,” *Stars and Stripes*, February 5, 2019.

assessments of the ANP are negative, asserting that there is rampant corruption to the point where citizens mistrust and fear the ANP.<sup>81</sup> According to SIGAR, as of 2019, the U.S. has obligated \$21.4 billion (in Afghanistan Security Forces Funds, ASFF) to support the ANP since FY2005. The force is largely supported by the U.N.-managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA).

The U.S. police training effort was first led by State Department/Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), but DOD took over the lead role in April 2005. Police training has been highlighted by SIGAR and others as a potentially problematic area where greater interagency cooperation is needed.<sup>82</sup> The target size of the ANP, including all forces under the ANP umbrella (except the Afghan Local Police, which are now under the command of the Ministry of the Interior), is 124,000; as of December 2018, it has 116,000 personnel. According to a December 2018 DOD assessment, women reportedly have a higher presence in the ANP than they do in the ANA.

*Afghan Local Police (ALP).* In 2008, the failure of several police training efforts led the Afghan government, with U.S. assistance, to support local forces in protecting their communities, despite some reluctance to create local militias, which previously had been responsible for human rights abuses in Afghanistan. The ALP concept grew out of earlier programs to organize and arm local civilians to provide security in their home districts; fighters are generally selected by local elders. The current number of ALP members (known as “guardians”) is around 28,000.

The ALP have the authority to detain criminals or insurgents temporarily, and transfer them to the ANP or ANA, but have been cited by Human Rights Watch and other human rights groups, as well as by DOD investigations, for killings, rapes, arbitrary detentions, land grabs, and sexual abuse of young boys.<sup>83</sup> Others criticize the ALP as incompatible with the goal of creating nationalized defense and security forces and characterize ALP forces as unaccountable militias serving the interests of local strongmen.<sup>84</sup> There have been discussions around incorporating ALP elements into the ANDSF. The ALP are funded by the United States at approximately \$60 million a year (ASFF funds disbursed by CSTC-A).

## Regional Dimension

Regional developments and relationships have long influenced events inside Afghanistan. The Trump Administration has linked U.S. policy in Afghanistan to broader regional dynamics, particularly as they relate to South Asia. Key states include Afghanistan’s most important neighbors, Pakistan and Iran; the larger regional players India, Russia, and China; and the politically influential Gulf States.

### Pakistan

The neighbor that is considered most crucial to Afghanistan’s security is Pakistan, which has played an active and, by many accounts, negative role in Afghan affairs for decades. Experts and officials debate the extent of Pakistan’s commitment to Afghan stability in light of its attempts to exert control over events in Afghanistan through ties to insurgent groups. DOD reports on

---

<sup>81</sup> Tom Miles, “U.N. torture committee wants Afghan general prosecuted,” Reuters, May 12, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Alex Horton, “Some U.S. troops watch ‘Cops’ to train Afghan police. That’s a problem, watchdog says,” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Ernesto Londono, “U.S. Cites Local Afghan Police Abuses,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Mujib Mashal, “Afghan Plan to Expand Militia Raises Abuse Concerns,” *New York Times*, October 16, 2015.

Afghanistan's stability repeatedly have identified Afghan militant safe havens in Pakistan as a key threat to Afghan stability.

### **Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement**

U.S. efforts to persuade Pakistan to forge a "transit trade" agreement with Afghanistan bore success with the signature of a trade agreement between the two on July 18, 2010, though implementation has been uneven. The agreement allows for easier exportation via Pakistan of Afghan products, which are mostly agricultural products that depend on rapid transit and are key to Afghanistan's economy. Under the agreement, Afghan goods have access to Pakistani markets and ports, but cannot reach India directly. Afghan efforts to secure Pakistani approval for land transit of Afghan goods to India have been unsuccessful, a frequent irritant in the countries' relations. Total annual trade between the two is around \$2 billion, but Pakistan is much more important for Afghanistan than the reverse. Afghanistan is the fifth-largest destination for Pakistani exports, comprising about 6% of the total, while nearly 40% of all Afghan exports go to Pakistan.

*Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations.* Many Afghans approved of Pakistan's backing the *mujahideen* that forced the Soviet withdrawal in 1988-1989, but later came to resent Pakistan as one of three countries to formally recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government. (Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the others.) Relations improved after Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf left office in 2008 but remain troubled as Afghan leaders continue to accuse Pakistan of supporting the Taliban and meddling in Afghan affairs. On several occasions, President Ghani has accused Pakistan of waging an "undeclared war" on Afghanistan.<sup>85</sup>

Some analysts argue that Pakistan sees Afghanistan as potentially providing it with "strategic depth" against India.<sup>86</sup> Pakistan has long asserted that India uses its diplomatic facilities in Afghanistan to recruit anti-Pakistan insurgents, and that India is using its aid programs to build anti-Pakistan influence there. Long-standing Pakistani concerns

over Indian activities in Afghanistan are being exacerbated by President Trump's pledge to further develop the United States' strategic partnership with India as part of the new U.S. approach to Afghanistan and South Asia.<sup>87</sup>

About two million Afghan refugees have returned from Pakistan since the Taliban fell, but 1.4 million registered refugees remain in Pakistan, according to the United Nations, along with perhaps as many as one million unregistered refugees.<sup>88</sup> Many of these refugees are Pashtuns, the ethnic group that makes up about 40% of Afghanistan's 35 million people and 15% of Pakistan's 215 million; Pashtuns thus represent a plurality in Afghanistan but are a relatively small minority among many others in Pakistan, though Pakistan's Pashtun population is considerably larger than Afghanistan's. Pakistan condemns as interference statements by President Ghani (who is Pashtun) and other Afghan leaders about an ongoing protest campaign by Pakistani Pashtuns for greater civil and political rights.<sup>89</sup>

Afghanistan-Pakistan relations are also complicated by the two countries' long-running dispute over their shared 1,600-mile border, the "Durand Line." Pakistan, the United Nations, and others recognize the Durand Line as an international boundary, but Afghanistan does not. Afghanistan contends that the Durand Line, a border agreement reached between the British Empire and

<sup>85</sup> "'Undeclared war' between Afghanistan, Pakistan must end: Ghani," *Hindu*, November 15, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> "Delhi's Road to Kabul Runs through Kashmir," Royal United Services Institute, March 25, 2014.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Salman Masood, "Trump's Request for India's Help in Afghanistan Rattles Pakistan," *New York Times*, August 22, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> "Afghanistan's refugees: forty years of dispossession," Amnesty International, June 20, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Afghan Leader Roils Pakistan With Pashtun Comments," *Voice of America*, February 7, 2019.



Afghanistan in 1893, was drawn unfairly to separate Pashtun tribes and should be renegotiated. Tensions between the two neighbors have erupted several times in recent years, most recently in 2017, when clashes at the Chaman border crossing (which sits on the Durand Line) reportedly led to civilian and military casualties on both sides. Previous agreements led to efforts to deconflict the situation, but such bilateral mechanisms evidently have proven insufficient.<sup>90</sup> Pakistan claims to have established nearly 1,000 border posts along the Durand Line, nearly five times as many as operated by Afghanistan.<sup>91</sup>

*Pakistan and U.S. Policy in Afghanistan.* For several years after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Pakistani cooperation with the United States against Al Qaeda was, arguably, relatively effective. Pakistan arrested more than 700 Al Qaeda figures after the September 11 attacks and allowed U.S. access to Pakistani airspace, some ports, and some airfields for the major combat phase of OEF.<sup>92</sup> However, traditional support for the Taliban by elements of the Pakistani government and security establishment caused strains with the U.S. that were compounded by the May 1, 2011, U.S. raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. Relations worsened further after a November 26, 2011, incident in which a U.S. airstrike killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, and Pakistan responded by closing border crossings, suspending participation in the border coordination centers, and boycotting the December 2011 Bonn Conference. Relations improved from the 2011 low in subsequent years but have remained tense.

President Trump, in announcing a new Afghanistan strategy in August 2017, declared that “we can no longer be silent about Pakistan’s safe haven for terrorist organizations,” and that while “in the past, Pakistan has been a valued partner ... it is time for Pakistan to demonstrate its commitment to civilization, order, and to peace.”<sup>93</sup> Despite that praise for Pakistan as a “valued partner,” and U.S. other officials hailing successful Pakistani efforts to secure the release of several Americans held by the Haqqanis in Afghanistan in October 2017, the Trump Administration announced plans in January 2018 to suspend security assistance to Pakistan. That decision has impacted hundreds of millions of dollars of aid.<sup>94</sup>

Beyond the issue of aid (which had been withheld in the past, to little apparent effect), observers have speculated about such measures as reexamining Pakistan’s status as a major non-NATO ally, increasing U.S. drone strikes on targets within Pakistan, and imposing sanctions on Pakistani officials.<sup>95</sup> Pakistani officials and others warn that such measures could be counterproductive, highlighting the potential geopolitical costs of increasing pressure on Pakistan, especially as they relate to U.S. counterterrorism efforts and Pakistan’s critical role in facilitating U.S. ground and air lines of communication to landlocked Afghanistan.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Shamil Shams, “Worst border clashes in years: Are Afghanistan and Pakistan at war?” *Deutsche Welle*, May 7, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> See the February 2, 2018, Pakistan Foreign Ministry transcript at <http://www.mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?mm=NTg00A>.

<sup>92</sup> Among those captured by Pakistan are top bin Laden aide Abu Zubaydah (captured April 2002); alleged September 11 plotter Ramzi bin Al Shibh (September 11, 2002); top Al Qaeda planner Khalid Shaikh Mohammed (March 2003); and a top planner, Abu Faraj al-Libbi (May 2005).

<sup>93</sup> Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia, The White House, August 21, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> White House, “Statement From President Donald J. Trump on Recovering the Boyle-Coleman Family from Captivity in Pakistan,” October 12, 2017; Mark Landler and Gardiner Harris, “Trump, Citing Pakistan as a ‘Safe Haven’ for Terrorists, Freezes Aid,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Felicia Schwartz and Saeed Shah, “U.S. Readies New Steps to Pressure Pakistan,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2017.

<sup>96</sup> Christopher Clary, “Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Limits of U.S. Influence,” *War on the Rocks*, August 23, 2017. Pakistan closed its ground and air lines of communication (GLOCs and ALOCs, respectively) to the United States after

## Iran

Iran has long sought to exert its historic influence over western Afghanistan and to protect Afghanistan's Shia minority. Tensions between Iran and the U.S., whose presence in Afghanistan has long concerned Tehran, may be driving Iran's reported attempts to support the Taliban, its erstwhile foe.

Iran historically opposed the Taliban, which Iran saw as a threat to its interests in Afghanistan, especially after Taliban forces captured the western city of Herat in September 1995, and Iran supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance with fuel, funds, and ammunition.<sup>97</sup> In September 1998, Iranian and Taliban forces nearly came into direct conflict when Taliban forces killed several Iranian diplomats in the course of the Taliban's offensive in northern Afghanistan. Iran massed forces at the border and threatened military action, but the crisis cooled without a major clash. Iran offered search and rescue assistance in Afghanistan during the U.S.-led war to topple the Taliban, and it also allowed U.S. humanitarian aid to the Afghan people to transit Iran. Iran helped broker Afghanistan's first post-Taliban government, in cooperation with the United States, at the December 2001 Bonn Conference.

At the same time, Iran has had diplomatic contacts with the Taliban since at least 2012, when Iran allowed a Taliban office to open in Iran, and high-level Taliban figures have visited Iran.<sup>98</sup> While some analysts see the contacts as Iranian support of the insurgency, others see them as an effort to exert some influence over reconciliation efforts.<sup>99</sup> Iran likely seeks to ensure that U.S. forces cannot use Afghanistan as a base from which to pressure or attack Iran. Since at least early 2017, however, U.S. officials have reported more active Iranian backing for Taliban elements, particularly in western Afghanistan. In November 2018, Trump Administration officials displayed a number of Iranian-origin rockets that they alleged had been provided to the Taliban.<sup>100</sup>

Iran's support of Taliban fighters, many of whom are Pashtun, is in contrast with Iran's traditional support of non-Pashtun Persian-speaking and Shia factions in Afghanistan. For example, Iran has funded pro-Iranian armed groups in the west and has supported Hazara Shias in Kabul and in Hazara-inhabited central Afghanistan, in part by providing scholarships and funding for technical institutes as well as mosques. There are consistent allegations that Iran has funded Afghan provincial council and parliamentary candidates in areas dominated by the Persian-speaking and Shia minorities.<sup>101</sup>

### **Afghan Fighters in Syria: Iran's Fatemiyoun Division**

The Fatemiyoun Division (*Liwa Fatemiyoun*) is an Iranian-financed and -commanded military unit operating in Syria that is made up of Shia Afghans. The organization, formed in 2014, has its roots in various Iranian-supported groups that were active in fighting both against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s (the "Tehran Eight") and alongside Iranian forces in the Iran-Iraq War.

the latter suspended security aid during an earlier period of U.S.-Pakistan tensions in 2011-2012.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathon Steel, "America Includes Iran in Talks on Ending War in Afghanistan," *Washington Times*, December 15, 1997.

<sup>98</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, "Iranians Build Up Afghan Clout," *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2012; "Afghan Taliban Reportedly Sends Delegation to Iran for Talks," CBS, June 3, 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Maysam Behraves, "What does Iran want in Afghanistan?" *Al Jazeera*, February 4, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Idrees Ali, "U.S. touts new evidence of Iranian weaponry in Yemen, Afghanistan," *Reuters*, November 29, 2018.

<sup>101</sup> Laura King, "In Western Afghan City, Iran Makes Itself Felt," *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 2010. See also Department of Defense, "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 2019, p. 20.

By late 2013, reports of Shia Afghans fighting alongside Iranian and Bashar al Asad government-aligned forces had emerged out of Syria.<sup>102</sup> The likely motivations behind Afghan participation in the Syrian war are numerous, ranging from religious allegiances to economic and legal incentives to outright coercion by Iranian authorities. In 2018, the *Washington Post* reported, “Even more than religion, these Afghan recruits seem mainly driven by necessity, reenlisting again and again to take home another few hundred dollars in military pay — even as they risk injury or death in front-line battles where few Iranian troops are sent.”<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch has documented alleged instances of Iranian recruitment of child soldiers from Afghan refugees.<sup>104</sup>

The role of Afghans in the Iranian effort to support the Asad government has been, by some measures, significant. The size of the Fatemiyoun Division is generally estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000, with “4,000-8,000 fighters deployed at any given time.”<sup>105</sup> By some reports, Afghan fighters are used as “cannon fodder,” with many knowing little about the dynamics of the war in which they fight given their cultural and linguistic isolation.<sup>106</sup>

With the Asad government recapturing most areas of Syria formerly under opposition control, the future of Fatemiyoun fighters is an open question. According to one February 2018 report, “there are indications that Fatemiyoun recruitment has stopped and some fighters are being returned to Iran.”<sup>107</sup> The most serious concern among U.S. and Afghan policymakers is that Iran could potentially use Fatemiyoun fighters in Afghanistan itself, perhaps as part of Iran’s regional rivalry with Saudi Arabia, which has also supported various groups in Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> However, as noted by one analyst, “the Fatemiyoun Division’s disproportionately high casualties and reliance on Iranian midlevel commanders reflect its limited usefulness for Tehran.”<sup>109</sup> The Fatemiyoun could also redouble to Iran’s disadvantage in Afghanistan, where the group has proven politically controversial. Mohammad Mohaqeq, the deputy chief executive of Afghanistan and the highest ranking Hazara official in government, drew criticism from President Ghani and others after Mohaqeq praised the role of Iran and its regional proxies in the Syrian conflict in November 2017.<sup>110</sup>

Even as it funds anti-government groups as a means of pressuring the United States, Iran has built ties to the Afghan government. President Ghani generally has endorsed his predecessor’s approach on Iran; Karzai called Iran a “friend” of Afghanistan and said that Afghanistan must not become an arena for disputes between the United States and Iran.<sup>111</sup> At other times, Afghanistan and Iran have had disputes over Iran’s efforts to expel Afghan refugees. There are approximately one million registered Afghan refugees in Iran, with as many as two million more unregistered.<sup>112</sup> Iran’s ties to the Shia community in Afghanistan have facilitated its recruitment of Afghan Shias to fight on behalf of the Asad regime in Syria, though there is some evidence that Shia Afghan refugees have been coerced into joining the war effort (see textbox).

<sup>102</sup> David Kenner, “Afghan Militants Join Syria’s Civil War, As If It Wasn’t Awful Enough,” *Foreign Policy*, December 4, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Pamela Constable, “Recruited by Iran to fight for Syrian regime, young Afghans bring home cash and scars,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2018.

<sup>104</sup> “Iran: Afghan Children Recruited to Fight in Syria,” Human Rights Watch, October 1, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Tobias Schneider, “The Fatemiyoun Division: Afghan Fighters in the Syrian Civil War,” Middle East Institute, October 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Ali Alfoneh, “Shia Afghan Fighters in Syria,” Atlantic Council, April 19, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Ahmad Shuja Jamal, “Mission accomplished? What’s next for Iran’s Afghan fighters in Syria,” *War on the Rocks*, February 13, 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Mujib Mashal and Fatima Faizi, “Iran Sent Them to Syria. Now Afghan Fighters Are a Worry at Home,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2017; Ahmad Shuja Jamal, “The Fatemiyoun Army: Reintegration into Afghan Society,” United States Institute of Peace, March 19, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Ali Alfoneh, “Tehran’s Shia Foreign Legions,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 30, 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Noor Zahid and Mehdi Jedinia, “Analysts: Pro-Iran Remarks May Trigger Regional Rivalry in Afghanistan,” *Voice of America*, December 2, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Comments by President Karzai at the Brookings Institution, May 5, 2009.

<sup>112</sup> “Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees,” UNHCR, October 2018.

## India

India's past involvement in Afghanistan reflects its long-standing concerns about potential Pakistani influence and Islamic extremism emanating from Afghanistan, though its current role is focused on development. India also views Afghanistan as a trade and transit gateway to Central Asia, but Pakistan blocks a direct route, so India has sought to develop Iran's Chabahar Port.

India supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in the mid-1990s and retains ties to Alliance figures. India saw the Afghan Taliban's hosting of Al Qaeda during 1996-2001 as a major threat because of Al Qaeda's association with radical Islamic organizations in Pakistan that seek to end India's control of part of the disputed territories of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>113</sup> Some of these groups have committed major acts of terrorism in India, including the attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 and in July 2011.

Afghanistan has sought to strengthen its ties to India—in large part to access India's large and rapidly growing economy—but has sought to do so without causing a backlash from Pakistan. In October 2011, Afghanistan and India signed a "Strategic Partnership." The pact affirmed Pakistani fears by giving India, for the first time, a formal role in Afghan security; it provided for India to train ANDSF personnel, of whom thousands have been trained since 2011.<sup>114</sup> However, India has resisted playing a greater role in Afghan security, probably to avoid becoming ever more directly involved in the conflict in Afghanistan or inviting Pakistani reprisals.

India's involvement in Afghanistan is dominated by development issues. India is the fifth-largest single country donor to Afghan reconstruction, funding projects worth over \$3 billion.<sup>115</sup> Indian officials assert that their projects are focused on civilian, not military, development and are in line with the development priorities set by the Afghan government.<sup>116</sup> As part of the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan, President Trump called in August 2017 for India to "help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development," though he also derided Indian aid to Afghanistan in January 2019.<sup>117</sup>

Prime Minister Modi visited Afghanistan in December 2015 and June 2016 to inaugurate major India-sponsored projects, including the new parliament complex in Kabul and the Afghan-India Friendship Dam in Herat province. In May 2016, India, Iran and Afghanistan signed the Chabahar Agreement, under which India is to invest \$500 million to develop Iran's Chabahar port on the Arabian Sea. That port is designed to facilitate increased trade between India and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. The Trump Administration is providing India with a waiver under applicable Iran sanctions laws to be able to continue to develop the port.

## Russia

For years Russia tacitly accepted the U.S. presence in Afghanistan as furthering the battle against radical Islamists in the region. Recently, however, in the context of renewed U.S.-Russian rivalry,

<sup>113</sup> Rahul Bedi, "India joins anti-Taliban coalition," *Jane's*, March 15, 2001.

<sup>114</sup> "Afghans push India for more arms, despite Pakistan's wary eye," *The Indian Express*, August 23, 2016.

<sup>115</sup> "India's development aid to Afghanistan exceeds \$3bn," *Times of India*, January 4, 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Nandita Palrecha and Monish Tourangbam, "India's Development Aid to Afghanistan: Does Afghanistan Need What India Gives?" *Diplomat*, November 24, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Zeenat Saberin and Shereena Qazi, "Indians, Afghans react to Trump's 'Afghan library' dig at PM Modi," *Al Jazeera*, January 6, 2019.

Russia has taken a more active role both in the conflict (including providing some political and perhaps material support for the Taliban) and in efforts to bring it to a negotiated end.

During the 1990s, after the Soviet Union's 1989 withdrawal from Afghanistan and subsequent breakup (see **Appendix B**), Russia supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban with some military equipment and technical assistance in order to blunt Islamic militancy emanating from Afghanistan.<sup>118</sup> After 2001, Russia agreed not to hinder U.S. military operations, later cooperating with the United States in developing the Northern Distribution Network supply line to Afghanistan. About half of all ground cargo for U.S. forces in Afghanistan flowed through the Northern Distribution Network from 2011 to 2014, despite the extra costs as compared to the route through Pakistan.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, Russian-U.S. collaboration in Afghanistan, a relative bright spot in the two countries' relationship, has suffered in light of a more general deterioration of bilateral ties.

Moscow has taken a markedly more assertive role in Afghanistan since at least late 2015. U.S. officials have differed in how they characterize both the nature of and motivation for Russia's actions, but there appears to be widespread agreement that they represent a challenge to U.S. goals. Former Secretary Mattis said that Russia was "choosing to be strategic competitors" with the United States in Afghanistan, while former U.S. commander General Nicholson said the Russians were motivated by a desire to "undermine the United States and NATO."<sup>120</sup> Other analysts have noted Russian anxieties about a potential long-term U.S. military presence in Central Asia, a region that has been in Moscow's sphere of influence since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>121</sup> The Russian government frames its renewed interest in Afghanistan as a reaction to the growth of ISKP, for which Russia faults the United States. However, Russian descriptions of ISKP strength and geographic location generally surpass estimates by the United States and others, perhaps overstating the threat to justify supporting the Taliban, which Russia may see as less of a direct danger.<sup>122</sup>

The Washington Post, citing unnamed U.S. defense officials, reported in 2017 that Russia had provided weapons (including heavy machine guns) to the Taliban ostensibly to be used against the Islamic State affiliated fighters, but that the weapons had surfaced in places far from ISKP strongholds, like Helmand province.<sup>123</sup> Russia had previously condemned such claims as "groundless" and "absurd fabrications;" a Taliban spokesman also denied the reports, saying "our contacts with Russia are for political and diplomatic purposes only."<sup>124</sup> General Nicholson echoed such reports in a March 2018 interview, saying, "We've had weapons brought to this headquarters and given to us by Afghan leaders and said, this was given by the Russians to the Taliban."<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> James Risen, "Russians Are Back in Afghanistan, Aiding Rebels," *New York Times*, July 27, 1998.

<sup>119</sup> Tom Gjelten, "U.S. Now Relies On Alternate Afghan Supply Routes," NPR, September 16, 2011.

<sup>120</sup> "Press Conference by Secretary Mattis in Afghanistan," April 24, 2017; Philip Ewing, "Why Is Russia Helping Anti-U.S. Insurgents In Afghanistan?" NPR, February 13, 2017.

<sup>121</sup> Barnett Rubin, "It's Much Bigger Than Afghanistan: U.S. Strategy For A Transformed Region," *War on the Rocks*, April 25, 2017.

<sup>122</sup> Brian Todd and Steve Almasy, "Russia, Taliban share intelligence in fight against ISIS," CNN, December 25, 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Erin Cunningham, "While the U.S. wasn't looking, Russia and Iran began carving out a bigger role in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2017.

<sup>125</sup> Justin Rowlett, "Russia 'arming the Afghan Taliban', says US," BBC, March 23, 2018.

Russia also has sought to establish itself as a player in Afghanistan by its efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement. In December 2016, Moscow hosted Chinese and Pakistani officials in a meeting that excluded Afghan representatives, drawing harsh condemnation from the Afghan government.<sup>126</sup> Significantly, Russia has also hosted Taliban officials for talks in Moscow, in February and May 2019—meetings in which Afghan government representatives did not participate.

## China

China’s involvement in Afghanistan, with which it shares a small, remote border, is motivated by several interests, of which reducing what China perceives as a threat from Islamist militants in Afghanistan and securing access to Afghan minerals and other resources are considered the most important.

Since 2012, China has deepened its involvement in Afghan security issues and has taken on a more prominent role as a potential mediator in Afghan reconciliation, though its role in both is still relatively modest. In 2012, China signed a series of agreements with Afghanistan, one of which reportedly promised Chinese training and funding for Afghan forces, though some reports, citing participants, question how beneficial that training is.<sup>127</sup> In October 2014, China hosted Ghani for his first working trip abroad as president, during which China agreed to provide \$330 million in bilateral aid over the coming three years, in addition to other forms of support. As a consequence of that visit, some Taliban figures reportedly visited China, apparently accompanied by Pakistani security officials, as part of an effort to promote an Afghan political settlement.<sup>128</sup>

In 2018, Chinese officials denied reports of plans to build a military base in the Wakhan Corridor, a sparsely inhabited sliver of Afghanistan with which China has a 47-mile border, saying, “no Chinese military personnel of any kind on Afghan soil at any time.”<sup>129</sup> China did agree to help Afghanistan stand up a “mountain brigade” in the Wakhan Corridor to take on any Islamist fighters who return to the country from the Middle East. China fears that some of the returned fighters may be Chinese nationals who may be planning attacks in China’s northwestern region of Xinjiang, across the border from Afghanistan.<sup>130</sup> In a September 2018 interview with Reuters, Afghanistan’s ambassador to Beijing said China will be doing “some training” of Afghan troops as part of that effort, but in China, rather than in Afghanistan, as some reports had suggested.<sup>131</sup>

Looking ahead, China may be seeking to play a larger role in reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan; China has considerable influence with its ally Pakistan, which is generally considered the most important regional player in the Afghan conflict. China participates in various multilateral fora dedicated to fostering Afghan peace talks, such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (comprising representatives from Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and the

<sup>126</sup> Afghanistan was included in the second meeting (February 2017), and the United States was invited to the third (April 2017), though the United States declined to attend. Some analysts speculated that U.S. wariness about Russian goals and a reluctance to legitimize Russian efforts were behind the refusal to participate. Phillip Walter Wellman, “Russia’s Afghan peace initiative seen as undermining NATO mission,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 11, 2017.

<sup>127</sup> Andrew Small, “China’s Afghan Moment,” *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Edward Wong, “Exploring a New Role: Peacemaker in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2015.

<sup>129</sup> “China says it is helping Afghanistan with defense, counterterrorism,” Reuters, August 30, 2018.

<sup>130</sup> Mathieu Duchatel, “China’s Foreign Fighter Problem,” *War on the Rocks*, January 25, 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Martina, “Afghan troops to train in China, ambassador says,” Reuters, September 6, 2018.

United States). Chinese officials reportedly have met with Taliban representatives several times in the past year as well.<sup>132</sup>

Many experts see China's activities in Afghanistan as primarily economically driven.<sup>133</sup> Chinese delegations continue to assess the potential for new investments in such sectors as mining and energy. The cornerstone of China's investment to date has been the development of the Aynak copper mine south of Kabul, but that project has stalled over contractual disputes, logistical problems, and some security issues. Additionally, prospective transportation and trade routes through Afghanistan comport with China's Belt and Road Initiative and previous U.S. efforts to establish a similar New Silk Road.<sup>134</sup> Some experts argue that shared U.S. and Chinese interests in a stable Afghanistan represent a potential area for Sino-American cooperation.<sup>135</sup>

## Persian Gulf States

At times the Gulf States have been considered a key part of the effort to stabilize Afghanistan, though donations by Gulf residents have been a major source of Taliban funding. Gulf States have also contributed development funds and have influence with some Afghan clerics and factions.

- **Saudi Arabia** has a long history of involvement in Afghanistan; it channeled hundreds of millions of dollars to the *mujahideen* in the 1980s during the war against the Soviet occupation, and was one of three countries to formally recognize the Taliban government. Saudi Arabia later brokered some of the negotiations between the Afghan government and “moderate” Taliban figures. More recently, however, Saudi officials have described the Taliban as “armed terrorists,”<sup>136</sup> though some critics allege that the kingdom has not taken measures to stop private donors in the Kingdom from giving financial support to the Taliban.<sup>137</sup>
- **The United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, another country that recognized the Taliban regime, deployed a limited number of troops and aircraft to support NATO security missions in southern Afghanistan. The UAE has donated over \$250 million to Afghanistan since 2002 for housing, health care, and education projects.<sup>138</sup> UAE officials were reportedly discussing the UAE aid program for southern Afghanistan at the time of the January 10, 2017 bombing at the Kandahar governor's guest house that killed at least six UAE diplomats, including the UAE's Ambassador to Afghanistan.
- **Qatar** did not recognize the Taliban and was not regarded as a significant player on the Afghanistan issue until 2011. Senior Taliban figures opened an informal “political office” in Doha, with U.S. acquiescence, as part of efforts to establish

<sup>132</sup> Farhan Bokhari, et al., “China courted Afghan Taliban in secret meetings,” *Financial Times*, August 6, 2018.

<sup>133</sup> Farhan Bokhari, “China has economic aims as it quietly builds bonds with Afghanistan,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, January 14, 2019.

<sup>134</sup> In its FY2018 budget request, the Trump Administration described the New Silk Road initiative, originally announced in 2011 by then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, as one of the “major initiatives” to be supported by the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. However, the term did not appear in the FY2019 and FY2020 requests.

<sup>135</sup> David Rank, “Leveraging US-China Cooperation to Build a Regional Consensus on Afghanistan,” USIP, February 2018.

<sup>136</sup> Samuel Ramani, “What's Behind Saudi Arabia's Turn Away From the Taliban?” *Diplomat*, September 7, 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Carlotta Gall, “Saudis Bankroll Taliban, Even as King Officially Support Afghan Government,” *New York Times*, December 6, 2016.

<sup>138</sup> “UAE humanitarian aid to Afghanistan touches new heights,” *Gulf Today*, January 14, 2017.

talks with the Taliban in 2013. Qatar also has played host to most of the substantive U.S.-Taliban talks being overseen by Special Representative Khalilzad.

## **Multilateral Fora**

The United States has encouraged Afghanistan's neighbors to support a stable and economically viable Afghanistan and to include Afghanistan in regional security and economic organizations and platforms. Afghanistan has sought to increase its integration with neighboring states through participation in other international fora, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a security coordination body that includes Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, to which Afghanistan was granted full observer status in 2012.

In addition, several regional meetings series have been established between the leaders of Afghanistan and neighboring countries. These include summit meetings between Afghanistan, Pakistan, the U.S., and China (the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, or QCG). The Quadrilateral Coordination Group met for the sixth time in October 2017.<sup>139</sup> Russia convened a meeting with Pakistan and China to discuss Afghanistan in December 2016 (more below), drawing condemnation from the Afghan government, which was not invited to participate; Afghanistan was invited to, and attended, the second (February 2017) and third (April 2017) meetings, though the United States declined to attend. Economically, the U.S. has emphasized the development of a Central Asia-South Asia trading corridor in an effort to keep Afghanistan stable and economically vibrant as donors wind down their involvement.

## **Reconciliation Efforts**

For years, the Afghan government, the United States, and various neighboring states have engaged in efforts to bring about a political settlement with insurgents. As of July 2019, U.S. officials, led by Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, are currently engaged in direct talks with the Taliban in the most serious discussions to end the U.S. military effort there since it began. However, the Taliban still refuse to negotiate with representatives of the Afghan government, which they seek to delegitimize.

## **Afghan Government Initiatives**

The Afghan government has overseen several initiatives aimed at bringing the war to an end, including a February 2018 offer from President Ghani to negotiate with the Taliban without preconditions, but there does not appear to have been any substantive engagement between Taliban and Afghan leaders to date.

On September 5, 2010, an "Afghan High Peace Council" (HPC) was formed to oversee the settlement and reintegration process. Then-President Karzai appointed former president Burhanuddin Rabbani to head it, in part to gain crucial support for negotiations with the Taliban; Rabbani was assassinated in September 2011. The HPC was significantly reorganized and effectively relaunched in 2016; at the time, one prominent Afghanistan analyst described it as a "side-show in the peace process," a position that seemed to be confirmed in 2018 when that same

---

<sup>139</sup> "Four Nations Meet in Oman To Try To Restart Afghan Peace Talks," Radio Free Europe, October 17, 2017.



analyst assessed that “there will be no HPC role in the negotiations” the Afghan government is attempting to start with the Taliban.<sup>140</sup>

### Reconciliation vs. Reintegration

Experts and policymakers use a number of terms to refer to the eventual cessation of hostilities and return of combatants to normal life, including reconciliation and reintegration. While some use these terms interchangeably with respect to Afghanistan, there are important conceptual differences between the two terms.

**Reconciliation** is mostly used to mean a negotiated peace process. In Afghanistan, it is also used more broadly to refer to post-conflict efforts to repair Afghanistan’s social fabric (akin to truth and reconciliation commissions that have been used in South Africa and elsewhere). Reconciliation is the key U.S. focus in 2019 (with the term appearing in Special Representative Khalilzad’s title), though some observers have argued that such efforts are “probably as unwise as they are unrealistic,” given what they see as the ideological inflexibility of Taliban leadership.<sup>141</sup>

**Reintegration** is usually used to mean the process of peeling away Taliban fighters from the movement and incorporating them back into Afghan society. However, a former U.S. official has argued that in the parts of Afghanistan the Taliban control, “it’s the government that isn’t integrated,” and that “the concept of reintegration, suggesting a sort of dominant theme and minor theme, is not applicable in the Afghanistan context.”<sup>142</sup> A donor-funded Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program reintegrated about 11,000 combatants from 2010-2016, though some have criticized the program’s cost (\$135 million) and efficacy.<sup>143</sup> An earlier disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program (2003-2006) sought to incorporate pro-government militia fighters into the nascent Afghan national army.

The 2016 reconciliation with the government of one insurgent faction, Hizb-e-Islami-Gulbuddin (HIG), led by former *mujahideen* party leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was seen as a possible template for further work toward a political settlement. A former *mujahideen* commander who is accused of committing human rights abuses during the Afghan civil war of the 1990s, Hekmatyar allied his fighters with the Taliban after 2001, although HIG was not a major factor on the Afghanistan battlefield. In 2010, Hekmatyar signaled his openness to reconciliation with Kabul, and Hekmatyar instructed followers to vote in the 2014 presidential elections. On September 22, 2016, after months of negotiations, Afghan officials and Hekmatyar representatives signed a 25-point reconciliation agreement; U.N. sanctions against Hekmatyar were dropped in February 2017. In May 2017, Hekmatyar returned to Kabul, rallying thousands of supporters at a speech in which he criticized the Afghan government.<sup>144</sup> Hekmatyar declared his candidacy for the 2019 presidential election in January 2019.

The Taliban have maintained their long-standing refusal to negotiate with representatives of the Afghan government, which they characterize as a corrupt and illegitimate puppet of foreign powers, and Kabul is not directly involved in the ongoing U.S.-Taliban negotiations (more below).<sup>145</sup> Some observers have criticized that arrangement; former U.S. Ambassador to

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Ruttig, “In Search of a Peace Process: A ‘new’ HPC and an ultimatum for the Taleban,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, February 26, 2016; Thomas Ruttig, “Getting to the Steering Wheel: President Ghani’s new set of peace proposals,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, December 4, 2018.

<sup>141</sup> Marvin Weinbaum and Mohammad Sayed Madadi, “With More Troops in Afghanistan, Focus on Reintegration, Not Reconciliation,” *National Interest*, July 12, 2017.

<sup>142</sup> Laurel Miller, speaking at United States Institute of Peace event “U.S. Military Role in Afghanistan,” November 19, 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Kate Clark, “Graft and Remilitarisation: A look back at efforts to disarm, demobilize, reconcile and reintegrate,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 12, 2018.

<sup>144</sup> Hamid Shalizi, “Afghan former warlord Hekmatyar rallies supporters in Kabul,” Reuters, May 5, 2017.

<sup>145</sup> “Letter of the Islamic Emirate to the American people!” February 14, 2018, available at <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/taliban-attempts-to-appeal-to-us-audience-in-new-letter/2770/>.

Afghanistan Ryan Crocker argued that by not insisting on the inclusion of the Afghan government in these negotiations “we have ourselves delegitimized the government we claim to support,” and advocated that the U.S. halt talks until the Taliban agree to include the Afghan government.<sup>146</sup> A planned meeting between as many as 200 Afghan delegates, including some Afghan officials (in their personal capacity), and the Taliban in Doha collapsed in April 2019 when Taliban representatives objected at the last minute to the size and makeup of the group; that meeting has been postponed indefinitely.<sup>147</sup> A meeting between 50 Afghans and 17 Taliban representatives took place in July 2019; the Afghan delegation included some government officials, who participated in a personal capacity. The two-day “Intra-Afghan Conference for Peace” concluded with a joint statement that stressed the importance of an intra-Afghan settlement, and was hailed by Khalilzad as a “big success.”<sup>148</sup>

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has promised that his government will not accept any settlement that limits Afghans’ rights. In a January 2019 televised address, he further warned that any agreement to withdraw U.S. forces that did not include Kabul’s participation could lead to “catastrophe,” pointing to the 1990s-era civil strife following the fall of the Soviet-backed government that led to the rise of the Taliban (see textbox above).<sup>149</sup> President Ghani’s concern about being excluded from the talks surfaced in mid-March when his national security advisor accused Khalilzad of “delegitimizing the Afghan government and weakening it,” and harboring political ambitions within Afghanistan, leading to a sharp rebuke from the State Department.<sup>150</sup> According to a former State Department official, “The real issue is not the personality of an American diplomat; the real issue is a policy divergence,” namely, Afghans’ concerns about the potential U.S. withdrawal.<sup>151</sup>

## U.S.-Taliban Talks

The first direct meetings between U.S. and Taliban representatives began in 2010, centered largely on the issues of a prisoner exchange and the opening of a Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar. Multiple factors, including opposition from the Afghan government led by then-President Hamid Karzai, caused the collapse of talks in March 2012. Qatari and Pakistani mediation led to a 2013 agreement to allow the Taliban to open the Doha office, but because the Taliban opened that office in June 2013 with the trappings of an official embassy, in direct violation of the terms of the agreement, the Qatari government shuttered the office less than a month later.<sup>152</sup> In June 2014, Qatar coordinated the release of U.S. prisoner Bowe Bergdahl in exchange for five high-ranking Taliban officials imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay—individuals who are now part of the Taliban

<sup>146</sup> Ryan Crocker, “I Was Ambassador to Afghanistan. This Deal is a Surrender,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 2019.

<sup>147</sup> Mujib Mashal, “Peace Conference Derailed as Taliban Object to Afghan Delegation,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2019.

<sup>148</sup> “Afghanistan talks agree ‘roadmap to peace,’” BBC, July 9, 2019.

<sup>149</sup> Hasib Danish Alikozai and Mohammad Habibzada, “Afghans Worry as US Makes Progress in Taliban Talks,” *Voice of America*, January 29, 2019.

<sup>150</sup> Philip Stewart, Jonathan Landay, and Hamid Shalizi, “In U.S. pursuit of peace talks, perilous rift opens with Afghan leaders,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2019.

<sup>151</sup> Laurel Miller, quoted in Mark Landler, “U.S. Diplomat Is Focus of Afghan Leaders’ Anger Over Peace Talks With Taliban,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2019.

<sup>152</sup> See Steve Coll, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America’s Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Penguin Press, 2018), pp. 503-508, 578-585, 636-641.

team negotiating with the United States in Doha.<sup>153</sup> No further talks between U.S. and Taliban officials occurred under the Obama Administration.

## Developments under the Trump Administration

In President Trump's August 2017 speech laying out the new strategy for Afghanistan, he referred to a "political settlement" as an outcome of an "effective military effort," but did not elaborate on what U.S. goals or conditions might be as part of this putative political process. In remarks the next day, then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson rejected the idea of preconditioning talks on the Taliban's acceptance of certain arrangements, saying "the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban representatives need to sit down and sort this out. It's not for the U.S. to tell them it must be this particular model, it must be under these conditions."<sup>154</sup>

The Trump Administration decided in July 2018 to enter into direct negotiations with the Taliban, without Afghan government representatives. This came almost a year after the President announced a new strategy for South Asia that many interpreted as a sign of renewed American commitment to Afghanistan. With no progress on the battlefield, the Trump Administration reversed the long-standing U.S. position that any peace process would have to be "Afghan owned and Afghan led," and the first high-level, direct U.S.-Taliban talks occurred in Doha in July 2018. The September 2018 appointment by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan-born former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan under President George W. Bush, as Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation added more momentum to this effort.

Since his appointment, Khalilzad has held a near-continuous series of meetings with the Afghan, Pakistani, and other regional governments, as well as with Taliban representatives. After six days of negotiations in Doha in January 2019, Khalilzad stated that, "The Taliban have committed, to our satisfaction, to do what is necessary that would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups or individuals," in return for which U.S. forces would eventually fully withdraw from the country.<sup>155</sup> Khalilzad later cautioned that "we made significant progress on two vital issues: counter terrorism and troop withdrawal. That doesn't mean we're done. We're not even finished with these issues yet, and there is still work to be done on other vital issues like intra-Afghan dialogue and a complete ceasefire."<sup>156</sup>

After a longer series of talks that ended on March 12, 2019, Khalilzad announced that an agreement "in draft" had been reached on counterterrorism assurances and U.S. troop withdrawal. He noted that after the agreement is finalized, "the Taliban and other Afghans, including the government, will begin intra-Afghan negotiations on a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire."<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> The five figures, and their positions during the Taliban's period of rule, were Mullah Mohammad Fazl, the chief of staff of the Taliban's military; Noorullah Noori, the Taliban commander in northern Afghanistan; Khairullah Khairkhwa, the Taliban regime Interior Minister; Mohammad Nabi Omari, a Taliban official; and Abdul Haq Wasiq, the Taliban regime's deputy intelligence chief. Mujib Mashal, "Once Jailed in Guantánamo, 5 Taliban Now Face U.S. at the Negotiating Table," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Secretary of State Rex Tillerson Press Availability, Department of State, August 22, 2017.

<sup>155</sup> Mujib Mashal, "U.S. and Taliban Agree in Principle to Peace Framework, Envoy Says," *New York Times*, January 28, 2019.

<sup>156</sup> U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, Twitter, January 31, 2019. Available at <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/109094451500607488>.

<sup>157</sup> U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, Twitter, March 12, 2019. Available at

It remains unclear what kind of political arrangement could satisfy both Kabul and the Taliban to the extent that the latter fully abandons its armed struggle. The Taliban have given contradictory signs, with one spokesman saying in January 2019 that the group is “not seeking a monopoly on power” and another in May speaking of the group’s “determination to re-establish the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan.”<sup>158</sup> Still, many Afghans, especially women, who remember Taliban rule and oppose the group’s policies and beliefs, remain wary.<sup>159</sup>

## Afghan Governance and Politics

Political contention among Afghans can be seen as both a sign of the country’s U.S.- and internationally supported democratic development as well as a troubling reminder of the country’s fractured past and a potential impediment to peace.

### Constitution and Political System

During Taliban rule (1996-2001), Afghanistan was run by a small group of mostly Pashtun clerics loyal to Mullah Mohammad Omar, who remained based in Kandahar. No representative body was functioning, and government offices were minimally staffed and lacked modern equipment. The ouster of that government by U.S. forces and their Afghan partners in late 2001 paved the way for the success of a long-stalled U.N. effort to form a broad-based Afghan government.

In November 2001, after the Taliban government collapsed, the United Nations invited major Afghan factions, most prominently the Northern Alliance and allies of former King Zahir Shah—but, notably, not the Taliban—to an international conference in Bonn, Germany. There, on December 5, 2001, the factions signed the “Bonn Agreement” which authorized an international peacekeeping force and called for a *loya jirga* (consultative assembly) to establish a Transitional Authority to administer the country until a new constitution could be drafted. That *loya jirga* elected Afghan Interim Administration chairman Hamid Karzai as president in June 2002, and a subsequent *jirga* approved a new constitution, establishing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, in January 2004.

The Afghan constitution sets up a presidential system, with an elected president and bicameral national legislature, the 259-seat lower house of which (*Wolesi Jirga*) is popularly elected.<sup>160</sup> The president serves a five-year term, with a two-term limit, and there are two vice presidents. The president has broad powers. Under article 64, he has the power to appoint all “high-ranking officials,” which includes not only cabinet ministers but also members of the Supreme Court, judges, provincial governors and district governors, local security chiefs, and members of supposedly independent commissions such as the Independent Election Commission and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). These appointments are constitutionally subject to confirmation by the National Assembly.

<https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1105513781705302016>.

<sup>158</sup> Kathy Gannon, “Taliban Say They Are Not Looking to Rule Afghanistan Alone,” Associated Press, January 30, 2019; Abdul Qadir Sediqi and Rupman Jain, “Taliban fighters double as reporters to wage Afghan digital war,” Reuters, May 10, 2019.

<sup>159</sup> Pamela Constable, “The Return of a Taliban Government? Afghanistan Talks Raise Once-Unthinkable Question,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 2019.

<sup>160</sup> The 102-seat upper house (*Meshrano Jirga*, House of Elders) is selected as follows: one-third, or 34 seats, appointed by the president (for a five-year term); one-third appointed by the elected provincial councils (four-year term); and one-third appointed by elected district councils (for a three-year term).

To some extent, the National Assembly can check the powers of the president, although many observers assert that it has been unable to limit presidential authority.<sup>161</sup> Both the upper and lower houses are required to pass laws and the national budget. The National Assembly has often tried to assert its institutional strength, such as by holding a March 2006 vote to require the cabinet to be approved individually, rather than *en bloc*, increasing opposition leverage. Votes of no-confidence against ministers, which under Article 92 of the Afghan constitution can be proposed by 20% of lower house members, have often affirmed these powers, with several of Karzai's and Ghani's ministers blocked or removed from office. Because it tends to be composed of more established, notable Afghans who are traditionalist in their political outlook, the upper house has tended to be more politically conservative than the lower house, and more supportive of the president (who appoints a third of its members under the constitution).

## Politics of Ethnicity and Elections

Afghanistan's active political scene is often viewed through the prism of the country's complex ethnic makeup, itself a sensitive political issue. The Afghan constitution references 14 ethnicities as well as "other tribes," (Article 4) and designates six languages (Uzbek, Turkmen, Pachaie, Nuristani, Baluchi, and Pamiri) as possible third official languages (Article 16) after the two official national languages, Pashto and Dari (the Afghan variant of Persian).

Reliable figures for the ethnic breakdown of Afghanistan are difficult to come by and, as in many other parts of the world, are heavily freighted with political ramifications. For example, the CIA World Factbook does not provide any estimates at all, stating that "current statistical data on the sensitive subject of ethnicity in Afghanistan are not available."

There is generally widespread agreement that four ethnic groups are most dominant in Afghanistan. In descending order of size, they are Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. One representative estimate gives their size as 42%, 27%, 9%, and 9% of the Afghan population, respectively.<sup>162</sup>

- **Pashtuns** are generally acknowledged to be the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, and have traditionally dominated Afghan governance; Presidents Hamid Karzai (2003-2014) and Ashraf Ghani (2014-present) are both ethnic Pashtuns. Pashtuns are concentrated in the south and east of the country, along the border with Pakistan, which has a sizeable Pashtun minority of its own. The Taliban is largely, though not exclusively, Pashtun.
- **Tajiks**, who generally speak Dari, are thought to be the second largest group in Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance that opposed the Taliban was led by Tajiks like Ahmad Shah Massoud, and today's Tajik-dominated Jamiat-e-Islami party features significant figures like Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani, former Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor, and national Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah (who is of mixed Tajik-Pashtun ancestry).
- The Persian-speaking **Hazara** people live mostly in central Afghanistan and represent most of Afghanistan's Shia minority. They have periodically suffered discrimination, persecution, and violence. Deputy CEO Mohammad Mohaqiq is

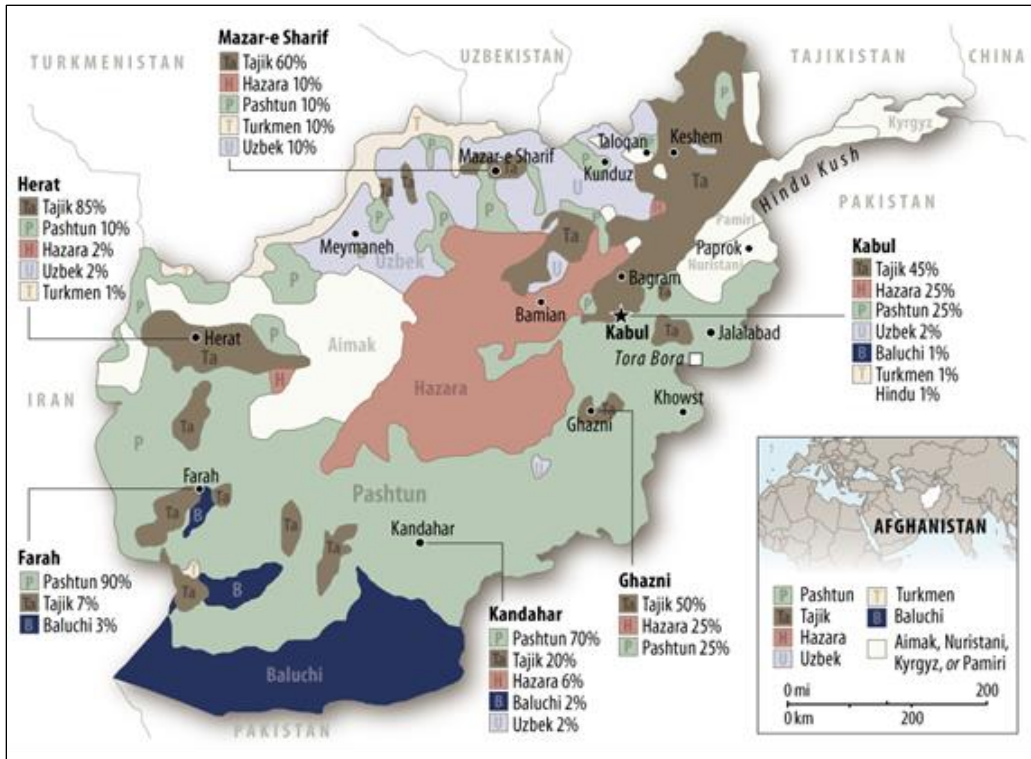
<sup>161</sup> Farid Hamidi and Aruni Jayakody, "Separation of Powers under the Afghan Constitution: A Case Study," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, March 2015.

<sup>162</sup> See, for example, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "About: Where We Work." Available at <https://www.sigar.mil/about/wherewework/>.

an ethnic Hazara. They are generally considered to be the most socially liberal ethnic group in Afghanistan.<sup>163</sup>

- **Uzbeks** represent Afghanistan’s largest Turkic minority population (other Turkic groups in Afghanistan include Turkmen and Kyrgyz), concentrated mostly in the country’s north, where they have sometimes come into conflict with Tajiks and other groups. Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum is generally considered the leader of Afghanistan’s Uzbek community.

**Figure 5. Map of Ethnicities in Afghanistan (2003)**



**Source:** 2003, National Geographic Society, <http://www.afghan-network.net/maps/Afghanistan-Map.pdf>. Adapted by Amber Wilhelm, graphics specialist, Publishing and Editorial Resources Section, CRS.

**Notes:** This map is intended to be illustrative of the approximate demographic distribution by region of Afghanistan. CRS is not able to confirm exact population distributions.

Hamid Karzai won the first nationwide presidential election in October 2004, and reelection in 2009; the latter election, the first to be administered by the Afghan government, was clouded by widespread fraud allegations. The election system (a runoff between the top two candidates if no majority is achieved in the first round) favors the likelihood the president will be an ethnic Pashtun. This was seemingly confirmed in 2014, when Abdullah Abdullah (of mixed ancestry, but associated with the Tajik community) won a plurality of votes with 45% in the first round and then lost with 44% in the second round to now-President Ghani, an ethnic Pashtun.

The 2014 presidential election was seen as a major test for Afghanistan as the U.S. and international partners drew down in advance of a planned transfer of responsibility for security to

<sup>163</sup> See Asia Foundation, “Afghanistan in 2018: A Survey of the Afghan People,” released December 4, 2018.

Afghan forces. In the first round, held in April 2014, violence was relatively low and there were fewer fraud complaints and deducted votes than in the 2009 election. The second round of voting, in June 2014, was extremely contentious and Abdullah alleged that fraud was responsible for preliminary results that showed him losing to Ghani, with Abdullah supporters reportedly threatening to seize power by force.<sup>164</sup>

Intense U.S. involvement, including calls from President Barack Obama and negotiations mediated by Secretary of State John Kerry, eventually led to a September 2014 power sharing agreement between the two men. As part of that accord, Ghani was inaugurated as president and appointed Abdullah as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a new, extraconstitutional position with powers approximating those of a prime minister. This arrangement, known as the national unity government, remains intact but has encountered extensive difficulties. Abdullah publicly accused Ghani in August 2016 of acting unilaterally and refusing to meet regularly with him.<sup>165</sup> Outward signs of friction seem to have receded since 2017, though tensions clearly remain.<sup>166</sup>

A trend in Afghan society and governance that worries some observers is the increasing fragmentation along ethnic and ideological lines.<sup>167</sup> Such fractures have long existed in Afghanistan but were largely contained during Hamid Karzai's presidency.<sup>168</sup> These divisions are sometimes seen as a driving force behind some of the contentious episodes that have challenged Ghani.

- Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum, who has criticized Ghani's government for favoring Pashtuns at the expense of the Uzbek minority he is seen to represent, left Afghanistan for Turkey in May 2017. Dostum's departure came in the wake of accusations that he engineered the kidnapping and assault of a political rival, prompting speculation that his departure was an attempt to avoid facing justice in Afghanistan.<sup>169</sup> Dostum returned to Afghanistan in July 2018, quelling protests by his supporters; he remains under indictment but no legal proceedings against him have taken place.<sup>170</sup>
- Ghani's December 2017 dismissal of Atta Mohammad Noor, the powerful governor of the northern province of Balkh who defied Ghani by remaining in office for several months before resigning in March 2018, was another sign of serious political divisions, possibly along ethnic lines.<sup>171</sup> Noor is one of the most

---

<sup>164</sup> Carlotta Gall and Matthew Rosenberg, "Anxious Moments for an Afghanistan on the Brink," *New York Times*, July 15, 2014.

<sup>165</sup> Mujib Mashal, "Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Denounces President Ghani as Unfit for Office," *New York Times*, August 11, 2016.

<sup>166</sup> Farhad Naibkhel, "Abdullah criticizes Ghani for recent appointments as politically motivated," *Afghanistan Times*, May 27, 2019.

<sup>167</sup> Frud Bezhan, "Leaked Memo Fuels New Allegations Of Ethnic Bias In Afghan Government," RFERL, November 20, 2017.

<sup>168</sup> See, for example, Azam Ahmed and Habib Zahori, "Afghan Ethnic Tensions Rise in Media and Politics," *New York Times*, February 18, 2014.

<sup>169</sup> "Afghan Vice-President Dostum flies to Turkey amid torture claims," BBC, May 20, 2017. Several of Dostum's bodyguards were sentenced to five years in jail in November 2017 for their involvement in the incident.

<sup>170</sup> Mujib Mashal, "'No Shame': Afghan General's Victory Lap Stuns a Victim of Rape," *New York Times*, August 7, 2018.

<sup>171</sup> James Mackenzie and Matin Sahak, "Stand-off over powerful Afghan governor foreshadows bitter election fight," Reuters, January 7, 2018; "Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani," Radio Free Europe, March 22, 2018.

prominent members of the Jamiat-e-Islami party, which is seen to represent the country's Tajik minority.<sup>172</sup>

After multiple delays, elections for the 249-seat Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of Afghanistan's bicameral legislature) were held in October 2018. District council elections, originally scheduled to take place at the same time, were delayed due to a lack of candidates.<sup>173</sup> The elections were preceded by contention among electoral commissioners and an ethnically charged dispute over electronic identity cards.<sup>174</sup> Various technical and logistical challenges have exposed the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to widespread criticism, with one observer describing the process as a "triumph of administrative chaos."<sup>175</sup>

Instability marred the election results as well: elections were held a week late in Kandahar and indefinitely postponed in Ghazni, and hundreds of polling stations in areas outside of the government's control were closed.<sup>176</sup> Additionally, ten candidates were assassinated during the campaign and dozens of civilians were killed and hundreds wounded in election-day violence.<sup>177</sup> Still, most reports indicated at least some measure of voter enthusiasm, especially in urban areas; turnout was estimated at around four million of nine million registered voters. Afghanistan scholar Barnett Rubin observed, "The main obstacle to democracy in Afghanistan is not the willingness of the people to participate, but the capacity of the state to make their participation meaningful."<sup>178</sup> Final nationwide results (except for Ghazni, parliamentary elections for which are supposed to be run alongside the 2019 presidential election) were released in May 2019.

President Ghani and CEO Abdullah, along with over a dozen other candidates, are running in the presidential election now scheduled, after two postponements, for September 2019. President Ghani's mandate expired on May 22, 2019. Many of his chief rivals have said that his government is no longer legitimate and have called for him to step down in favor of an alternate political arrangement.<sup>179</sup> On April 20, 2019, the Afghan Supreme Court reportedly issued a ruling extending the president's term until the election (along with those of his vice presidents; it is unclear what the CEO's status will be), citing a similar 2009 ruling that extended then-President Karzai's term to cover a postponement of the 2009 presidential election.<sup>180</sup>

It is unclear whether delays to the presidential election are related to ongoing U.S.-Taliban talks.<sup>181</sup> U.S. officials have denied that the establishment of an interim government is part of their

<sup>172</sup> "Powerful Afghan regional leader ousted as political picture clouds," Reuters, December 18, 2017.

<sup>173</sup> Ali Yawar Adili, "Afghanistan Election Conundrum (10): Failure to hold the first ever district council elections?" Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 7, 2018.

<sup>174</sup> Ali Yawar Adili, "Afghanistan Election Conundrum (1): Political pressure on commissioners puts 2018 vote in doubt," Afghanistan Analysts Network, November 18, 2017; Hamid Shalizi, "Who is an Afghan? Row over ID cards fuels ethnic tension," Reuters, February 8, 2018.

<sup>175</sup> Jelena Bjelica, "Election Day Two: A triumph of administrative chaos," Afghanistan Analysts Network, October 21, 2018.

<sup>176</sup> Azizullah Hamdard, "Nearly 950 polling stations out of govt's control," Pajhwok, March 25, 2018; "Afghans Vote in Kandahar Elections Delayed By Violence," Radio Free Europe, October 27, 2018; Haseba Atakpal, "Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections," *Tolo News*, October 27, 2018.

<sup>177</sup> Mujib Mashal, Fahim Abed, and Fatima Faizi, "Afghanistan Votes for Parliament Under Shadow of Taliban Violence," *New York Times*, October 20, 2018.

<sup>178</sup> Barnett Rubin, Twitter post, October 20, 2018. <https://twitter.com/BRRubin/status/1053679810789195776>.

<sup>179</sup> Massoud Ansar, "Presidential Candidates Suggest Caretaker Govt After May 22," *Tolo News*, May 13, 2019.

<sup>180</sup> Ali Yawar Adili, "Afghanistan's 2019 Elections (4): What will happen when the presidential tenure runs out on 22 May?" Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 30, 2019.

<sup>181</sup> Hamid Shalizi, "Afghanistan to Delay Presidential Election to July: Election Body," Reuters, December 30, 2018.



negotiations with the Taliban, but some observers speculate that such an arrangement (which Ghani has rejected) might be necessary to accommodate the reentry of Taliban figures into public life.<sup>182</sup> An interim government, or some other broad national political arrangement, might also facilitate the establishment of a new political system, which a putative settlement might require. The Taliban have stated their intention to replace the 2004 Afghan constitution, which they characterize as “invalid” and “imported from the West,” with an Islamic system.<sup>183</sup> President Ghani has responded by pointing out that Afghanistan is an Islamic republic and that the constitution prohibits any laws that “contravene the tenets and provisions” of Islam, though he has stated his openness to reviewing and amending it within legal processes.<sup>184</sup> Some analysts have argued that the Afghan constitution breeds ethnic conflict by investing the president with considerable powers (including the ability to appoint all provincial governors) and that a more decentralized system is necessary.<sup>185</sup>

## Aid, Economic Development, and Human Rights

Since the United States and its partners intervened in 2001, the international community has contributed tens of billions of dollars in economic and development assistance to Afghanistan. At the height of this effort, donor aid accounted for more than 75% of Afghanistan’s GDP. As of early 2018, donor aid still accounts for about 60% of total Afghan government expenditures (both operating budget and development budget), with domestic revenues making up the rest.<sup>186</sup> Experts and policymakers have debated many aspects of aid to Afghanistan, including amounts, mechanisms for delivery, donor coordination, and distribution within Afghanistan.

### U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan

Between 1985 and 1994, the United States had a cross-border aid program for Afghanistan, implemented by USAID personnel based in Pakistan. Citing the difficulty of administering this program, there was no USAID mission for Afghanistan from the end of FY1994 until the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan in late 2001. During the 1990s, the United States was the largest single provider of assistance to the Afghan people even though no U.S. aid went directly to the Taliban government when it was in power during 1996-2001; monies were provided through relief organizations. Since 2001, the United States has been by far the largest international donor to Afghanistan, spending over \$132 billion for development assistance since FY2001 according to SIGAR. U.S. aid has been primarily focused on security assistance, accounting for nearly 63% of those funds (see **Figure 6**).

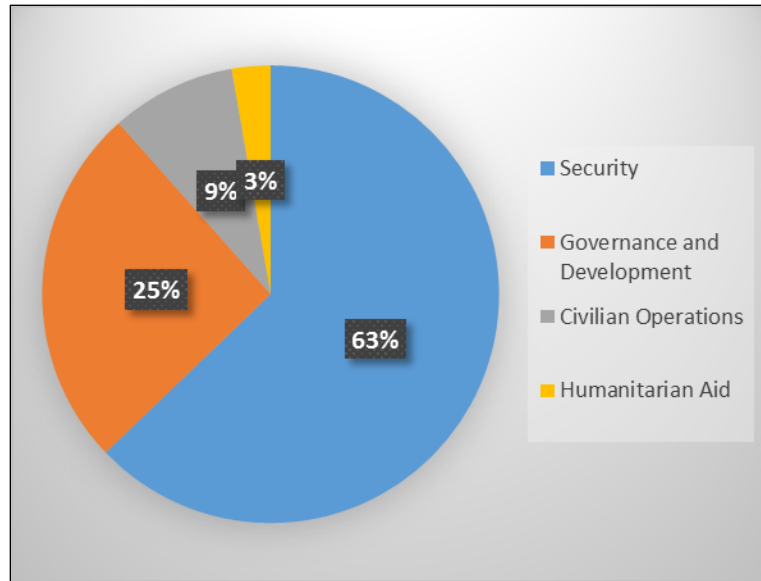
<sup>182</sup> Gul Maqsood Sabit, “On the Verge of Peace, Afghanistan Needs a Carefully Managed Strategy,” *Diplomat*, January 4, 2019; Ali Yawar Adili, “Afghanistan’s 2019 Elections (1): The Countdown to the Presidential Election Has Kicked Off,” *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, January 23, 2019.

<sup>183</sup> “Taliban demand new constitution in rare Moscow talks,” *Dawn*, February 6, 2019.

<sup>184</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Constitution of Afghanistan*. Available at <http://www.afghanembassy.com.pl/afg/images/pliki/TheConstitution.pdf>.

<sup>185</sup> Nazif Shahrani, “The Afghan president has more powers than a king,” *Al Jazeera*, January 3, 2018; Abdul Waheed Ahmad, “A Weak State, But a Strong Society in Afghanistan,” *War on the Rocks*, February 27, 2018.

<sup>186</sup> “Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan: A Research Study by ATR Consulting,” *Oxfam and Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA)*, March 2018.

**Figure 6. U.S. Funding for Reconstruction and Related Activities by Category**

**Source:** SIGAR January 30, 2019 Quarterly Report.

**Notes:** Total figure is \$132.3 billion. “Civilian Operations” is the cost of supporting the U.S. civilian presence in Afghanistan (State, USAID, various inspectors general) and includes categories such as civilian housing, transportation, food, and security.

**Appendix C** at the end of this report portrays U.S. assistance to Afghanistan by year since the fall of the Taliban. The cited figures do not include costs for U.S. combat operations.

The United States and other donors have been working to transition assistance away from off-budget (internationally managed, excluded from the Afghan national budget) expenditures to on-budget (managed by the Afghan government, also referred to as “direct contributions”). About \$14.5 billion of U.S. assistance provided to Afghanistan has been directly to the Afghan government (\$9.2 billion directly to the Afghan government, \$5.3 billion through international trust funds).<sup>187</sup> Since 2010, donors have aimed to increase to half the portion of development assistance delivered on-budget. SIGAR has expressed misgivings about this goal, arguing that “the Afghan government often lacks both the will and the necessary internal controls to ensure that those funds are spent on what the donor intended” and that “should U.S. military and civilian personnel levels decrease, the ability to track on-budget assistance will inevitably suffer.”<sup>188</sup>

### Aid Conditionality and Oversight

Some laws have required the withholding of U.S. aid subject to Administration certification of Afghan compliance on a variety of issues, including counternarcotics efforts, corruption, vetting of the Afghan security forces, human rights practices, protection of women’s rights, and other issues. Successive measures included in annual appropriations measures and National Defense Authorization Acts have conditioned Economic Support Funds (ESF) and International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funding to Afghanistan on various requirements, including the submission of various reports, and the certification that the Afghan government is meeting certain benchmarks related to metrics including corruption, democratic development, and

<sup>187</sup> SIGAR, January 30, 2019 Quarterly Report, pp. 47.

<sup>188</sup> John Sopko, remarks at “The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction: High-Risk List,” CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C., March 28, 2019.

women's rights. All the required certifications have been made, and virtually no U.S. funds have been withheld from Afghanistan.

The FY2008 defense authorization bill (P.L. 110-181) established a "Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction" modeled on a similar outside auditor for Iraq. The SIGAR issues quarterly reports and specific audits of aspects of Afghan governance and security, with particular attention to how U.S.-provided funds have been used. The SIGAR, as of July 2019, is John Sopko.

Some executive branch agencies have periodically criticized SIGAR audits as inaccurate or as highlighting problems that the agencies are already correcting. For example, DOD took strong exception to a December 4, 2013, audit by the SIGAR that asserted that the U.S. military had failed to adequately manage risk accounting for \$3 billion in DOD funds for the ANDSF.<sup>189</sup> SIGAR's annual operations are funded at around \$55 million. H.Rept. 116-78, accompanying the House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2020 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, directs that "Not later than 180 days after enactment of this Act, the SIGAR shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations a detailed plan, including funding requirements and personnel data, for the complete drawdown of operations in Afghanistan by the end of fiscal year 2021."

### Other International Donors and Multilateral Trust Funds

Non-U.S. donors, including such institutions as the EU and the Asian Development Bank, have provided substantial funds for Afghanistan's development. According to SIGAR, most of those funds are through three major international funds: the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), the UNDP-managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, and the NATO-managed Afghan National Army Trust Fund (ANATF). As of late 2018, the largest donors to these funds, after the U.S., are the UK, Japan, Germany, the EU, and Canada (see **Figure 7**). Major pledges have been made primarily at donor conferences such as Tokyo (January 2002), Berlin (April 2004), Kabul (April 2005), London (February 2006), Paris (June 2008), London (January 2010), Tokyo (July 2012), and Brussels (October 2016).

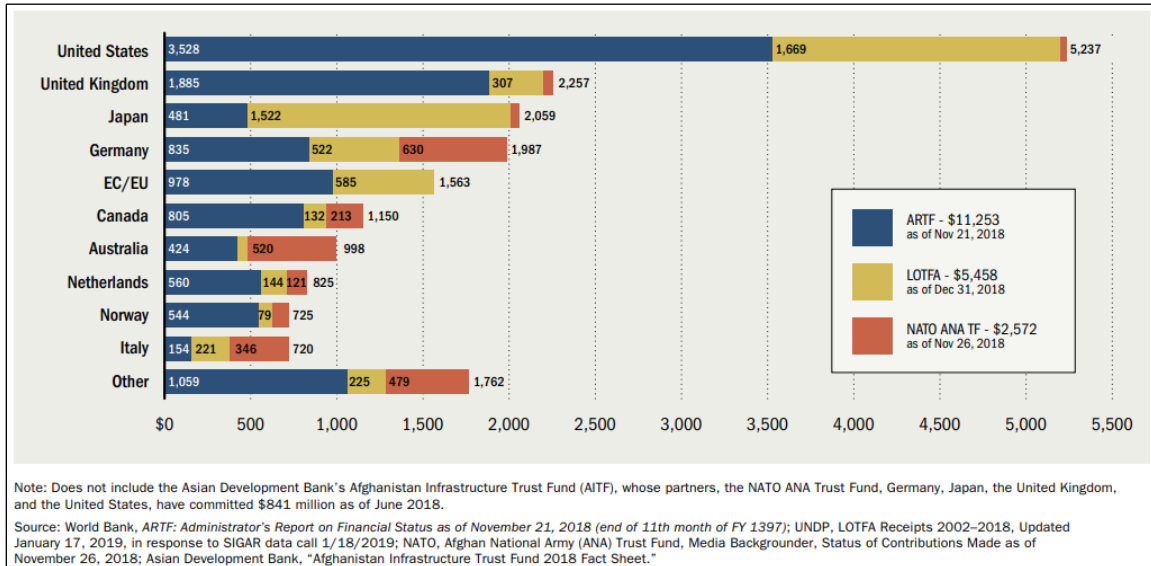
At the 2012 Tokyo conference, the United States and its partners pledged a total of \$16 billion in aid to Afghanistan through 2015 (\$4 billion per year for 2012-2015) and agreed to sustain support through 2017 at levels at or near the past decade. Among other major pledges, Japan pledged \$3 billion through 2016, and Germany pledged \$550 million over four years.<sup>190</sup> The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) that resulted from the conference stipulated requirements of the Afghan government in governance, anti-corruption, holding free and fair elections, and human rights practices.<sup>191</sup> As an incentive, if Afghanistan meets the benchmarks, the TMAF increases (to 20% by 2024) the percentage of aid provided through the ARTF and other mechanisms that give Kabul discretion in the use of donated funds.

<sup>189</sup> David Zucchino. "Watchdog Faults U.S. Military's Oversight of Aid to Afghanistan." *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 2013.

<sup>190</sup> "Donors conference in Tokyo pledges US\$16 billion for Afghanistan's development," UNAMA, July 24, 2012.

<sup>191</sup> For the text of the TMAF, see "Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (Tokyo Framework)," USAID, July 8, 2012. Available at <https://www.usaid.gov/tokyoconference/framework>.

**Figure 7. SIGAR: Cumulative Contributions to ARTF, LOTFA, and NATO ANA TF**  
 Figures in millions of U.S. dollars



**Source:** January 30, 2019 SIGAR Quarterly Report.

Donors met to assess progress on the TMAF benchmarks and pledged more funds for Afghanistan at a donors meeting in Brussels in October 2016. The conference welcomed Afghanistan's new "National Peace and Development Framework" and its efforts to fight corruption. At the conclusion of the meeting, donors announced pledges of \$15.2 billion for the period of 2017–2020 (and support at lower levels thereafter through 2024). In November 2018, 61 countries and 35 international organizations met in Geneva to measure progress on development and reform in light of the Brussels pledges. At the conference, donor nations reaffirmed their commitment to continue support through 2020 and praised some successes (such as "bold and important steps" on the peace process taken by the Afghan government) but left some key issues unaddressed, according to one analyst.<sup>192</sup>

## Economic and Human Development

Economic development is pivotal to Afghanistan's long-term stability. Some economic sectors in Afghanistan have been developed largely with private investment, including by well-connected Afghan officials or former officials who founded companies. Promoting economic growth has been a major goal of U.S. development assistance, mostly by USAID, but also by other departments. For example, the DOD Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) sought to facilitate additional private investment in Afghanistan. However, A SIGAR report of November 2014 assessed that the Task Force's efforts yielded very little result, and the TFBSO concluded its operations in March 2015.

Decades of war have stunted the development of most domestic industries. More recently, the economy also has been hurt by a decrease in aid provided by international donors since 2014. Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has grown an average of 7% per year since 2003,

<sup>192</sup> "Securing Afghanistan's Future: Peace, Self-Reliance and Connectivity: Communique," Geneva Conference on Afghanistan: Joint Communique, November 28, 2018; William Byrd, "How to Secure Afghanistan's Future," USIP, December 10, 2018.

but growth slowed to 2% in 2013 due to aid cutbacks and political uncertainty about the post-2014 security situation.

Since 2015, Afghanistan has experienced a “slight recovery” with growth of between 2% and 3% in 2016 and 2017, though the increase in the poverty rate (55% living below the national poverty line in 2016-2017 compared to 38% in 2012-2013) complicates that picture.<sup>193</sup> On the other hand, the Afghan government has made progress in increasing revenue (though as mentioned above, the percentage of total budgetary expenditures funded by donor grants is still above 60%). In any event, “for the foreseeable future, and barring a breakthrough in reconciliation and an end to or at least a substantial reduction in the level of conflict, Afghanistan will remain highly aid dependent.”<sup>194</sup>

Efforts by the U.S. and others to build the legitimate economy are showing some results, by some accounts, and are outlined by sector below.

## Infrastructure

U.S. aid has been key to a number of infrastructure initiatives, most notably in constructing roads, improving the electric grid, and developing the telecommunications sector.

- *Roads.* Road building in Afghanistan, which reportedly had less than 50 miles of paved roads in 2001, was a major development priority; as former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan General Eikenberry (later Ambassador) has said, “where the roads end, the Taliban begin.”<sup>195</sup> USAID has spent about \$2.1 billion on road construction and maintenance projects, with DOD funding an additional \$850 million in such work, according to an October 2016 SIGAR audit report. The major road, the Ring Road (which links the country’s five major cities), has been completely repaved using funds from various donors, including substantial funds from the Asian Development Bank, at a total expense of about \$4 billion (all donors). Some observers warn that the Afghan government lacks the resources to adequately maintain the roads built with international funds. Many of the roads built have fallen into disrepair and are marked with major potholes, as discussed in detail in the October 2016 SIGAR audit report.<sup>196</sup> As of July 2019, USAID does not appear to have any ongoing roadbuilding projects.
- *Electricity.* Considerable U.S. efforts in the energy sector since 2001 arguably have yielded mixed results. According to the January 2019 SIGAR report, total U.S. disbursements for power projects total over \$2 billion, including \$1.5 billion in USAID Economic Support Funds (ESF) since FY2002 (with \$626 million in active power-infrastructure programs) and about \$565 million in DOD Afghanistan Infrastructure Funds.<sup>197</sup> While the percentage of Afghans with access to electricity has increased due to these and other development efforts, by most estimates a majority remains without grid-connected power.<sup>198</sup> Afghanistan has a complex power system, operating in nine separate,

<sup>193</sup> All aid data from “Afghanistan Development Update,” World Bank, August 2018; poverty figures from CIA World Factbook, updated February 19, 2019.

<sup>194</sup> William Byrd, “Improving Afghanistan’s Public Finances in 2017-2019: Raising Revenue and Reforming the Budget,” USIP, April 2018.

<sup>195</sup> Kevin Sieff, “After billions in U.S. investment, Afghan roads are falling apart,” *Washington Post*, January 30, 2014.

<sup>196</sup> “Afghanistan’s Road Infrastructure: Sustainment Challenges and Lack of Repairs Put U.S. Investment at Risk,” SIGAR, October 2016.

<sup>197</sup> SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, January 30, 2019.

<sup>198</sup> Most estimates put the number of Afghans with access to the power grid around 25-30%; they are concentrated

unconnected grids, and is still largely dependent on the sale of surplus power from its neighbors, importing 80% of its energy. The vast majority (95%) of Afghanistan's domestically generated electricity is provided by hydropower.<sup>199</sup> The United States has worked to create a more independent and cohesive system by assisting in the development of indigenous power production and management capabilities and by connecting Afghanistan's disparate power grids.

- *Telecommunications.* Several Afghan telecommunications firms (e.g., Roshan, MTN, and Afghan Wireless) have formed since 2002 and more than \$2 billion in private investment has flowed into this sector, according to a 2016 SIGAR report.<sup>200</sup> Cellular networks now reach approximately 90% of Afghans, and the Asia Foundation found in 2018 that over 89% of respondents reported that their household owned at least one mobile phone, up from 52% in 2009. This rapid development, aided by tens of millions of dollars in support from DOD, State, and USAID, has made telecommunications a key driver of the Afghan economy. Various observers have assessed in recent years that the sector contributes millions in tax revenues to the Afghan government, and provides employment to tens of thousands of Afghans, though doubts about its sustainability exist.<sup>201</sup>

## Agriculture

Agriculture has always been key to Afghanistan's economy and stability; even though only about 12% of Afghanistan's land is arable, about 70% of Afghans live in rural areas. Non-opium agriculture contributes about 25% of Afghanistan's GDP (down from around 70% as late as the mid-1990s).<sup>202</sup> Because most GDP gains since 2001 have come from other sectors, experts have identified agriculture as a key potential growth area. Agriculture continues to employ around 40% of Afghanistan's labor force, but policies to encourage the growth of such subindustries as intensive livestock production and horticultural crops could double agriculture GDP and add more than a million jobs in that sector over the next decade, according to the World Bank.<sup>203</sup>

U.S. policy to boost Afghanistan's agriculture sector is aimed not only at reducing drug production but also at contributing to economic growth. Prior to the turmoil that engulfed Afghanistan in the late 1970s, Afghanistan was a major exporter of agricultural products. Since 2002, USAID has disbursed more than \$2 billion on almost 60 agriculture programs for such goals as increasing access to markets and providing alternatives to poppy growing, according to July 2018 SIGAR audit.<sup>204</sup> According to a 2019 factsheet, USAID programs have facilitated over

---

mostly in urban areas, in which nearly 89% of residents have access to power, compared with 11% of rural Afghans. Amanullah Ghalib, "Afghanistan's Energy Sector Development Plans," Afghanistan Ministry of Energy and Water, February 1, 2017.

<sup>199</sup> World Bank, Afghanistan Country Snapshot, October 1, 2017. One of the main U.S. power projects has been the Kajaki Dam, in Helmand Province, where USAID assisted in the October 2016 installation of a long-awaited third turbine, increasing the generation capacity of the dam by nearly 60%. The Afghan national power utility (Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, or DABS) assumed full responsibility for operation of the facility in April 2017.

<sup>200</sup> "Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector: U.S. Agencies Obligated Over \$2.6 Billion to the Sector, but the Full Scope of U.S. Efforts is Unknown," Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, July 2016.

<sup>201</sup> SIGAR, "Afghanistan's Information and Communications Technology Sector: U.S. Agencies Obligated Over \$2.6 Billion to the Sector, but the Full Scope of U.S. Efforts is Unknown," July 2016; Kristina Shevory, "Once a Bright Spot, Afghan Telecoms Face Unsustainable Losses," *New York Times*, April 8, 2016.

<sup>202</sup> Izabela Leao, Mansur Ahmed, Anuja Kar, "Jobs from Agriculture in Afghanistan," World Bank Group, 2018.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> "Regional Agriculture Development Program: Additional Evaluations and Assessments Could Improve the

\$845 million in increased sales of agriculture products, supporting the equivalent of 647,000 full time equivalent jobs.<sup>205</sup>

## Mining and Gems

Afghanistan's mining sector has been largely dormant since the Soviet invasion. Some Afghan leaders complain that not enough has been done to support the potentially lucrative mining sector. The issue became more prominent in June 2010 when the DOD Task Force for Business and Stability Operations announced, based on surveys, that Afghanistan may have untapped minerals, including copper, iron, lithium, gold, and precious gems, worth over \$1 trillion.<sup>206</sup> Some experts assert that U.S. hopes for this sector as a driver of long-term economic sustenance for Afghanistan are misplaced.<sup>207</sup> Instability and poor infrastructure are the most important impediments to the development of this sector, but questions about the legality of some projects, and the overall legal framework, have led some to question whether profits will actually support the Afghan people.<sup>208</sup>

## Oil, Gas, and Related Pipelines

Years of war have stunted development of a hydrocarbons energy sector in Afghanistan. The country has no hydrocarbons export industry, only a small refining sector that provides some of Afghanistan's needs for gasoline or other fuels. Nevertheless, Afghanistan's prospects in this sector appeared to brighten by the 2006 announcement of an estimated 3.6 billion barrels of oil and 36.5 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves, amounts that could make Afghanistan self-sufficient in energy or even able to export.<sup>209</sup> USAID has funded test projects to develop gas resources in northern Afghanistan, including a \$120 million contribution to the \$580 million Sheberghan Gas Development Project, which consisted of a number of gas wells and, in partnership with the private sector, building a 200 megawatt gas-fired thermal plant and associated transmission lines in northern Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's geographic location could also let it become a transit hub for Central Asian natural gas. The most important current gas project is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India, or TAPI, pipeline. In 2002, the leaders of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan signed preliminary agreements on a gas pipeline that would originate in southern Turkmenistan and pass through Afghanistan to Pakistan, with possible extensions into India. The leaders of the four countries involved formally "broke ground" on the pipeline at a ceremony in Turkmenistan in 2015, and work on the Afghan section began in February 2018. Afghanistan stands to gain access to gas, as well as earn hundreds of millions annually in transit fees, but some describe claims of

---

Performance and Sustainability of USAID/Afghanistan's \$301 Million Program," Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, July 2018.

<sup>205</sup> USAID Afghanistan Agriculture Fact Sheet, updated March 4, 2019.

<sup>206</sup> James Risen, "U.S. Identifies Mineral Riches in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, June 14, 2010.

<sup>207</sup> Tim Worstall, "Dear President Trump, Afghanistan's Minerals Aren't Very Valuable, They're Really Not," *Forbes*, July 27, 2017.

<sup>208</sup> Mujib Mashal, "Afghanistan Signs Major Mining Deals Despite Legal Concerns," *New York Times*, October 6, 2018; "Afghanistan's new mining law risks falling short in the fight against corruption," Global Witness, September 5, 2018.

<sup>209</sup> "Big Afghan Oil, Gas Reserves Identified," Radio Free Europe, March 15, 2006.

progress on the project as “dubious”, and point to security concerns along the pipeline’s intended route through Afghanistan, among other potential issues, as causes for skepticism.<sup>210</sup>

## Education

With more than 60% of Afghans under the age of 24, strengthening the education system is recognized as key to Afghanistan’s future but, as in other areas, prospects depend largely on security dynamics. While most sources (including USAID and others) give a figure of 9 million children enrolled in school, the January 2017 SIGAR report relays a December 18, 2016 interview with the Afghan Minister of Education, who said that “after adjusting numbers for more than three million permanently absent registered students from school records, only six million students were actually attending classes in Afghanistan.” Continuing Taliban attacks on schools have caused some (“over 1,000” according to a January 2017 address by the acting Minister of Education) to close and hindered efforts to enroll Afghan students.<sup>211</sup> Attacks tripled in 2018, according to a UNICEF report (though at least some of that rise is attributable to violence surrounding the 2018 parliamentary elections, during which many schools were used as polling centers).<sup>212</sup>

## Trade

U.S. policy has been to encourage Afghanistan’s trade relationships, particularly those with its neighbors. Afghanistan took a major step forward on building its trade relationships with its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in July 2016, over a decade after it first applied. USAID has funded a number of projects to increase the competitiveness of Afghan products in international markets, which have shown some results; the value of Afghan exports rose from \$600 million in 2016 to an estimated \$1 billion in 2018.<sup>213</sup>

In September 2004, the United States and Afghanistan signed a bilateral trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA), and most of Afghanistan’s exports are eligible for duty free treatment under the enhanced Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program. Still, Afghanistan is a relatively minor trading partner of the United States, with U.S. exports totaling \$1.2 billion in 2018 and imports from Afghanistan totaling just \$29 million.<sup>214</sup>

## General Human Rights Issues

U.S. assistance has also been used to promote the broader U.S. policy of enhancing and protecting human rights in Afghanistan and promoting the government’s adherence to international standards of human rights practices. Like previous years’ State Department human rights reports on Afghanistan, the report for 2018 attributes most of Afghanistan’s human rights deficiencies to overall lack of security, loose control over the actions of Afghan security forces, corruption, and cultural norms such as the preclusion of male-female interactions. Successive State Department reports cite torture, rape, and other abuses by officials, security forces, detention center authorities, and police.

---

<sup>210</sup> Bruce Pannier, “Afghan TAPI Construction Kicks Off, But Pipeline Questions Still Unresolved,” Radio Free Europe, February 23, 2018.

<sup>211</sup> “More Than 1,000 Schools Closed Across Afghanistan,” Tolo News, January 2, 2017.

<sup>212</sup> Rahim Faiez, “U.N. agency: Attacks on schools in Afghanistan tripled in 2018,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2019.

<sup>213</sup> USAID Afghanistan Economic Growth Fact Sheet, February 25, 2019.

<sup>214</sup> Trade in Good with Afghanistan, United States Census Bureau, accessed in April 2019.



Afghanistan has a free press, and Afghans freely express a variety of views, including criticism of the central government, in Afghanistan's numerous independent media outlets (though local media may be more constrained by local powerbrokers). Journalists have been targeted by insurgent groups, including in an April 30, 2018, suicide attack that killed nine reporters and photographers in Kabul. Numerous peaceful protests, marches, and sit-ins over the past year are a testament to the government's general respect for freedom of assembly. Several other issues related to the status of human rights in Afghanistan are outlined below.

## Status of Women

Freedoms for women have expanded since the fall of the Taliban. The advancement of Afghan women has been a stated U.S. policy interest and goal of U.S. assistance efforts, though it is unclear how sustainable these gains are, particularly given ongoing U.S.-Taliban negotiations. Despite these gains, and an expenditure by the U.S. government of roughly \$1 billion on programs for which the advancement of women was a component,<sup>215</sup> the U.N. still ranks Afghanistan 163<sup>rd</sup> of 164 countries on its 2017 gender development index.<sup>216</sup> Potential changes to the status of women in Afghanistan under a prospective political settlement have drawn scrutiny and speculation from Afghans and outside observers alike.

### *Selected Metrics*

- Female literacy: 6% (2001) vs. 16% (2017).<sup>217</sup>
- Girls in school: 3.5 million enrolled, 2.2 million out-of-school.<sup>218</sup> The Taliban claim to have lifted the ban on educating girls, and in Taliban-controlled areas some girls are attending primary school.<sup>219</sup>
- Civil service: 22% female (30% target level set in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework).
- Women in parliament: Article 83 of the Afghan constitution directs that on average at least two women be elected to the lower house of parliament from each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, creating a quota of 68 women out of 250 seats (about 27%). One third of the upper house of parliament (34 of 102 seats) is selected by the president, and Article 84 directs that half of these seats (17) be filled by women.
- As of November 2018, 4,735 women serve in the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), making up slightly less than 2% of the force.

### *Afghan Government Efforts*

The Afghan government pursues a policy of promoting equality for women under its National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) as required by the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. Afghanistan has a Ministry of Women's Affairs, the primary function

<sup>215</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, *Afghanistan High-Risk List*, Testimony of John Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 116th Cong., 1st sess., April 3, 2019.

<sup>216</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Gender Development Index (GDI).

<sup>217</sup> Literacy figures from Save the Children (2001) and the Afghan Central Statistics Organization (2017).

<sup>218</sup> "Education," USAID, March 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/education>; "Education," UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>.

<sup>219</sup> A 2018 study could not identify a single girls' secondary school open in areas of heavy Taliban influence or control. See Ashley Jackson, "Life Under the Taliban Shadow Government," Overseas Development Institute, June 2018.

of which is to promote public awareness of relevant laws and regulations concerning women's rights. It plays a key role in trying to protect women from domestic abuse by overseeing the operation of as many as 29 women's shelters across Afghanistan. Despite gains since 2001, numerous abuses, such as denial of educational and employment opportunities, forced marriage, and honor killings, continue primarily because of conservative traditions.

On August 6, 2009, then-President Karzai issued, as a decree, the "Elimination of Violence Against Women" (EVAW) law that makes many of the practices mentioned above unlawful. Efforts by the National Assembly to enact the EVAW in 2010 and in 2013 failed due to opposition from religious conservatives. While prosecutions of abuses against women are increasingly obtaining convictions, a relatively small percentage of reports of violence against women are registered with the judicial system; about one-third of those proceed to trial.<sup>220</sup>

President Ghani has signaled his support for women's rights by publicly highlighting the support he receives from his wife, despite the Afghan cultural taboo about mentioning wives and female family members in public. Ghani nominated a woman to Afghanistan's Supreme Court, but the National Assembly rejected her nomination in July 2015. He has also appointed two female governors—one more than during Karzai's presidency—and three (of 25) cabinet ministers. In February 2018, hundreds of Afghan women gathered at a conference in Kabul to urge Ghani's government to reject any potential peace deal that does not safeguard women's rights.<sup>221</sup> While women are not included in the current U.S.-Taliban negotiations, they comprise 26% of Afghan High Peace Council, and 20% of provincial peace councils, which lead local peacebuilding efforts.<sup>222</sup> A number of women participated in July 2019 talks between Taliban and Afghan representatives (including some government officials who attended in a personal capacity).

### *U.S. Policy*

Successive SIGAR audits and reports have identified issues with U.S.-funded programs to support Afghan women. According to SIGAR, Congress appropriated \$627 million to address the needs of Afghan women and girls from FY2003 through FY2010; SIGAR reported at least \$64.8 million in the three subsequent fiscal years but stated that the "full extent of [DOD, State, and USAID] efforts was unclear."<sup>223</sup> In late 2018, SIGAR assessed that the most prominent and highly funded initiative in this area, USAID's Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs (Promote), is hindered by insufficient evaluation efforts and noted that it was "unclear whether the Afghan government has the institutional capacity to continue Promote's activities once the program ends."<sup>224</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> In 2017, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission reported 4340 registered cases of violence against women. See "Summary of the Report on Violence Against Women," AIHRC, March 2018; Alissa Rubin, "Slow Gains in Justice for Afghan Women," *New York Times*, December 12, 2012, <http://unama.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Qy9mDiEa5Rw%3d&tabid=12254&language=en-US>.

<sup>221</sup> Fatima Faizi and David Zucchino, "700 Afghan Women Have a Message: Don't Sell Us Out to the Taliban," *New York Times*, February 28, 2019.

<sup>222</sup> "Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/afghanistan>.

<sup>223</sup> "Afghan Women: Comprehensive Assessments Needed to Determine and Measure DOD, State, and USAID Progress," SIGAR, December 2014.

<sup>224</sup> "Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs (Promote): USAID Needs to Assess This \$216 Million Program's Achievements and the Afghan Government's Ability to Sustain Them," SIGAR, September 2018.

## Religious Freedoms and Minorities

For several successive years, including in its 2018 annual report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has identified Afghanistan as a “Tier 2” country, meaning that the government “engaged in or tolerated...serious” violations that are “characterized by at least one of the elements of the ‘systematic, ongoing, and egregious’” standard.<sup>225</sup> According to USCIRF, “aspects of the country’s constitution and other laws are contrary to international standards for freedom of religion.”

Members of minority religions, including Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and Baha’i’s, often face discrimination, but members of these communities also sometimes serve at high levels of government.<sup>226</sup> According to USCIRF, the number of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan has dwindled from nearly 200,000 in 1992 to between 3,000 and 7,000 today. These groups were targeted in a July 2018 ISKP attack against a campaign rally in Jalalabad that killed more than 20, including a Sikh candidate for parliament.

ISKP has also aggressively targeted Afghanistan’s Shia minority (10-20% of the population), most of which are ethnic Hazaras. Afghan Shia leaders appreciated the July 2009 enactment of a “Shia Personal Status Law” that gave Afghan Shias the same degree of recognition as the Sunni majority, and provided a legal framework for Shia family law issues. Some rights groups characterized the law as formalizing discrimination against Shia women.<sup>227</sup>

## Human Trafficking

Afghanistan was ranked as “Tier 2” in the State Department *Trafficking in Persons Report* for 2018, a continuation of its 2017 ranking and an improvement from 2016 when Afghanistan was ranked as “Tier 2: Watch List” on the grounds that the Afghan government was not complying with minimum standards for eliminating trafficking and had not demonstrated increased efforts against trafficking since the prior reporting period.<sup>228</sup>

As part of the government’s significant efforts to combat trafficking, the 2018 report cites a revision to the penal code that increases penalties for human trafficking and a new training manual for combating trafficking. Nevertheless, the report says that the government did not report any new prosecutions or convictions of officials involved in trafficking, despite credible allegations. The report asserts that Afghanistan is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked persons, though trafficking within Afghanistan is more common than trafficking across its borders. Related abuses prevalent in Afghanistan include forced or bonded labor; sex trafficking, including for *bacha bazi*, a practice in which wealthy men use groups of young boys for social and sexual entertainment (see textbox below); and the recruitment and use of children in combat.

### ***Bacha Bazi***<sup>229</sup>

<sup>225</sup> The 2018 report can be accessed at <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2018USCIRFAR.pdf>.

<sup>226</sup> Baha’is fare worse than members of some of the other minorities and have “lived in relative anonymity” since 2007, when the Afghan Supreme Court declared the Baha’i faith to be a form of blasphemy.

<sup>227</sup> “Afghanistan: Law Curbing Women’s Rights Takes Effect,” Human Rights Watch, August 13, 2009.

<sup>228</sup> “2018 Trafficking in Persons Report,” U.S. Department of State, June 2018. The report can be accessed at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/282798.pdf>.

<sup>229</sup> This textbox was written by Carmelina Palmer, Research Intern, and Zoe Danon, Section Research Manager.

*Bacha bazi*, which translates as “boy play,” is a form of child sexual abuse that has been reported among Afghanistan’s military and defense forces. While there is no clear legal definition of the term, a DOD Inspector General report from 2017 describes *bacha bazi* as the practice of men sexually abusing boys who are trained to dance in girls’ clothing.<sup>230</sup> This type of abuse is thought to have a long history in Central Asia, and some who practice it report seeing it as a sign of social status, but Afghan society at large reportedly disapproves strongly; it was formally criminalized in February 2018.

The Taliban strongly oppose *bacha bazi*, and had largely eradicated it when they controlled the country. A former Marine who had served in Afghanistan noted that the Taliban have used reports of rapes committed by government agents as a recruiting tool.<sup>231</sup> The current Afghan government, after initially failing to address *bacha bazi*, has pledged to tackle the problem.<sup>232</sup> The Department of State’s 2018 Trafficking in Persons report credits the Ghani Government with some strides toward criminalizing *bacha bazi* and enforcing those laws, but the practice continues to be widespread.<sup>233</sup>

This issue attracted significant congressional concern after *The New York Times* reported in 2015 that U.S. soldiers serving in Afghanistan were being punished for protesting against the sexual abuse of boys on military bases.<sup>234</sup> Some Members of Congress intervened on behalf of several individual soldiers, and 93 Members asked SIGAR to investigate the problem and the enforcement of Leahy Laws in Afghanistan. The resulting SIGAR report and a subsequent report by the DOD Inspector General documented an ongoing problem, including a lack of clear guidance for U.S. forces to report and counter cases of abuse.<sup>235</sup> Some Afghan units receive U.S. assistance despite committing “gross violation of human rights,” because of the “notwithstanding clause” that allows for exceptions to the Leahy Laws, and because of procedural flaws in the way Leahy Laws are managed in Afghanistan.<sup>236</sup>

## Outlook

Insurgents and terrorist groups have demonstrated considerable capabilities in 2018 and 2019, throwing into sharp relief the daunting security challenges that the Afghan government and its U.S. and international partners face. At the same time, prospects for a negotiated settlement have risen, driven by direct U.S.-Taliban talks, though the prospects for such negotiations to deliver a settlement are uncertain.

Those talks currently are centered on the U.S. and Taliban priorities, namely counterterrorism and the withdrawal of foreign troops, respectively. Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Khalilzad and other U.S. officials maintain that facilitating an intra-Afghan settlement is also a U.S. objective, but the means by which the U.S. could force the Taliban into dialogue with the

<sup>230</sup> Office of the Inspector General, *Implementing of the DoD Leahy Law Regarding Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse by Members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, U.S. Department of Defense, DODIG-2018-018, 2017.

<sup>231</sup> Aaron Maclean, “Bacha Bazi and the Afghan Drawdown,” *Weekly Standard*, October 5, 2015.

<sup>232</sup> Matthew Rosenberg, “Ashraf Ghani, Afghan President, Vows to Crack Down on Abuse of Boys,” *New York Times*, (2015).

<sup>233</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2017*; the Afghan legislation is Law Prohibiting Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (1395/11/10) [2017].

<sup>234</sup> Joseph Goldstein, “U.S. Soldiers Told to Ignore Sexual Abuse of Boys by Afghan Allies,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2015.

<sup>235</sup> SIGAR 17-47-IP, “Child Sexual Assault in Afghanistan: Implementation of the Leahy Laws and Reports of Assault by Afghan Security Forces;” Office of the Inspector General, “Implementing of the DoD Leahy Law Regarding Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse by Members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces,” U.S. Department of Defense, DODIG-2018-018, 2017.

<sup>236</sup> For more see CRS Report R43361, “*Leahy Law*” *Human Rights Provisions and Security Assistance: Issue Overview*, coordinated by Nina M. Serafino, Legal Sidebar *Legal Obligation of U.S. Armed Forces to Intervene in Acts of Bacha Bazi in Afghanistan*, and CRS In Focus IF10575, *Human Rights Issues: Security Forces Vetting (“Leahy Laws”)*, by Liana W. Rosen.

Afghan government (let alone guarantee the Taliban's adherence to certain political or other conditions) is unclear, especially after a U.S. withdrawal from the country.

Observers differ on whether or not the Taliban pose an existential threat to the Afghan government, given the current military balance, but generally agree that alterations to U.S. troop deployments or, perhaps more importantly, U.S. funding for the ANDSF, would pose a challenge to the Afghan government. As President Ghani said in 2018, “[W]e will not be able to support our army for six months without U.S. [financial] support.”<sup>237</sup> Increased political instability, fueled by questions about the central government's authority and competence and rising ethnic tensions, may pose as serious a threat to Afghanistan's future as the Taliban does.<sup>238</sup>

A potential collapse of the Afghan military and/or the government that commands it could have significant implications for the United States, particularly given the nature of negotiated security arrangements. Regardless of how likely the Taliban would be to gain full control over all, or even most, of the country, the breakdown of social order and the fracturing of the country into fiefdoms controlled by paramilitary commanders and their respective militias may be plausible, even probable; Afghanistan experienced a similar situation nearly thirty years ago during its post-Soviet civil war. Under a more unstable future scenario, alliances and relationships among extremist groups could evolve, as could security conditions, offering new opportunities to transnational terrorist groups, whether directly or by default. Human rights would be likely to suffer as well.

In light of these uncertainties, Members of Congress and other U.S. policymakers may reassess notions of what success in Afghanistan looks like, examining how potential outcomes might harm or benefit U.S. interests, and the relative levels of U.S. engagement and investment required to attain them.<sup>239</sup> The present condition, which is essentially a stalemate that has endured for several years, could persist; some argue that the United States “has the capacity to sustain its commitment to Afghanistan for some time to come” at current levels.<sup>240</sup>

In May 2019, former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster compared the U.S. effort in Afghanistan to an “insurance policy” against the negative consequences of the government's collapse.<sup>241</sup> Other analysts counter that “the threat in Afghanistan doesn't warrant a continued U.S. military presence and the associated costs—which are not inconsequential.”<sup>242</sup>

The Trump Administration has described U.S. policy in Afghanistan as “grounded in the fundamental objective of preventing any further attacks on the United States by terrorists enjoying safe haven or support in Afghanistan.”<sup>243</sup> For years, some analysts have challenged that line of reasoning, describing it as a strategic “myth” and arguing that “the safe haven fallacy is an argument for endless war based on unwarranted worst-case scenario assumptions.”<sup>244</sup> Some of

<sup>237</sup> Anwar Iqbal, “Afghan Army to Collapse in Six Months Without US Help: Ghani,” *Dawn*, January 18, 2018.

<sup>238</sup> Sayed Salahuddin, “Strongman's Loyalists Show Taliban Isn't Only Threat in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, July 4, 2018.

<sup>239</sup> See, for example Jim Banks, “The Public Deserves an Afghanistan War Progress Report,” *National Review*, October 23, 2018; Seth Jones, “The U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: The Perils of Withdrawal,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 26, 2018.

<sup>240</sup> Michael Semple, “The Taliban's Battle Plan,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 28, 2018.

<sup>241</sup> Kyle Rempfer, “H.R. McMaster Says The Public Is Fed A ‘War-Weariness’ Narrative That Hurts US Strategy,” *Military Times*, May 9, 2019.

<sup>242</sup> Charles Pena, “We Can't Win-and Don't Have To-In Afghanistan,” *Real Clear Defense*, October 9, 2018.

<sup>243</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Integrated Country Strategy: Afghanistan,” September 27, 2018.

<sup>244</sup> A. Trevor Thrall and Erik Goepner, “Another Year of the War in Afghanistan,” *Texas National Security Review*,

these analysts and others dismiss what they see as a disproportionate focus on the military effort, citing evidence that “the terror threat to Americans remains low” to argue that “a strategy that emphasizes military power will continue to fail.”<sup>245</sup>

Core issues for Congress in Afghanistan include Congress’s role in authorizing, appropriating funds for, and overseeing U.S. military activities, aid, and regional policy implementation. Additionally, Members of Congress may examine how the United States can leverage its assets, influence, and experience in Afghanistan, as well as those of Afghanistan’s neighbors and international organizations, to encourage more equal, inclusive, and effective governance. Congress also could seek to help shape the U.S. approach to talks with the Taliban, or to potential negotiations aimed at altering the Afghan political system, through oversight, legislation, and public statements.<sup>246</sup>

How Afghanistan fits into broader U.S. strategy is another issue on which Members might engage, especially given the Administration’s focus on strategic competition with other great powers.<sup>247</sup> Some recognize fatigue over “endless wars” like that in Afghanistan but argue against a potential U.S. retrenchment that could create a vacuum Russia or China might fill.<sup>248</sup> Others describe the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan as a “peripheral war,” and suggest that “the billions being spent on overseas contingency operation funding would be better spend on force modernization and training for future contingencies.”<sup>249</sup>

---

September 11, 2018. See also Micah Zenko and Amelia Mae Wolfe, “The Myth of the Terrorist Safe Haven,” *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2015.

<sup>245</sup> Erik Goepner, “In Afghanistan, the Withdrawal of U.S. Troops Is Long Overdue,” Cato Institute, September 29, 2017.

<sup>246</sup> Omar Samad, “A Pivotal Year Ahead for Afghanistan,” Atlantic Council, November 27, 2018.

<sup>247</sup> See CRS In Focus IF11139, *Evaluating DOD Strategy: Key Findings of the National Defense Strategy Commission*, by Kathleen J. McInnis

<sup>248</sup> Eric Edelman, “The US Role In The Middle East In An Era Of Renewed Great Power Competition,” Hoover Institution, April 2, 2019.

<sup>249</sup> Benjamin Denison, “Confusion in the Pivot: The Muddled Shift from Peripheral War to Great Power Competition,” *War on the Rocks*, February 12, 2019.

## Appendix A. Historical Timeline, 1747-2001

This timeline briefly describes the major political and military events that have shaped Afghanistan's modern trajectory from the Durrani Empire to the U.S. invasion in 2001.

1747	Ahmad Shah Durrani, a Pashtun military commander in the army of the Persian ruler Nadir Shah, establishes the Durrani Empire in what is now Afghanistan; sometimes considered the first modern Afghan state.
1823	Durrani Empire collapses.
1826	Dost Mohammad Khan takes power in Kabul, becoming the emir (or ruler) of Afghanistan and founding the Barakzai dynasty (named after a Pashtun tribal confederation).
1839-1842	In the First Anglo-Afghan War, British forces invade to depose Dost Mohammad and install former Durrani leader as emir; despite initial success, they are eventually driven from the country and Dost Mohammad regains his throne. First example of Afghanistan's role as a buffer in the nineteenth century "Great Game" between the Russian and British empires as they solidified control over Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, respectively.
1878-1880	In the Second Anglo-Afghan War, British forces return, eventually occupying much of the country; they eventually withdraw but Afghanistan cedes some territory to British India and agrees to "conduct...relations with Foreign States in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government" as part of the Treaty of Gandamak.
1893	The "Durand Line" delineating border between Afghanistan and British India is established by Afghan emir Abdurrahman Khan and British diplomat Mortimer Durand.
1914-1918	During the First World War, the Afghan government remains neutral, resisting popular pressure to respond to the Ottoman Empire's call for pan-Islamic solidarity against Russia and Great Britain.
1919	In the Third Anglo-Afghan War, Emir Amanullah Khan (r. 1919-1929) launches attacks on British forces in Afghanistan shortly after taking power and wins complete independence from Britain as recognized in the Treaty of Rawalpindi (August 8, 1919); Amanullah declares the Kingdom of Afghanistan in 1926.
1929	After a brief civil war (during which Habibullah Kalakani seizes power for several months, becoming the only Tajik ruler of modern Afghanistan), King Mohammad Nadir Shah reasserts Barakzai rule.
1933	After Nadir Shah's assassination, his son Mohammad Zahir Shah succeeds him as king.
1973	While receiving medical treatment in Italy, Zahir Shah is overthrown by his cousin, Mohammad Daoud, who abolishes the monarchy, declaring himself the first President of Afghanistan, and establishes a dictatorship with strong state involvement in the economy.
1978	Daoud is overthrown and killed by military officers under the direction of two leaders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, in the Saur (April) Revolution. Taraki becomes president.
1979	Amin displaces Taraki in a September coup and orders Taraki's death. The Soviet Union sends troops into Afghanistan in December to prevent further gains by a grassroots rebellion against the PDPA government and its reform program. The Soviets replace Amin with another PDPA Saur Revolution leader, Babrak Karmal, who the Soviets apparently perceive as pliable.
1980	The United States begins providing covert assistance to the <i>mujahideen</i> , including both economic aid and military assistance provided through the CIA in cooperation with Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI).
1986	The U.S. government decides to begin providing anti-aircraft Stinger missiles to the <i>mujahideen</i> . After the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev becomes leader in 1985, the Soviets replace Karmal with the director of Afghan intelligence, Najibullah Ahmedzai (known by his first name), a Ghilzai Pashtun.

- 1988 Gorbachev agrees to a U.N.-brokered pact (the Geneva Accords) requiring the Soviet Union to withdraw.
- 1989 Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is completed on February 15, leaving in place the weak Najibullah government.
- 1991 Soviet Union collapses in December, cutting off support on January 1, 1992.
- 1992 Najibullah's government falls on April 15, when Hekmatyar and Massoud forces enter Kabul. Burhanuddin Rabbani becomes president, but fighting between forces loyal to him and various *mujahideen* and other militia commanders, mostly notably Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, plunges the country into civil war.
- 1994 The Taliban take control of the southern city of Kandahar in November.
- 1995 Taliban fighters approach Kabul. In September, the Taliban captures Herat province, bordering Iran, and imprisons its Tajik governor, Ismail Khan (ally of Rabbani and Masoud), who later escapes to Iran.
- 1996 Taliban victories near Kabul lead to the withdrawal of Rabbani and Masoud to the Panjshir Valley (north of Kabul); the Taliban take control of Kabul on September 27, 1996. Taliban gunmen enter the U.N. facility in Kabul that was sheltering Najibullah, his brother, and aides, and hang them. Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden relocates to Afghanistan from Sudan in May.
- 1998 Then-U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson leads a small U.S. delegation to Afghanistan, but the group does not meet Mullah Umar or persuade the Taliban to hand over bin Laden.
- After the Al Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998, the Clinton Administration increases pressure on the Taliban to extradite bin Laden by imposing U.S. sanctions on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and firing cruise missiles at Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan.
- 2001 In accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1333, the State Department orders the Taliban representative office in New York closed in February 2001.
- The Taliban destroy monumental Buddha statues carved into hills above Bamiyan city, considering them idols, in March.
- On September 9 (two days before, and possibly linked to the September 11 attacks), Ahmad Shah Massoud is assassinated by Al Qaeda operatives posing as journalists.



## Appendix B. Soviet War in Afghanistan

The Soviet Union's invasion of, and withdrawal from, Afghanistan has emerged as a frequently referenced possible historical analogue for the U.S. experience there. While there are clear and dramatic differences between the U.S. and Soviet experiences in Afghanistan, they also share some similarities that are of potential value in assessing various U.S. policy options.

The Soviet Union deployed troops into Afghanistan in December 1979 to buttress the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government, which had been established after the 1978 *Saur* (April) Revolution. Growing instability in Afghanistan, including a nascent grassroots popular uprising against the PDPA's reform program and factional fighting within the PDPA, led Soviet leaders to order the initial invasion of about 80,000 Soviet troops, which quickly took control of urban centers, major lines of communication, and other strategic points. Soviet troops, which numbered over 100,000 at their peak, partnered with Afghan government forces and various paramilitaries but generally bore the brunt of fighting against armed opposition groups, collectively known as the *mujahideen*. *Mujahideen* groups, supported by Pakistan, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and others, led a guerilla campaign against Soviet and Afghan government forces characterized by sabotage operations, attacks against military and government sites, and attacks against some civilian targets. The Soviet effort was not just military in nature. The USSR also "sent thousands of technical specialists and political advisors" to Afghanistan to "help stabilize the government and broaden its base of support," though these missions were often undermined by "infighting and lack of coordination among advisers and other Soviet officials."<sup>250</sup>

By 1985, newly installed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had decided to seek a withdrawal from Afghanistan. Soviet military losses were substantial (around 13,000 Soviet troops killed and 40,000 wounded over the course of the decade-long intervention), but experts disagree about the extent to which these casualties motivated the decision to withdraw. Other reasons cited include international isolation, the economic cost of the war effort, the potential for political unrest within the USSR, and the greater importance Gorbachev placed on his reform program.<sup>251</sup> Increasingly, Soviet attention turned to both pressuring squabbling Afghan leaders to unify and building up the Afghan military, which suffered from high rates of desertion, attrition, and casualties. U.N.-mediated talks in Geneva between delegations from the governments of Afghanistan (supported by the USSR) and Pakistan (supported by the U.S.) began in March 1982 and continued fitfully until the signing of the Geneva Accords in April 1988. The Soviet withdrawal began in May, per the Accords, and finished on February 15, 1989, when the last Soviet soldier crossed back into the Soviet Union (now Uzbekistan) from Afghanistan. In late 1988, some Soviet officials advocated maintaining a residual force in Afghanistan, citing violations of the Geneva Accords by Pakistan, and the withdrawal was briefly paused. However, the United States and Pakistan, perceiving that the Soviet impulse to pull out would trump concerns about the post-withdrawal political situation, maintained aid to the *mujahideen* and "the bluff failed to work."<sup>252</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan* (Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 33-35.

<sup>251</sup> The Soviet withdrawal is sometimes attributed, at least in part, to the 1986 U.S. decision to provide shoulder-fired surface-to-air Stinger missiles to the *mujahideen*. However, the Stingers' tactical impact is unclear given that Gorbachev's plans for withdrawal were already underway by 1986 and advanced by 1987, when the Stingers saw their greatest battlefield use; Stingers may have, at least by some Soviet accounts, prolonged the Soviet presence in the country. See Diego Cordovez and Selig Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 198-201.

<sup>252</sup> Kalinovsky, op. cit., pp. 154.

*Mujahideen* forces, as a nonstate movement, were excluded from U.N. negotiations and continued to receive support from the United States, Pakistan, and other backers after the Soviet withdrawal, as the Afghan government continued to receive military and financial support from Moscow. With this support, the Afghan government (led by Najibullah Ahmadzai, commonly known by his first name) defied expectations among some in the U.S. that it would quickly collapse after the Soviet pullout and maintained its position for several years. In September 1991, as the Soviet Union was being engulfed in a major political crisis that would eventually lead to its dissolution in December 1991, Soviet and U.S. officials announced a final cutoff in their countries' support to their respective clients, effective January 1992. With the help of key defections including current Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum, *mujahideen* and other Afghan groups displaced Najibullah in April 1992, and the country sank into a civil war from which the Taliban would emerge and eventually take control of most of the country. Upon their entry to Kabul in September 1996, one of the Taliban's first acts was to torture and publicly hang Najibullah.

# Appendix C. U.S. Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan (SIGAR)

**Table C-1. SIGAR Assistance FY2002-FY2019 (\$million)**

Category	Agency	Cumulative since FY2002	FY2002-2007	Fiscal Year											
				2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Security</b>															
DOD-Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASSF)	DOD	77,752.18	10,309.53	2750	5,606.94	9,166.77	10,619.28	9,200	4,946.2	3,962.34	3,939.33	3,502.26	4,162.72	4,666.82	4,920
Train and Equip (DOD)	DOD	440	440	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign Military Financing Program (FMF)	State	1,059.14	1,059.14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
International Military Education and Training (IMET)	State	18.33	4.35	1.66	1.4	1.76	1.56	1.18	1.42	1.5	1.05	0.86	0.8	0.8	0
Voluntary Peacekeeping (PKO)	State	69.33	69.33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Afghan Freedom Support Act (AFSA)	DOD	550	550	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities (DICDA)	DOD	3,250.46	695.36	192.81	230.06	392.27	379.83	472.99	255.81	238.96	0	138.76	135.61	118.01	0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>83,139.44</b>	<b>13,127.71</b>	<b>2,944.47</b>	<b>5,838.40</b>	<b>9,560.80</b>	<b>11,000.67</b>	<b>9,674.17</b>	<b>5,203.43</b>	<b>4,202.80</b>	<b>3,940.38</b>	<b>3,641.88</b>	<b>4,299.13</b>	<b>4,785.63</b>	<b>4,920.00</b>
<b>Governance &amp; Development</b>															
Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)	DOD	3,704.00	600	488.33	550.67	1,000	400	400	200	30	10	5	5	5	10
Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund (AIF)	DOD	988.5	0	0	0	0	299	400	145.5	144	0	0	0	0	0

Category	Agency	Cumulative since FY2002	FY2002-2007	Fiscal Year											
				2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO)	DOD	822.85	0	0	14.44	59.26	239.24	245.76	138.2	122.24	3.72	0	0	0	0
Economic Support Fund (ESF)	USAID	20,499.44	4,229.19	1,399.51	2,077.48	3,346	2,168.51	1,836.76	1,802.65	907	831.9	633.27	767.17	500	0
Development Assistance (DA)	USAID	886.5	735.07	149.43	0.4	0.3	0	0	0.35	0	0.95	0	0	0	0
Child Survival & Health (CSH + GHAI)	USAID	554.63	270.82	63.04	58.23	92.3	69.91	0	0.25	0.01	0.06	0	0	0	0
Commodity Credit Corp (CCC)	USAID	34.95	8.8	10.77	4.22	4.22	3.09	0.38	0	0	0	0	1.95	1.52	0
USAID (other)	USAID	53.73	5.5	21.96	2.81	3.45	6.25	7.1	1.84	0.8	0.82	2.91	0.29	0	0
Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR)	State	804.54	258.69	29.72	59.92	70.74	69.3	65.32	52.6	43.2	43.5	37.96	37	36.6	0
Provincial Reconstruction Team Advisors	USDA	5.7	0	0	5.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Treasury Technical Assistance	Treasury	4.65	3.23	0.75	0.47	0	0	0	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE)	State	5,254.53	1,473.67	307.56	493.9	589	400	357.92	593.81	225	250	210	184.5	160	9.17
Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)	DOJ	254.23	67.97	40.59	18.88	19.2	18.7	18.7	17	18.7	9.05	3.31	11.03	11.11	0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>33,868.25</b>	<b>7,652.94</b>	<b>2,511.66</b>	<b>3,287.12</b>	<b>5,184.47</b>	<b>3,674.00</b>	<b>3,331.94</b>	<b>2,952.40</b>	<b>1,490.95</b>	<b>1,150.00</b>	<b>892.45</b>	<b>1,006.94</b>	<b>714.23</b>	<b>19.17</b>
<b>Humanitarian</b>															
Pub. L. No. 480 Title I Program	USDA	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Category	Agency	Cumulative since FY2002	FY2002-2007	Fiscal Year											
				2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Pub. L. No. 480 Title II Programs	USAID	1,095.68	436.65	154.73	73.01	58.13	112.55	59.2	46.15	65.97	53.73	26.65	4.69	4.22	0
Disaster Assistance	USAID	824.43	298.3	16.84	27.13	29.61	66.23	56	21.5	28.13	24.5	39.78	93.84	119.64	2.96
Transition Initiatives	USAID	37.54	32.58	0	0.75	0.84	1.08	0.62	0.32	0.82	0.49	0.04	0	0	0
Migration & Refugee Assistance (MRA)	State	1,339.62	408.8	44.25	76.79	80.93	65	99.56	76.07	107.89	129.27	84.27	89.24	76.25	1.31
Emergency Migration & Refugee Assistance (EMRA)	State	25.2	25	0	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food for Progress	USDA	109.49	76.85	20.55	12.09	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
416(b) Food Aid	USDA	95.18	95.18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food for Education	USDA	50.49	50.49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Emerson Trust	USDA	22.4	0	22.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		3,605.03	1,428.85	258.77	189.97	169.51	244.86	215.38	144.04	202.81	207.99	150.74	187.77	200.11	4.27
<b>Civilian Operations</b>															
Oversight		536.52	2.5	14.3	25.2	34.4	37.2	59	58.7	62.65	68.6	62.37	55.74	55.65	0.22
Other		11,153.01	879.33	435.51	1,065.86	1,761.7	905.1	1,424.75	1,272.24	852.45	909.5	795.2	782.07	69.12	0.18
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		11,689.53	881.83	449.81	1,091.06	1,796.1	942.3	1,483.75	1,330.94	915.1	978.1	857.57	837.81	124.77	0.4
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		132,302.25	23,091.33	6,164.71	10,406.55	16,710.88	15,861.83	14,705.24	9,630.81	6,811.66	6,276.47	5,542.64	6,331.65	5,824.74	4,943.84

Source: April 30, 2019, SIGAR Quarterly Report to Congress.

Notes: Numbers have been rounded. DOD reprogrammed \$1 billion from FY2011 ASFF, \$1 billion from FY2012 ASFF, and \$178 million from FY2013 ASFF to fund other DOD OCO requirements. DOD reprogrammed \$230 million into FY2015 ASFF. ASFF data reflects the following rescissions: \$1 billion from FY2012 in P.L. 113-6, \$764.38 million from FY2014 in P.L. 113-235, \$400 million from FY2015 in P.L. 114-113, and \$150 million from FY2016 in P.L. 115-31. DOD transferred \$101 million from FY2011 AIF, \$179.5 million from FY2013 AIF, and \$55 million from FY2014 AIF to the ESF to fund infrastructure projects implemented by USAID.

## **Author Information**

Clayton Thomas  
Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs

## **Acknowledgments**

This report draws from previous reports on Afghanistan by Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, whose expertise and assistance have been invaluable.

Sarah Collins, Research Assistant in Middle Eastern Affairs, provided considerable support in the drafting and editing of this report.

---

## **Disclaimer**

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.