

COI Focus

AFGHANISTAN

Security Situation in Kabul City

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List of abbreviations/acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| AGEs | Anti-Government Elements |
| ANA | Afghan National Army |
| ANDSF | Afghan National Defence and Security Forces |
| ANP | Afghan National Police |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| ISKP | Islamic State Khorasan Province |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NDS | National Directorate of Security |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| PD | Police District |

Introduction

This COI Focus aims to provide information on the security situation in Kabul city and is an update of both the *COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City* from 24 April 2018¹ and the Kabul city chapters taken from the *European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation*, published in December 2017² and the *EASO Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation Update*, published in May 2018³. If any developments significantly change the security situation in Kabul, Cedoca will update this COI Focus as soon as possible. For a general introduction to the security situation in Afghanistan, reference is made to the EASO reports listed above, published in December 2017 and May 2018.

This report follows the structure of the individual provincial chapters in the December 2017 and May 2018 EASO reports. The general description of the city contains information on the geography and population; the chapter on the background of the conflict takes a longer term look at the security situation in Kabul, including the actors active in the city. In the chapter on recent trends in the security situation, the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims are described within a timeframe from 1 April 2018 until 31 March 2019⁴. Finally, a separate chapter is dedicated to population displacements caused by the conflict and the situation of IDPs in Kabul city.

This report presents information from 1 April 2018 until 31 March 2019⁵, taken from a wide range of sources, including national and international organizations, governmental agencies and local and international media. However, it should be noted that the reporting on the security situation cannot be considered complete for a variety of reasons, such as parties to the conflict exaggerating the actual situation, or minimizing it, incidents not being reported in mass media, etc. As Thomas Ruttig of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) notes in regard to information on the security situation in Afghanistan in 2017, 'fact-based information has become scarcer', 'interpretations of what data there is has become politicized' and parties in the conflict have become less transparent, which has made tracking trends in security more difficult.⁶

Although sources providing statistical data are very limited, Cedoca has chosen -in line with EASO and the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre LandInfo- to refer to certain statistics or figures when this data can be taken as indicative. However, it should be read together with other indicators and information on developing trends. At the same time, Cedoca wants to emphasize that the list of incidents in this COI Focus is not exhaustive and does not try to be. The incidents mentioned are included because they are considered relevant for assessing the security situation.

As Cedoca no longer has access to quantitative data on security incidents in Afghanistan, this report will not contain any (contrary to previous reports, including previous EASO reports). Since January 2018, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an American non-profit conflict collection, analysis and crisis mapping project, releases weekly data on 'political violence and protest' in Afghanistan.⁷ Afghan news agency Pajhwok Afghan News publishes monthly reports on 'attacks' and casualties and in January 2019 it published annual figures for the year 2018.⁸ As their use of a different data base (own reporting for Pajhwok Afghan News and public media reports for ACLED), different definitions, methodologies and reporting periods make it difficult to incorporate them, Cedoca

¹ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#)

² EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation, 22 December 2017, [url](#)

³ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation Update, May 2018, [url](#)

⁴ If considered relevant some incidents that occurred in April 2019 were included as well.

⁵ If considered relevant some more recent sources from April 2019 were included as well.

⁶ Ruttig, T., More Violent, More Widespread: Trends in Afghan Security in 2017, AAN, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

⁷ ACLED, South and Southeast Asia - Afghanistan, April 2019 (data accessed 11 April 2019), [url](#)

⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2018 Casualties Indicate 7 Percent Surge, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

has chosen not to include their quantitative data in this report on Kabul city. Kabul city is generally well covered in analytical reports, better than certain other regions in Afghanistan.

With the exception of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), there are no reliable sources that systematically report on the impact of conflict-related violence on civilians in Afghanistan. Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig points out the possibility that civilian casualties are non- or 'underreported' by UNAMA⁹, as its methodology requires that cases in its reports have been verified through 'at least three different and independent types of sources' before being included in the UNAMA reports.¹⁰

To find sources providing a complete view on the situation regarding displacement is also challenging. In March 2016, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) transferred the overall coordination of the response to conflict-induced displacement to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).¹¹ AAN explains how UNOCHA collects statistics on internally displaced persons (IDPs) by conducting joint assessments throughout the country and logging those assessments into a database.¹² Although Cedoca is aware that these figures possibly do not include all IDPs -such as IDPs living in urban areas and therefore difficult to identify because they are dispersed among economic migrants and the urban poor or IDPs displaced in inaccessible areas¹³- UNOCHA data on conflict-induced displacement have been included in this report, as they are continuously and systematically updated and allow to discern patterns and trends or to enable comparisons.

As this report is an update of the Kabul city chapters from the December 2017 and May 2018 EASO reports, it is written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012) and the EASO COI Referencing Guide (December 2018).¹⁴

⁹ Ruttig, T., More Violent, More Widespread: Trends in Afghan Security in 2017, AAN, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. i

¹¹ UNHCR, Afghanistan Fact Sheet, June 2016, [url](#)

¹² Bjelica, J., Over Half a Million Afghans Flee Conflict in 2016: A look at the IDP Statistics, AAN, 28 December 2016, [url](#)

¹³ Bjelica, J., Over Half a Million Afghans Flee Conflict in 2016: A look at the IDP Statistics, AAN, 28 December 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴ Both can be downloaded from the EASO website: [url](#)

1. General description of the city

Kabul city is the capital of Afghanistan and of Kabul province, of which it is a separate district alongside 14 others.¹⁵ Surrounded by mountains, the city is located at 1 800 meters above sea level¹⁶ in the Central region of the country.¹⁷ While analyst Thomas Ruttig notes in a 2017 commentary that 'Kabul urban district' is identical to the city of Kabul,¹⁸ according to analyst Fabrizio Foschini in his 2017 report for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the city of Kabul expanded from 12 districts or city wards to 22 municipal districts, which spread out to include neighbouring districts such as Chaharasyab or Musayi of Kabul province.¹⁹ A UNOCHA map, dated 4 January 2016, shows 22 police districts (PDs).²⁰ In his 2019 geographical guide of Kabul city Foschini also refers to 22 urban districts that coincide with Kabul's 22 PDs or *nahia* (the local Dari/Pashto term for city district).²¹

Kabul is by far Afghanistan's most populous and influential city, characterized by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth.²² The City Mayors Statistics ranks Kabul as the fifth fastest growing city in the world, with an average annual growth rate of 4.74 %.²³ Foschini describes Kabul as a 'primate city', a city twice as large and important as the next largest city in the country.²⁴ Kabul's urbanized area has tripled since the 1978 master plan of the capital, continuously expanding in almost all directions.²⁵ Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred this rapid growth in Kabul²⁶, but the city's infrastructure has not followed at the same pace.²⁷ Foschini explains how this burgeoning growth has compounded the problems already afflicting the capital (inadequate housing and sanitation, land grabs, lack of ownership documents, poverty, traffic, pollution and criminality), has made their solution less likely and has created new problems as well.²⁸ According to US General Nicholson, the rapid growth of the city has complicated security in Kabul.²⁹

More than three-quarters of Kabul province's population lives in the city of Kabul.³⁰ There is no consensus about its current population and growth.³¹ According to the Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization (CSO) Kabul city is currently inhabited by 4.1 million people, but this estimate only includes 17 city districts out of a total of 22.³² According to Foschini, estimates range from 3.5 million

¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province - District Atlas, 14 April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶ REACH, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2017, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷ Afghanistan CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 99

¹⁸ Ruttig, T., Kommentar zum Gutachten von Mag. Karl Mahringer (2017), 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 10

²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016, [url](#)

²¹ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²² Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 9-10; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²³ City Mayors Statistics, The World's Fastest Growing Cities and Urban Areas from 2006 to 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 9-10; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²⁵ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 7

²⁶ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 5; APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, [url](#), pp. 6-8

²⁷ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#)

²⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²⁹ Washington Post (The), 'The Taliban is in the City': Secretive Raids with U.S. Forces Launched to Stop Kabul Attacks, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁰ Afghanistan CSO, Kabul Province Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Highlights, 13 January 2015, [url](#), p. 5

³¹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 9; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³² Afghanistan CSO, ۱۳۹۷ برآورد نفوس کشور [Estimated Population of the Country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 5

up to a possible 6 million inhabitants (although this figure is disputed).³³ UNHCR, cited by EASO, reports that 'informal estimates suggest more than 7 million [people are] living in the city'.³⁴ According to the Global Cities Institute, quoted by the Guardian, the Afghan capital is projected to be home to about 50 million people by the end of the century.³⁵

Kabul city is laid out as a circle consisting of three concentric rings: the first one includes Shahr-e Kohna, the old city, Shahr-e Naw, the new city, as well as Shash Darak and Wazir Akbar Khan, where many foreign embassies, international organizations and offices are located. The second ring consists of neighbourhoods developed in the 1950s - 1980s to host the growing urban population, like Taimani, Qala-e Fatullah, Kart-e Se, Kart-e Chahar, Kart-e Naw and the *microraisons* (Soviet-style residential districts). The outer, growing ring of the city expanded rapidly after 2001, mainly housing Afghans who have migrated to the capital since then and some high-profile residential compounds.³⁶

Kabul has historically been a majority Persian-speaking city with its own distinctive Dari dialect.³⁷ It is ethnically diverse with communities from almost all Afghan ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, Sikhs and Hindus all reside there, with no group clearly dominating.³⁸ Foschini describes central Kabul as 'cosmopolitan' and more mixed than in the past. According to Foschini, the constant move of residents has a disruptive effect on social networks in the centre of the city.³⁹ Districts in Kabul's outskirts are ethnically more homogenous than the city centre. They are where the most recent settlements are to be found and new residents rely on their networks to find housing and jobs.⁴⁰ As people tend to move to areas where they already have family or into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity, different city neighbourhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups.⁴¹ For example, northern districts such as Khairkhana are primarily associated with Tajiks, whereas western outskirts such as Dasht-e Barchi primarily with Hazaras.⁴² In these densely populated neighbourhoods where recent immigrants share the same regional or ethnic background, a sort of 'village society' has emerged, whose dwellers know each other and have more direct connections with their province of origin than with central Kabul.⁴³

Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organizations, diplomatic compounds and national and international security forces, the capital has a different security outlook than most of Afghanistan's other districts and provinces.⁴⁴

³³ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 9; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁴ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Key Socio-Economic Indicators, State Protection, and Mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017, [url](#), p. 17

³⁵ Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-27

³⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); Noori, W. A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, [url](#), pp. 35-36, 38-39; Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-27

³⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6, 58

⁴¹ APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, [url](#), p. 8

⁴² Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8

⁴³ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 7; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 5; Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

2. Background on the conflict and actors in Kabul city

In Afghanistan as a whole, since the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2014, sources have noted a shift in the conflict pattern towards more conventional warfare and battles for territories. In Kabul, however, no territorial struggle is taking place. The conflict in the city is characterized by an asymmetric tactical warfare.⁴⁵ Although the Afghan capital remains under government control,⁴⁶ armed opposition groups repeatedly show that they can infiltrate the city and have the capacity to carry out large, complex attacks.⁴⁷

Kabul regularly witnesses violence.⁴⁸ Large-scale attacks causing hundreds of civilian casualties have been recorded in previous years.⁴⁹ Commenting on a string of violent incidents in January 2018 in urban areas and in Kabul city in particular⁵⁰, which were already discussed in a previous update of this COI Focus⁵¹ and in the May 2018 EASO report⁵², analysts note that this was 'not the first peak of attacks over recent years' and 'does not constitute a major shift in the conflict or the modus operandi of the Taliban', while pointing out that 'it contributes to the feeling of a worsening security situation and the feeling that the government and its security organs are incapable of stopping terror attacks'.⁵³

After an increase at the end of 2017 and in the first months of 2018⁵⁴, several sources indicate that the number of high-profile attacks in Kabul (and in the country as a whole) started to decrease from April - May 2018 and further into the second half of 2018.⁵⁵ The UN Secretary General reports a 37 % decrease of suicide attacks in Kabul in December 2018 and a 61 % decrease in February 2019, suggesting together with the United States Department of Defence (USDoD) that this possibly reflects the successful interdiction efforts and enhanced security measures by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) in the capital (see below).⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Kabul remains a target for

⁴⁵ LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den Sentrale Regionen og i det Sentrale Hoylandet - oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁶ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 22; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2018, [url](#), p. 243; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, [url](#), p. 223; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 24; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 244

⁴⁷ Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#); LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 37; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

⁴⁸ Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁰ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Osman, B., The Cost of Escalating Violence in Afghanistan, ICG, 7 February 2018, [url](#); UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 27 February 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁵¹ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-7

⁵² EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation Update, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 28-30

⁵³ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Osman, B., The Cost of Escalating Violence in Afghanistan, ICG, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁴ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 23

⁵⁵ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2018, 15 August 2018, [url](#), p. 19; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 25; UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁶ UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 5; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 13, 55; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 75; UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

insurgent groups and anti-government elements (AGEs) such as the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)⁵⁷, who continue to carry out attacks in the city.⁵⁸

As in 2016⁵⁹ and 2017⁶⁰, the main tactics used in Kabul in 2018 were either 'high-profile attacks'⁶¹, 'suicide attacks'⁶² or 'complex attacks'⁶³. UNAMA defines a complex attack as 'a deliberate and coordinated attack which includes a suicide device, more than one attacker and more than one type of device'.⁶⁴ Afghanistan analyst Borhan Osman notes that the Taliban's urban warfare has long been characterized by suicide attacks.⁶⁵ High-profile locations are targeted with suicide bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁶⁶

The targets of these attacks have been high-profile international institutions, both military and civil - including diplomatic personnel and western non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in addition to Afghan authorities, institutions and security forces.⁶⁷ According to UNAMA, the suicide and complex attacks in Kabul in 2018 mainly targeted civilians, including the civilian government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other 'soft' targets.⁶⁸ By using large amounts of explosions in populated areas, these suicide attacks -initially targeting government officials- result in the indiscriminate killing and injuring of civilians going about their daily lives in the city.⁶⁹ Additionally several sources report on a pattern of continued intimidation and violence faced by media workers and journalists⁷⁰ as well as medical personnel, both often being targeted when

⁵⁷ ISKP is Islamic State's local 'franchise' in Afghanistan and Pakistan, also known as *Daesh* in Afghanistan - see: AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Afghan analyst in Kabul that Lifos spoke to in August 2018. Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 72; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 36; UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, [url](#), p. 33

⁶⁰ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2017, 7 February 2018, [url](#), pp. 26-27; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2018, [url](#), p. 85

⁶¹ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Washington Post (The), How the Islamic State Got a Foothold in Afghanistan, 21 March 2018, [url](#); USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), pp. 23, 43; Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#); USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 36; UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁶² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-7; Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 23, 26, 28

⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 23, 26

⁶⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 63

⁶⁵ ICG, The Cost of Escalating Violence in Afghanistan, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁶⁷ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), The US and Afghanistan, Can't Win the War, Can't Stop It, Can't Leave, 1 May 2018, [url](#); Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#); Afghan analyst in Kabul that Lifos spoke to in August 2018. Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 69-70

⁶⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

⁶⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁰ UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 6 June 2018, [url](#), p. 9; Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2018, 4 December 2018, [url](#), p.

responding to these attacks.⁷¹ According to the head of the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee, cited by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), these attacks are intended to intimidate the media and can be linked to the fear that AGEs and their foreign backers may have about the Afghan population becoming more aware of the reality of the ongoing conflict.⁷² Other targets of insurgency attacks in Kabul mentioned by analyst Thomas Ruttig include religious and tribal leaders working with the government, mosques and clergymen and women's and human rights activists.⁷³

According to Ruttig, the high-profile, suicide and complex attacks in urban centres like Kabul 'do not directly change the balance of power on the battlefield, but do have propaganda impacts'.⁷⁴ Apart from striking the opponent, the objectives of these kind of attacks include grabbing international media attention, creating the perception of widespread insecurity, undermining the legitimacy of the Afghan government and sending the message to the Afghan population and authorities that 'they [insurgent groups] are capable of carrying out such attacks, even in the highly secured capital'.⁷⁵ Ruttig adds 'there also seems to be an element of competition between the Taliban and IS[KP], with IS[KP] being a relatively new player on the Afghan conflict scene and a competitor for funding and local support'.⁷⁶

In a June 2017 AAN analysis, Borhan Osman notes that a range of militant groups -including the Afghan Taliban, the now reconciled Hezb-e Islami, Taliban splinter groups such as Fedai Mahaz or Dadullah Mahaz and more recently, ISKP- have focused their attacks on Kabul city in the last fifteen years. Osman describes Kabul city as 'an attractive place for insurgent groups to carry out attacks' due to a combination of the presence of a high number of government and foreign institutions and the potential for grabbing media attention. It is also a good place for new militant groups to launch attacks if they are looking for publicity and want to introduce themselves to potential recruits.⁷⁷ Analysts refer to ISKP and the Taliban as the dominant and apparently competing insurgent groups operating in Kabul.⁷⁸ Kabul-based Afghan political analyst Yonus Fakur, cited by news agency Deutsche Welle (DW), comments on the Taliban as 'favoured as an armed opposition compared to ISKP'.⁷⁹ According to BBC analyst Abid Zainul, ISKP has faced a significant challenge from the Taliban recently. This often triggered clashes between the two groups resulting in an increase in casualties on both sides.⁸⁰

151; UNHCHR, Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan and Technical Assistance Achievements in the Field of Human Rights, 28 January 2019, [url](#), p. 12; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019 - Afghanistan, 4 February 2019, [url](#); UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 10; USDoS, Afghanistan 2018 Human Rights Report, March 2019, [url](#), p. 17; HRW, Afghanistan's Media Self-Censors to Survive - Press Freedom at Risk in Deadliest Country for Journalists, 10 April 2019, [url](#)

⁷¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁷² IWPR, Deadliest Day for Afghan Media - Reporters Rally to Insist That They Will Not Be Intimidated Into Silence, 2 May 2018, [url](#)

⁷³ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (Afghanistan Analysts Network) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Ruttig T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Osman, B., The Cost of Escalating Violence in Afghanistan, ICG, 7 February 2018, [url](#); USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 23; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 36

⁷⁶ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, 5 February 2018, [url](#); DW, Are Taliban and Kabul Teaming up Against 'Islamic State'?, 3 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁹ DW, Are Taliban and Kabul Teaming up Against 'Islamic State'?, 3 August 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#)

In September 2018, an Afghan analyst declares to the Swedish Centre for Country Information and Country Analysis in the Migration Area (Lifos) that the Taliban continue to carry out targeted attacks in the capital, primarily against security forces, various security institutions and other government related people/targets.⁸¹ Different sources state that after failing to accomplish their military objectives in 2017, the Taliban may have adapted their strategy in 2018. The Afghan security forces have increasingly shown the capacity to regain territory and resist the Taliban on the battlefield. According to a June 2018 USDoD report and a Swedish researcher, quoted by LandInfo in its May 2018 report on the security situation in Kabul, this might be the reason why the Taliban have resorted more to guerrilla tactics, high-profile attacks and civilian targets in major population centres like Kabul in 2018.⁸²

According to UNAMA, the countrywide number of civilian casualties from deliberate targeting of civilians by the Taliban nearly doubled from 916 in 2017 to 1 751 in 2018. This increase largely results from the suicide ambulance attack in Kabul on 27 January 2018 and from election-related attacks on polling day (20 October 2018).⁸³ UNAMA adds that the Taliban temporarily gained control of strategic check posts along major roadways leading to Kabul city, restricting freedom of movement for residents and impeding the movement of people and goods between Kabul and other big cities.⁸⁴ Based on various Taliban sources, researcher Antonio Giustozzi reports on an infiltration of the Taliban in Kabul city with informants and people supporting the movement. According to Giustozzi, there are three different Taliban intelligence organizations in Kabul city: the Haqqanis', the Quetta Shura's and the Mashhad Office's, counting for an estimated 1 500 Taliban informants. These are found in all city districts⁸⁵, but with a high concentration in the districts where government offices and embassies are mostly located.⁸⁶

During 2016, ISKP emerged as a new actor in Kabul. This has resulted in a more fragmented picture of the conflict in the Afghan capital and a change in the profile of the attacks carried out in the city.⁸⁷ According to analysts, ISKP has considerably stepped-up its number of attacks in Kabul, using urban terrorism as a means of showing its continued presence and significance.⁸⁸ In her December 2018 report on ISKP's network and organizational capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, researcher Amira Jadoon indicates that 56 % of all suicide attacks conducted by ISKP in Afghanistan from 2015 to 2018 happened in Kabul. Jadoon relates ISKP's focus on Kabul to various factors: Kabul city is the most densely populated region in the country, located quite close to ISKP's stronghold in Nangarhar province, while also providing the insurgency group with greater opportunities to strike both state and civilian targets.⁸⁹ ISKP claimed responsibility for several attacks in the Afghan capital in 2018, including large-scale attacks targeting members of the Shia Muslim religious minority (see below) and the ANDSF.⁹⁰ As its territorial expansion in the rest of the country became more compromised in 2018 due to increased targeted operations by the Afghan and international security forces, several sources

⁸¹ Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 69-70

⁸² LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 43

⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁵ Giustozzi refers to 17 city districts.

⁸⁶ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and the Intimidation Campaign, Report for LandInfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁷ LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁸ AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, [url](#); Osman, B. et al, 'Mother of All Bombs' Dropped on ISKP: Assessing the Aftermath, AAN, 15 April 2017, [url](#); Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#); Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Jadoon, M., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Combating Terrorism Center, 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁹⁰ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 26; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 29

comment that ISKP has relied more on asymmetric tactics, including suicide and complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of Kabul.⁹¹ BBC analyst Abid Zainul refers to *inghimasi* attacks⁹² as one of ISKP's main tactics in Kabul. These are operations carried out by well-trained fighters in which the attacker is not expecting to survive. According to Zainul, the use of this tactic suggests that ISKP has the manpower to keep up such attacks.⁹³ AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig notes a fear of ISKP among the Afghan population stemming from its perception as a great danger when it carries out a bomb attack in Kabul⁹⁴, even if there is a broad consensus that ISKP is not as powerful as the Taliban.⁹⁵

UNAMA reports 20 incidents attributed to ISKP in Kabul in 2018, resulting in 1 027 casualties and causing a high level of civilian harm in the densely populated city.⁹⁶ This is an increase compared to the 14 incidents reported by UNAMA in 2017.⁹⁷ On average, UNAMA counts 50 civilian casualties per incident attributed to ISKP in Kabul city.⁹⁸ According to UNOCHA, the physical threat posed by ISKP is unlikely to be fully eradicated and the insurgency group is expected to retain its capacity to carry-out mass casualty incidents in major urban centres like Kabul.⁹⁹ Based on ACLED data, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports a decrease of ISKP-claimed attacks in Afghanistan in its January 2019 quarterly report to the United States Congress.¹⁰⁰ Analyst Thomas Ruttig, cited in March 2019 by the Austrian news agency Der Standard, confirms that ISKP's influence in Afghanistan has been weakened overall since the autumn of 2018 and is mainly confined to a few areas in the east of the country. It is unclear whether the group's affiliates, who claim responsibility for the attacks in Kabul, are directly connected to those in the east.¹⁰¹

While news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) cites an Afghan security source saying '20 or more' ISKP cells are operating in Kabul, International Crisis Group (ICG) analyst Borhan Osman points out that it is difficult to estimate the number of ISKP fighters in the capital.¹⁰² He notes that there is little understanding of the cell(s) that carry out urban attacks. Osman describes the leaders of these cells as veterans, formerly of the Haqqani Network, the Taliban, or Al Qaeda, who have brought their expertise and network to ISKP.¹⁰³ According to an acknowledged analyst LandInfo spoke with in March 2018, the ISKP cells in Kabul have a high degree of autonomy. They mainly consist of people who have a good knowledge of the city and are able to plan and carry out attacks in an urban setting.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, ISKP cells in Kabul facilitate the movement of ISKP suicide bombers and families into

⁹¹ Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#); Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2018, 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 44; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 60

⁹² An example of an *inghimasi* attack during the reporting period occurred in May 2018 when ISKP militants assaulted the Ministry of Interior in Kabul. Al Jazeera, Afghan Forces End ISIL Attack on Ministry in Kabul, 30 May 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Jihadists Attack Afghan Ministry in Kabul, 30 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹³ Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#); Washington Post (The), How the Islamic State Got a Foothold in Afghanistan, 21 March 2018, [url](#); DW, Are Taliban and Kabul Teaming up Against 'Islamic State'?, 3 August 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 21

⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 39

⁹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 21

⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 18; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan January 2018 - December 2021, December 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 73

¹⁰¹ Standard (Der), Afghanistan: Gedenkfeier mit Politikern in Kabul mit Granaten beschossen, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰² RTBF, Afghanistan: des cellules de l'EI actives en plein Kaboul, 10 January 2018, [url](#); Strait Times (The), ISIS Cells Operate in Kabul under Noses of Afghan and US Forces, 10 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³ NYT, Islamic State Claims Deadly Blast at Afghan Shiite Center, 28 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

and out of the city, provide logistical support like accommodation and transport to suicide bombers and collect funds to finance operations.¹⁰⁵ The presence of ISKP cells is reported in PDs 5, 11, 14 and 15 to the west and the north of the city. These areas are located outside of the city centre, have low police presence and are closely associated with informal settlements populated by IDPs and returnees from Pakistan.¹⁰⁶ ISKP is reported to have an effective recruitment strategy in Kabul, driven by a large number of young urban Afghans drawn to its Salafi-jihadist ideology and increased access to social media.¹⁰⁷ In a conversation with LandInfo in April 2018, a diplomatic source connects the power of ISKP in Kabul to their cooperation with the Haqqani Network, which assists ISKP with material, explosives and expertise.¹⁰⁸

According to research by Stanford University, the Haqqani Network is believed to have introduced suicide operations as a fighting method in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹ Referring to the UN, the Long War Journal (LWJ) describes the Haqqani Network in March 2019 as 'holding key positions within the Taliban hierarchy and Al Qaeda's long-time ally, maintaining a significant terror network in Kabul'.¹¹⁰ According to UNAMA, the Haqqani Network¹¹¹ has assumed an increasingly influential role in the Taliban's military operations.¹¹² The network is believed to be responsible for many high-profile attacks carried out in Kabul, such as complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of the city.¹¹³

During the reporting period, several significant attacks in Kabul remained unclaimed or were conducted by unidentified armed groups.¹¹⁴ Analysts highlight the challenge in assessing the credibility of claims or denials of involvement in certain attacks and in attributing responsibility.¹¹⁵ On the one hand, there are indications that diverse pro-ISKP groups are claiming attacks that have not been carried out by them. On the other hand, analysts note that the Taliban are denying their involvement in attacks when there are particularly high numbers of civilian casualties, as for them it might be convenient that ISKP claims these kinds of attacks.¹¹⁶ In this regard, the New York Times (NYT) refers to the recent promise the Taliban made not to attack predominantly civilian targets.¹¹⁷ Additionally, analysts note that 'criminal networks and groups loosely connected with other insurgency actors are able to provide ISKP

¹⁰⁵ Frontier Post (The), NDS Arrests 13 Militants of Daesh Group in Kabul, 3 January 2018, [url](#); Salaam Times, Security Forces Arrest Suspected Top ISIS Recruiter in Kabul, 17 May 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, NDS Arrests Key Daesh Member in Kabul, 17 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Osman, B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring Sectarianism to the Afghan War, AAN, 19 October 2016, [url](#); REACH, Kabul Informal Settlement Profiling, November 2016, [url](#), pp. 18, 47, 49; Times (The), Middle-Class Isis Recruits Blamed for New Waves of Terror in Kabul, 10 March 2018, [url](#); Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, NDS Arrests Key Daesh Member in Kabul, 17 May 2018, [url](#); 1TV News, Four Daesh Members Arrested in Kabul, 29 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ NYT, Islamic State Claims Deadly Blast at Afghan Shiite Center, 28 December 2017, [url](#); RTBF, Afghanistan: des cellules de l'EI actives en plein Kaboul, 10 January 2018, [url](#); Strait Times (The), ISIS Cells Operate in Kabul under Noses of Afghan and US Forces, 10 January 2018, [url](#); LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁸ LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁹ Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ LWJ, UN: Al Qaeda Continues to View Afghanistan as a 'Safe Haven', 5 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Since 2017 UNAMA has attributed attacks believed to be committed by the Haqqani Network to the Taliban as the distinction could no longer be reliably established. UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 60

¹¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 60

¹¹³ Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#); USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017, September 2018, [url](#), p. 294; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 60

¹¹⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 73; UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹¹⁵ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ NYT, Taliban Leaders Declare a Halt to Bombings in Civilian Areas, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

with one-off help in exchange for financial incentives¹¹⁸ and 'there also might be an infrastructure, logistics and possible personnel ('terrorists to hire') that can be utilized by the Haqqani Network or other Taliban groups, splinter groups now sailing under an IS[KP] banner, and violent Pakistani sectarian (anti-Shia) groups'¹¹⁹.

The security plan for Kabul city, called the 'Zarghun Belt' (Green Belt) and announced in mid-August 2017, provided for a gradual expansion of Kabul's diplomatic area (also known as 'Green Zone') to the north of Wazir Akbar Khan, Sherpur and an area along the road leading to the airport.¹²⁰ In the wake of several attacks in Kabul carried out in January 2018, the approval of a new security plan for the Afghan capital was announced¹²¹ and the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone (ESZ) was established.¹²² New security measures include: replacing permanent checkpoints with temporary ones and mobile controls; replacing all police district commanders; surveillance of accesses from the different neighbourhoods that were traditionally not monitored; reinforcement of controls at the main entrances to Kabul through its four gates (including a renovation of the Kabul city gates); additional road blockades and increased patrolling; additional checkpoints on many of the side roads connecting suburbs of Kabul to the centre of the city; increased communication across Kabul's local police districts; increased reconnaissance and intelligence activities by security forces by building an intelligence fusion cell.¹²³ Many Kabul residents, especially those living in the central parts of the city, complain that the new security measures have exacerbated the city's traffic problems.¹²⁴ Analysts suggest that in response to this new security environment in Kabul, insurgent groups could start shifting their focus from protected government/coalition targets to alternative 'soft targets' on the periphery of the enhanced security zone.¹²⁵

Under the new measures, responsibility for Kabul's enhanced security zone has been transferred to the Kabul Security Force (KSF): Afghan National Police (ANP) forces maintain responsibility for security within Kabul city, Afghan National Army (ANA) forces secure the perimeter of the city and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) ensures that information and intelligence collection and sharing remain focused on the prevention of high-profile attacks.¹²⁶ A previously established separate special Crisis Response Unit (222) within the ANP in Kabul is responsible for preventing and responding to attacks.¹²⁷

¹¹⁸ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁰ AAN, Kabul Green Zone and Possible Extension, 15 September 2017, [url](#); NYT, US Digging in for Long Haul in Afghanistan, 17 September 2017, [url](#); Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., The New Kabul 'Green Belt' Security Plan: More Security for Whom?, AAN, 25 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹ RFE/RL, New Security Plan In Kabul After Deadly Attacks, 7 February 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, New Security Plan For Kabul Finalized, 4 February 2018, [url](#); Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 65, 80

¹²² USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 15, 43, 46-47; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹²³ EFE, Kabul Implements New Security Plan Following Repeated Assaults on City, 18 February 2018, [url](#); Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#); USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2018, 15 August 2018, [url](#), p. 19; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 36; Khaama Press, Deputy Interior Minister Replaces Police Chiefs of 11 Police Districts in Kabul City, 11 March 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Frontier Post (The), Kabul's New Security Plan Irks Residents, 23 February 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, WAK Residents Bear The Brunt Of Tightened Security, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., The New Kabul 'Green Belt' Security Plan: More Security for Whom?, AAN, 25 September 2017, [url](#); Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#); LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹²⁶ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹²⁷ LWJ, NATO Touts Efficacy of Afghan Crisis Response Unit, 22 August 2018, [url](#); LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den Sentrale Regionen og i det Sentrale Hoylandet - oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

The ANA has an independent Capital Division (111) that is responsible for security in the capital.¹²⁸ Under the new Minister of Internal Affairs, Amrullah Saleh, and newly appointed Kabul police chief Sayed Mohammad Roshandil, police and intelligence forces began a concerted effort to restore order in Kabul and to dismantle Taliban and ISKP cells in and around the city.¹²⁹ For example, in September 2018 extra measures were taken to protect Shia mourners on their commemoration day of Ashura.¹³⁰ The KSF conducted 27 operations targeting ISKP cells in Kabul, whereby 47 people suspected of facilitating ISKP attacks in the city were arrested.¹³¹ In February 2019, Afghan Special Forces arrested a top recruiter for ISKP in Kabul and the Taliban operative who was responsible for the May 2017 attack in the capital.¹³² In a special operation in April 2019, the Afghan intelligence arrested 6 ISKP media activists in Kabul city.¹³³

In their September 2017 assessment of the new Kabul security plan, AAN analysts stress the importance of recognizing that security is not about insurgent attacks alone and includes criminality.¹³⁴ Apart from conflict-related violence, Kabul city 'is often gripped by gun-toting crime syndicates that receive protection from the country's elite'.¹³⁵ Transport gangs operate at the gates of the city and target people coming out of the city, robbing and sometimes killing outbound travellers, while other gangs, linked to former jihadi chiefs or politicians, are active in central and peripheral areas of Kabul city that are more 'ethnically homogenous'.¹³⁶ Rising unemployment in Kabul is being cited as a major factor in the city's rate of petty (youth) crime.¹³⁷

In his 2019 AAN report, analyst Fabrizio Foschini indicates criminality as one of the current problems afflicting the Afghan capital, mostly affecting certain city neighbourhoods such as Mandawi area/Chowk (widespread theft and illicit trade), Koh-e Asmai/TV Mountain and Aliabad Hill (criminal gangs), Shahrara and Pule Sukhta (drug-related criminality), Kot-e Sangi (common criminality mixed with insurgent infiltration), the edge of PD 7 (common criminality), Kart-e Naw (house raids and robberies), the area around Jalalabad road (common criminality), Taimani and Qala-ye Fathullah (kidnappings), Wazirabad (robberies and house raids), Khairkhana (raids and robberies, 'gang sub-culture'), higher Paghman valley (kidnappings by politically connected criminal networks), Qasaba (notorious criminal networks), PD 17 (criminal gangs linked to local commanders' networks) and PD 21 (theft and robbery).¹³⁸

During the researched period for this report, national and international media mostly reported on drug-related criminality¹³⁹, extortion and kidnappings (often leading to the killing of the abducted victims)¹⁴⁰

¹²⁸ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 70

¹²⁹ NYT, In Chaotic Afghan Capital, Crackdown on Crime is Turning Heads, 16 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Clark, K., Before Ashura Extra Security Measures in Place for Second Year Running, AAN, 19 September 2018, [url](#);

Ruttig, T., Bracing for Security on Ashura, Extra Security for Ashura Mourners, AAN, 30 September 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 18, 55

¹³² NYT, Afghan Forces Arrest Man Accused in 2017 Attack That Killed 150, 9 February 2019, [url](#)

¹³³ Khaama Press, 6 ISIS Media Activists Arrested in Kabul City, 4 April 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Forces Arrest Alleged Islamic State Online Recruiters, 4 April 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., The New Kabul 'Green Belt' Security Plan: More Security for Whom?, AAN, 25 September 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁵ NYT, In Chaotic Afghan Capital, Crackdown on Crime is Turning Heads, 16 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 58

¹³⁷ Habib, M., Jobless Afghans Slip Into Crime: Countries Rising Unemployment is Proving Hard to Challenge, IWPR, 4 April 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 5-13, 15-16, 19-20, 22, 26

¹³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rise in Drug-Related Crimes Worries 'Powder Street' Dwellers, 18 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ NYT, There Are No Chickens on Chicken Street. Now There Are No Customers Either, 22 April 2018, [url](#); NYT, 3 Foreign Caterers Are Kidnapped and Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2018, [url](#); BBC News, 3 Foreigners Kidnapped and Killed in Kabul, 2 August 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, 3 Foreign Workers Abducted, Killed in Kabul, 2 August 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Kidnapping and Killing of 6-Year-Old Girl Enrages Afghans, 13 March 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kidnapping and Killing of 6-Year-Old Afghan Girl Causes Outcry, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Concerns Rise on 'Increasing' Threats to Business Community, 23 April 2019, [url](#)

in Kabul. Kidnappings in Kabul are on the rise and have been carried out by criminal gangs, as well as by the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.¹⁴¹ The city's business community as well as Afghan citizens of all income levels, foreigners and expatriate workers are potential targets.¹⁴² On the rise of kidnappings and extortion in Kabul, AAN comments that this phenomenon is 'underreported' and 'underrated' and that it 'undermines the security of Kabulis probably as much as terrorism'.¹⁴³ UNAMA equally mentions the underreporting of continued abductions (including NGO workers and UN staff members) by illegal groups and criminal gangs in Kabul in 2018.¹⁴⁴

Cited by the NYT, Kabul police chief Sayed Mohammad Roshandil declares in January 2019 that he focuses his police forces on dismantling what he calls 'a pyramid of crime' in the capital. According to officials, about 1 500 people suspected of criminal activities in the city were arrested. Interior Minister Amrullah Saleh has released the names of the suspects, giving them ultimatums to surrender and answer the accusations against them. A new nationwide order bans anyone but military, interior or intelligence officials from being trailed on the roads by pickup trucks with highly visible armed guards, as powerful people in the capital and beyond have long done. According to interviewees of the NYT, these initiatives have changed public opinion and have recently created 'a sense of optimism' in Kabul.¹⁴⁵

Unprecedented since the Taliban's expulsion from Kabul in 2001, 2018 was the first year to witness a historic ceasefire declared by the Afghan government and the Taliban leadership. In June 2018, 'president Ghani called a unilateral halt to all offensive government actions' over the Muslim holiday of Eid ul-Fitr marking the end of the month Ramadan. The Taliban joined the ceasefire for three days, whereas ISKP didn't respect it.¹⁴⁶ According to a July 2018 ICG report, the three-day ceasefire 'saw a remarkable decline in levels of bloodshed and prompted celebrations across the country'.¹⁴⁷ Like in other provincial capitals, traffic circles in the streets of Kabul were flooded with hundreds of militants from the government as well as the Taliban, embracing, exchanging flags and posing for photos. Taliban members and their supporters entered Kabul city from various directions, mainly from Wardak and Logar provinces, welcomed by crowds of cheering residents.¹⁴⁸ However the Taliban rejected the president's idea of extending the ceasefire and after three days the fighting resumed.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹ NYT, 3 Foreign Caterers Are Kidnapped and Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴² Reuters, Kidnapping and Killing of 6-Year-Old Girl Enrages Afghans, 13 March 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kidnapping and Killing of 6-Year-Old Afghan Girl Causes Outcry, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Concerns Rise on 'Increasing' Threats to Business Community, 23 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³ AAN, Afghan Capital Plagued by Kidnapping and Extortion of Locals, 10 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁴⁵ NYT, In Chaotic Afghan Capital, Crackdown on Crime is Turning Heads, 16 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to Imagine Their Country at Peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, [url](#); Quilty, A., Inside Afghanistan's Historic Ceasefire with the Taliban, VICE News, 26 June 2018, [url](#); Clark, K., Record Number of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Airstrikes: UNAMA Reports on the Conflict, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ ICG, Building on Afghanistan's Fleeting Ceasefire, 19 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁸ Tolo News, Taliban and Security Forces Celebrate Eid Together, 16 June 2018, [url](#); Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to Imagine Their Country at Peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, [url](#); Quilty, A., Inside Afghanistan's Historic Ceasefire with the Taliban, VICE News, 26 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ ICG, Building on Afghanistan's Fleeting Ceasefire, 19 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Ruttig, T., Getting to the Steering Wheel: President Ghani's New Set of Peace Proposals, AAN, 4 December 2018, [url](#)

3. Recent security trends in Kabul city

In UNOCHA's conflict severity map for 2018, which is based on combining data on armed clashes and airstrikes¹⁵⁰, civilian casualties and conflict induced displacements, Kabul city is ranked among the districts of the highest category.¹⁵¹

Without providing data on civilian casualties for the individual provinces or districts in its quarterly and midyear reports of 2018, UNAMA counts Kabul province in 2018 as the first or second among the five provinces where the inhabitants are most impacted by the conflict.¹⁵² UNAMA expresses its particular concern on the indiscriminate use of IEDs such as suicide and pressure-plate devices in civilian populated areas as well as the increased deliberate targeting of civilians using IEDs.¹⁵³ UNAMA casualty figures show an increase in civilian¹⁵⁴ casualties in Kabul since 2015 and indicate that, as in 2016¹⁵⁵ and 2017¹⁵⁶, in 2018 'Kabul province continued to record the highest number of civilian casualties, mainly due to suicide IED attacks by AGEs in densely populated civilian areas of the capital'.¹⁵⁷ In 2018, UNAMA documented 1 866 civilian casualties (596 deaths and 1 270 injured) in Kabul province¹⁵⁸. 98 % (1 815 civilian casualties) of these were caused by suicide and non-suicide IEDs, compared to 1 769 in 2017.¹⁵⁹

The majority of the civilian casualties from attacks against civilians in Afghanistan in 2018 (58 %, 2 407 casualties) were caused by suicide and complex attacks, often in urban centres like Kabul city.¹⁶⁰ As discussed in the previous update of this COI Focus,¹⁶¹ this represents a new trend in 2018.¹⁶² In its annual report covering 2018, UNAMA continues to document 'the disproportionate and extreme harm to residents of Kabul city from suicide and complex attacks'. Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks across the country in 2018, 28 incidents occurred in Kabul city causing 1 686 civilian casualties (554 deaths and 1 132 injured), marking a 5 % increase compared to the number of casualties from these types of attacks in 2017.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁰ Compared to previous years, this indicator has changed in the UNOCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview and the Humanitarian Response Plan of November and December 2018. In previous reports UNOCHA used the indicator 'security incidents', in the 2018 reports this became 'armed clashes and airstrikes'.

¹⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 2, 39; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan January 2018 - December 2021, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 2, 23

¹⁵² UNAMA, Quarterly Report On The Protection Of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January To 31 March 2018, 12 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2018, 15 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Clark, K., UNAMA Mid-Year Report on Civilian Casualties: Highest Number of Deaths on Record, AAN, 15 July 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵⁴ For UNAMA's definition of 'civilian' see: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 63

¹⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2016, February 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2017, July 2017, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 7; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁵⁸ In its annual report covering 2018, UNAMA doesn't provide specific civilian casualty data for Kabul city.

¹⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-7; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁶¹ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶² UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2018, 12 April 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2018, 15 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

In its April 2019 quarterly report covering the first three months of 2019, UNAMA notes a 23 % decrease in civilian casualties in Afghanistan as compared to the same period in 2018, representing the lowest number for a first quarter since 2013.¹⁶⁴ UNAMA attributes this reduction to a significant decrease in civilian casualties caused by suicide IED attacks in the first months of 2019.¹⁶⁵ Unlike in 2018, UNAMA indicates ground engagements as the leading cause of civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2019. An ISKP-claimed single mortar attack in Kabul city on 7 March 2019 (see below) caused approximately one-fifth of all civilian casualties from ground engagements in the first quarter of 2019.¹⁶⁶ So far, in 2019 UNAMA notes the use of IEDs as the second leading cause of civilian casualties countrywide. Contrary to 2017 and 2018 trends, the majority of IED civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by non-suicide IEDs¹⁶⁷ rather than suicide IEDs.¹⁶⁸ In the first quarter of 2019, UNAMA rates Kabul province as the first among five provinces whose inhabitants are most impacted by the conflict.¹⁶⁹

When asked about the everyday life strategies of the people in Kabul to minimize the risks of attacks, analyst Thomas Ruttig mentions a combination of rising fear and habituation or numbness.¹⁷⁰ In the wake of the string of large-scale violent incidents in January 2018 in Kabul city, as was discussed in the previous update of this COI Focus¹⁷¹, national and international press paid attention to the psychological effects or mental impact these attacks have on Kabul's residents, mentioning feelings of anxiety¹⁷² and a 'shift in normalcy for the people who now live in fear of the next attack'¹⁷³. According to UNAMA, these attacks have influenced people's perceived security in the city, and 'the unpredictable nature of these types of attacks, often away from the fighting and in civilian populated areas, has caused ordinary Afghans to live in fear of the next explosion, severely curtailing their ability to carry out normal lives'.¹⁷⁴ According to different Afghan analysts Lifos spoke with in August and September 2018, the fear of getting caught in an attack has affected people's freedom of movement. They add that many Kabul residents have restricted their mobility and avoid unnecessary travel through the city and suburbs at times considered risky (for example when military convoys and other government targets are moving around in the city).¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁴ UNAMA notes that particularly harsh winter conditions during the first three months of 2019 may have contributed to this trend. According to UNAMA it is unclear whether the decrease in civilian casualties was influenced by any measures taken by parties to the conflict to better protect civilians, or by the ongoing (peace) talks between parties to the conflict. UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁵ UNAMA also notes that the suicide attack in Kabul on 27 January 2018, which was the deadliest incident UNAMA has ever recorded, contributed to high civilian casualty figures from suicide IEDs that quarter and may have exacerbated the decrease in civilian casualties observed in the first quarter of 2019. UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

¹⁶⁶ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 3-4

¹⁶⁷ UNAMA documents a 21 % increase of civilian casualties from non-suicide IEDs so far in 2019. UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), pp. 3-4

¹⁶⁸ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁹ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁰ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-7, 10

¹⁷² Washington Post (The), Afghans, Fearing More Insurgent Violence, Feel Abandoned by Struggling Government, 11 February 2018, [url](#); Economist (The), Afghanistan's Fragile Government Picks a Dangerous Fight, 1 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Tolo News, Psychologists Claim Attacks Creating Fear Among the Public, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁵ Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6, 41, 69, 75

In 2018, UNAMA continued to document the same high levels of civilian casualties as in 2017 resulting from attacks targeting places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers, including high levels of deliberate sectarian-motivated violence by ISKP against the Shi'a Muslim religious minority population (most of whom belong to the Hazara ethnic group).¹⁷⁶ While most sectarian attacks against Shi'a Muslims in 2017 occurred in places of worship, the majority of these attacks in 2018 happened in other civilian areas, including in Shi'a Muslim majority or ethnic Hazara neighbourhoods in Kabul city.¹⁷⁷ In September 2018 the NYT reports on a continuing pattern of ISKP attacks on soft targets in the western Shia/Hazara neighbourhoods of the capital, where the group has attacked schools, mosques and training centres.¹⁷⁸ UNAMA expresses its concern about 'the extent to which these attacks are impeding their [Shi'a Muslims and Hazaras] freedoms of religion and movement and their quality of life'.¹⁷⁹ A Kabul-based security analyst quoted by news agency DW and the UN Secretary General suggest ISKP is trying to create sectarian rifts/strife in Afghanistan¹⁸⁰ and is targeting Shiites to distinguish itself from the Taliban.¹⁸¹

During the reporting period, Shia Muslims were for example deliberately targeted in the following ISKP-claimed attacks in Kabul: a suicide bombing on a voter registration centre in the predominantly Shia neighbourhood Dasht-e Barchi in western Kabul in April 2018, killing about 60 civilians and injuring an additional 138¹⁸², where ISKP explicitly cited a sectarian motive for this attack¹⁸³ (see below); a suicide attack on the Mahwood education centre in the Naqash area of Dasht-e Barchi, where a university preparatory course was taking place, killing 40 civilians and wounding 67 in August 2018¹⁸⁴; a twin attack on a wrestling club in the Qalai Nazir area of Dasht-e Barchi in September 2018 killing more than 30 civilians and injuring an additional 106¹⁸⁵; a suicide bombing close to the

¹⁷⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 28-29

¹⁷⁷ Afghan analyst in Kabul that Lifos spoke to in August 2018. Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), p. 70; HRW, World Report 2019 - Afghanistan, 17 January 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁷⁸ NYT, Bombings Target Afghan Wrestling Match and Those Who Rushed to the Scene, 5 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸⁰ UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 6 June 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸¹ DW, Why is 'Islamic State' Targeting Shiites in Afghanistan?, 21 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸² BBC News, Kabul Voter Center Suicide Attack Kills 57, 22 April 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), Dozens Dead in Bombing at Kabul Voter Registration Center, 22 April 2018, [url](#); NYT, 'So Many Bodies': Bomber Kills Dozens Signing Up to Vote in Afghanistan, 22 April 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Election-Related Attacks and Abuses During the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸⁴ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. Guardian (The), Suicide Bomber Kills 48 After Targeting Kabul Education Center, 15 August 2018, [url](#); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Suicide Bomber Targets Education Center in Kabul, Killing Dozens, 15 August 2018, [url](#); NYT, Dream of a Better Life in Afghanistan Ends in a Hilltop Grave for Students, 16 August, 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, ISIS Claims Responsibility for the Deadly Attack in Kabul City, 16 August 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 6; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸⁵ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. BBC News, Afghanistan Conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul Sports Club, 5 September 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Islamic State Claims Bombings at Sports Club in Kabul, 5 September 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Two Journalists Among 20 Killed in Kabul Blasts, 5 September 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 20 People Reported Killed, Including 2 Journalists, in Kabul Blasts, 5 September 2018, [url](#); NYT, 'Suicider!' Came the Warning. For Afghans Wrestler's Deaths Resound, 20 September 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 6; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 21

presidential palace, targeting a protest of Shia Hazaras on the security situation in Ghanzi and Uruzgan provinces, killing at least 6 civilians and injuring 22 in November 2018¹⁸⁶; a mortar attack on a high-profile political gathering for the commemoration of Hezb-e Wahdat party leader Abdul Ali Mazari¹⁸⁷ killing 11 people and injuring 104 others in the Dasht-e Barchi neighbourhood in March 2019¹⁸⁸ (see above); a triple bomb attack near the Shi'ite shrine of Kart-e Sakhi during Persian New Year celebrations on the 21st of March 2019, killing at least 6 people and injuring an additional 23¹⁸⁹. In September 2018, news agency Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reports on Hazara residents of neighbourhoods in western Kabul seeking to arm themselves and take over responsibility for security in their areas. According to AAN researcher Ali Adili, cited by RFE/RL, 'Hazara politicians have heaped pressure on the government to take extra security measures to protect Hazara areas in Kabul (...) but in the wake of [some] deadly attacks in Hazara areas (...) there are also people making unilateral call for arms'.¹⁹⁰

In October 2018, parliamentary elections took place in Afghanistan. Despite several measures taken by the Afghan government and its security forces to maintain the right of Afghan citizens to participate in the elections and to protect them from harm¹⁹¹, from the start of the voter registration on the 14th of April the whole country witnessed unprecedented election-related violence. This included attacks on sites used as registration and polling centres (for example schools), attacks on election-related staff, parliamentary candidates and ANP officers providing security and threats against people wanting to vote.¹⁹² UNAMA and news agency Voice of America (VoA) report on 'a deliberate campaign intended by the Taliban to disrupt and undermine the electoral process'.¹⁹³ From April to the end of 2018, UNAMA verified 1 007 election-related civilian casualties (226 deaths and 781 injured), with the first day of polling (20 October 2018) recording the highest number of civilian casualties on any single day in 2018.¹⁹⁴ The UN Secretary General designates Kunduz and Kabul as the two cities that recorded the highest number of security incidents on election day, with Kabul counting 14 IED and high-profile attacks claimed by ISKP. Nevertheless, this high number of security incidents did not significantly disrupt the electoral process in the capital and other urban areas.¹⁹⁵ The deadliest single election-

¹⁸⁶ RFE/RL, Deadly Clashes, Suicide Bombing Kill Dozens in Afghanistan, 12 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Killed, 22 Injured in Kabul Rally Bombing, 12 November 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, Hundreds Protest in Kabul over Ghazni, Uruzgan Insecurity, 12 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Mazari was a Hazara leader, killed by the Taliban in 1995. Al Jazeera, Death Toll Rises to 11 in Attack on Shia Gathering in Kabul, 8 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. Al Jazeera, Death Toll Rises to 11 in Attack on Shia Gathering in Kabul, 8 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 People killed, Scores Injured in Attack on Remembrance Event in Kabul: MOI, 8 March 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Death Toll Rises to 11 in Attack on Afghan Politicians Gathering, 8 March 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), pp. 3-4

¹⁸⁹ BBC News, Kabul Bombings, Nowruz Celebrations Hit by Deadly Blasts, 21 March 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Norouz Attack in Kabul Kills At Least Six, IS Claims Responsibility, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ RFE/RL, Under Threat, Kabul's Hazara Make Call to Arms, 20 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Election-Related Attacks and Abuses During the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2018, 15 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 3-4; UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, [url](#), p. 8; BBC News, Afghanistan Election: What's at Stake in the Parliament Vote?, 19 October 2018, [url](#); DW, Afghanistan Election: Multiple Blasts Reported at Kabul Polling Stations, 20 October 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 2-3; Clark, K., Record Number of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Airstrikes: UNAMA Reports on the Conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹³ VoA, Taliban Vows to Attack and Disrupt Afghan Elections, 8 October 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹⁵ UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

related attack documented by UNAMA occurred on 22 April 2018 in Kabul city. A body-borne IED detonated amongst a large crowd of civilians gathered outside a *tazkira* (Afghan ID-card) distribution centre located in the Shia populated Dasht-e Barchi neighbourhood, resulting in 198 civilian casualties (60 deaths and 138 injured). ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack using anti-Shi'a rhetoric (see above) and emphasizing the targeting of an 'electoral centre'.¹⁹⁶ USDoD suggests an attack like this may reflect ISKPs strategy to launch high-casualty attacks against minority groups in Kabul rather than a political intent to undermine the election.¹⁹⁷ In the deadliest attack on polling day (20 October 2018) in Kabul city, a suicide attacker detonated an explosive device outside a polling centre located in a municipality office, killing 13 civilians (of whom 4 ANP officers in a civilian function) and injuring 40. This attack was also claimed by ISKP.¹⁹⁸ In the aftermath of polling day, on 29 October 2018, an ISKP suicide attack took place at the entrance of the headquarters of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) compound in Kabul.¹⁹⁹

Other suicide and complex attacks carried out in Kabul city during the reporting period -causing several civilian casualties- include: a dual suicide bombing in the Shash Darak city area, close to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) headquarters, several embassies, foreign offices and the Afghan intelligence service, at the end of April 2018, claimed by ISKP and resulting in 63 civilian casualties (21 deaths and 42 injured), among them several journalists covering the first explosion²⁰⁰; an ISKP-claimed suicide attack on a gathering of the Afghan Ulema Council, the country's top religious body in Kabul, in the beginning of June 2018, killing at least 7 civilians (including 2 religious scholars) and injuring an additional 20 (including 6 religious scholars)²⁰¹; an ISKP-claimed suicide bombing at the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in mid-June 2018, resulting in 13 people killed and more than 25 injured²⁰²; another ISKP-claimed suicide attack targeting the same ministry one month later, resulting in 7 people killed and 15 wounded²⁰³; an ISKP-claimed suicide bombing at the entrance of Hamid Karzai International Airport, shortly after Afghan First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum had left the airport after his arrival in the capital, in July 2018, causing the death of 27 civilians and injuring 79 more²⁰⁴; an ISKP-claimed suicide attack near the procession commemorating the death of former mujahedin commander Ahmed Shah Massoud in September 2018, killing 7 civilians and

¹⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Election-Related Attacks and Abuses During the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-3

¹⁹⁷ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2018, 15 August 2018, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹⁹ RFE/RL, Suicide Bomber Targets Afghan Election Headquarters, 29 October 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Suicide Attack Targets Afghanistan Election Workers in Kabul, 29 October 2018, [url](#); UNGASC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

²⁰⁰ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. RFE/RL, Journalists Among 25 Killed in Kabul Suicide Bombings, 30 April 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Deadliest Day for Afghan Journalists, 10 Killed in Two Attacks, 30 April 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Twin ISIL Blasts Kill 29 in Afghanistan's Kabul, 30 April 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. i, 23

²⁰¹ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. RFE/RL, Suicide Blast Kills At Least Seven at Cleric Gathering in Kabul, 4 June 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Suicide Bomber Strikes Religious Conference in Kabul, 4 June 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 28-29

²⁰² BBC News, Kabul Blast: At Least 13 Killed in Afghan Ministry Attack, 11 June 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Suicide Bomber Kills 13, Including Women, Outside Afghan Ministry, 11 June 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Bombing Outside Afghan Ministry in Kabul, 11 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁰³ RFE/RL, Multiple Casualties in Deadly Kabul Suicide Attack, 15 July 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, 7 Killed, 15 Wounded in Kabul Suicide Attack, 15 July 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Khorasan Arm of Islamic State Again Strikes Afghan Ministry in Kabul, 15 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. RFE/RL, Afghan Vice President Dostum Escapes Suicide Attack, 14 Others Killed, 22 July 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Islamic State Claims Suicide Bombing Near Ceremony for Afghanistan's Returning Vice President, 22 July 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, Death Toll Rises to 14 in Kabul Suicide Bombing, 22 July 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

injuring at least another 24²⁰⁵; a suicide bombing targeting a gathering of religious scholars and madrasa students at wedding hall/hotel Uranos in November 2018, causing 147 civilian casualties (61 deaths and 86 injured), not claimed by any individual insurgency group but condemned by the Taliban²⁰⁶; a Taliban-claimed truck bomb attack on a British security contractors (G4S) compound in the Pul-e Charkhi neighbourhood at the end of November 2018, killing at least 10 people and injuring another 29²⁰⁷; an unclaimed complex attack targeting a government compound in the east of the city at the end of December 2018, resulting in at least 43 people killed and more than 10 wounded²⁰⁸; a Taliban-claimed suicide car bomb targeting Kabul's 'Green Village' in January 2019, killing 6 civilians and injuring another 140²⁰⁹; an ISKP-claimed suicide attack and subsequent siege that lasted for several hours targeting the Ministry of Communication in downtown Kabul in April 2019, causing at least 7 people being killed and several others wounded²¹⁰.

As in 2017,²¹¹ several attacks in Kabul in 2018 were directed against the Afghan security forces²¹², for example: an ISKP-claimed coordinated attack on a police headquarter in Dasht-e Barchi in the western part of the city in May 2018, causing several casualties²¹³; a Taliban-claimed suicide bombing targeting an NDS convoy in Bagh-e Daoud in the Company area in PD 5 in July 2018, killing 4 NDS officers and wounding several others²¹⁴; a Taliban ambush targeting a convoy of security personnel in the outskirts of Kabul in December 2018, killing at least 12 people (of which 4 security force members) and wounding several more²¹⁵. During the researched period, the use of magnetic IEDs by the insurgency was reported in several attacks against police and other security force vehicles.²¹⁶

²⁰⁵ RFE/RL, IS Claims Responsibility for Deadly Kabul Procession Bombing, 10 September 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Bombing Hits Ahmed Shah Massoud Supporters, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. RFE/RL, Toll in Afghan Attack Climbs to 55, Taliban Denies Responsibility, 21 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Death Toll from Kabul Hotel Blast Soars to 55, 21 November 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 23

²⁰⁷ Guardian (The) Taliban Carry Out Deadly Attack on G4S Compound in Kabul, 28 November 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, Truck Bomb Attack in Kabul Leaves 10 Dead, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Dead, 29 Wounded in Car Bombing on G4S Camp, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ RFE/RL, Dozens Killed, Injured in Militant Raid on Kabul Government Compound, 24 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 43 Killed, 10 Wounded in Kabul Attack, 25 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Casualty numbers according to UNAMA records. RFE/RL, Four Killed, 90 Wounded in Kabul Car-Bomb Attack, 14 January 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Fatal Blast Rocks Afghan Capital Kabul, 15 January 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Taliban Claim Lethal Car Bomb Attack in Kabul, 15 January 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²¹⁰ Guardian (The), At Least Seven Dead as Attackers Storm Afghan Ministry Building, 20 April 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Seven Dead in Attack on Communications Ministry in Kabul, 20 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, ISIS Khurasan Claims Responsibility for the Attack on Telecom Ministry in Kabul, 21 April 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹ Several examples are given in the previous update of this COI Focus. Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#), p. 12

²¹² Afghan analyst in Kabul that Lifos spoke to in September 2018. Lifos (Migrationsverket), Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 1.0), 4 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 69-70

²¹³ Khaama Press, ISIS Claims Responsibility for One of the Coordinated Attacks in Kabul, 9 May 2018, [url](#); NYT, Militants Kill 15 in Afghan Attacks, As Taliban expand Their Control, 9 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Police Among 4 Dead as Blasts, Clashes Rock Kabul, 9 May 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁴ Tolo News, Four NDS Members Killed in Taliban Attack in Kabul, 26 July 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Intelligence Operatives Suffer Casualties in Kabul Suicide Attack, 26 July 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban Suicide Bombers Attacks Afghan Intel Officers in Kabul, 26 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁵ NYT, Attacks Across Afghanistan Leave at Least 30 Dead, 11 December 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Suicide Bomber Targets Security Convoy in Kabul, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁶ LandInfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 7; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Wounded as Magnetic Bomb Hits Police Vehicle in Kabul, 10 June 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Policeman Wounded in Magnetic Bomb explosion in West of Kabul City, 19 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, 4 Wounded in Magnetic Bomb Explosion in Kabul City, 3 September 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Security Personnel Injured in Kabul Explosion, 6 January 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 3 Security Personnel Wounded in Kabul Magnetic Bomb Explosion, 6 January 2019, [url](#)

In a Skype interview with EASO in September 2017, journalist and author Anand Gopal states that 'although not easy to execute, targeted assassinations do take place in Kabul city'.²¹⁷ According to Antonio Giustozzi's 2017 report on the Taliban for LandInfo, targeted killings, including magnetic IED attacks against vehicles, 'take place away from the city centre', in contrast to the complex and suicide attacks which 'tend to take place mostly in the city centre'.²¹⁸ Compared to 2017, UNAMA reports a 17 % decrease in targeted killings -mainly by shooting- of civilians in Afghanistan in 2018. The civilians targeted in 2018 were individuals perceived as supporting or otherwise connected to the government or pro-government armed groups, whether through current or former employment or family ties, and tribal elders.²¹⁹ For example, in June 2018 a senior special forces police commander was shot dead during a family picnic in the Makrorayan area of the capital.²²⁰ UNAMA also expresses its concern on the number of killings targeting religious scholars and leaders in 2018, reporting 13 such documented incidents (15 deaths, 20 injured) countrywide.²²¹ For example, in November 2018 the deputy head of the Kabul *Ulema Shura* (Council) was shot dead by unknown gunmen on a motorbike in the seventh police district of the city.²²²

Occasionally, the AGEs target the capital with rockets and grenades.²²³ During the researched period, national and international media reported a few rocket attacks in Kabul city. For example: in July 2018 several rockets were fired at a residential area called Afshar, injuring at least 3 people, with no group claiming responsibility for the attack²²⁴; in August 2018, in an unclaimed attack, multiple rockets were fired at the presidential palace during a live broadcast of president Ashraf Ghani for the celebrations of Eid al-Adha²²⁵; also in August 2018, two rockets landed in PD 16, causing no casualties²²⁶; in September 2018, two rockets landed close to the Marshal Fahim Military University in Kabul, no casualties were reported, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack²²⁷. On several occasions, the Afghan security forces foiled rocket attacks in the capital.²²⁸

²¹⁷ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals Targeted by Armed Actors in the Conflict, December 2017, [url](#), p. 27

²¹⁸ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and Intimidation Campaign, Report for LandInfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 10

²¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

²²⁰ RFE/RL, Commander of Afghan Special Police Force Shot Dead During Picnic with Family, 29 June 2018, [url](#)

²²¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

²²² Khaama Press, Kabul's Ulema Council Chief Shot Dead by Unknown Gunmen, 24 November 2018, [url](#);

Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Cleric Body's Deputy Chief Gunned Down, 24 November 2018, [url](#)

²²³ Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴ Khaama Press, Civilians Wounded in Rocket Attack in Kabul City, 24 July 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, MPs Lash Out at Govt for Kabul Rocket Attack, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵ Guardian (The), Rockets Fired at Afghan Presidential Palace During Eid Speech, 21 August 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Rockets Hit Near Kabul Presidential Palace, 21 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Reject Involvement in Today's Rocket Attack on Kabul City, 21 August 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Two Rockets Fired by Rebels Hit Kabul, 19 August 2018, [url](#)

²²⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Two Rockets Land Near Military University in Kabul, 19 September 2018, [url](#)

²²⁸ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Foil Rocket Attack on Kabul City, 27 June 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, ANP Forces Thwart Rocket Attack on Kabul City, 18 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Foil Rocket Attack on Kabul City, 10 December 2018, [url](#)

4. Displacement and the situation of IDPs in Kabul city

According to UNOCHA assessments, no conflict-induced displacement was reported from Kabul district²²⁹ between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, while during that same period Kabul district received 8 218 conflict-induced IDPs.²³⁰ This number almost doubled compared to the reporting period of the previous update of this COI Focus, from 1 June 2017 until 31 March 2018.²³¹ The IDPs arriving in Kabul district during the reporting period come from a range of different provinces, such as Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Ghazni, Kapisa, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Paktya, Samangan and Wardak.²³² In 2018, UNOCHA registered a peak of 476 IDPs coming from the provincial capital of Ghazni province in mid-August, due to the three-day assault of the Taliban on Ghazni city²³³, a peak of 455 IDPs coming from Day Mirdad district of Wardak province in mid-November²³⁴ and a peak of 1 400 IDPs coming from Jaghuri district of Ghazni province in mid-November²³⁵. The IDPs arriving in Kabul district in 2019 are mainly from Tagab and Nejrab districts of Kapisa province, with three peaks counting for a total of 840 individuals during the first half of January 2019.²³⁶

As many as two-thirds of all Afghans displaced outside their province have moved to the five regional capitals.²³⁷ Kabul's growth has been particularly significant.²³⁸ According to the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey of CSO published in September 2018, 'Kabul province -and more specifically the capital- stands out as the main gravitational centre for migrants in the country, both for those moving internally and for those returning from abroad'.²³⁹ According to 2018 estimates from IOM, about 7 % of Kabul's population are either displaced by war or returnees who previously fled the country.²⁴⁰

The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known. Movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods.²⁴¹ In September 2018, the Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation estimated the total number of IDPs in Kabul from 70 000 to 80 000 people.²⁴² There are different categories of IDPs in the city: (1) those fleeing armed conflict and insecurity, (2) returnees who could not return to their area of origin and live in secondary displacement, (3) those displaced from rural areas because of natural disasters, localized conflicts or a shortage of work, essential services and food, and (4) migratory groups/nomads such as Kuchis and

²²⁹ In its assessment of conflict-induced displacement UNOCHA doesn't differentiate between Kabul city and Kabul district. There are no specific UNOCHA data available for displacement from and to Kabul city.

²³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 21 April 2019, [url](#)

²³¹ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#), p. 13

²³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 21 April 2019, [url](#)

²³³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 15 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 18 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Tolo News, Poor Living Conditions Plague Ghanzi, Uruzgan IDP's, 30 November 2018, [url](#)

²³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 21 April 2019, [url](#)

²³⁷ NRC, Displaced: If You're a Thirteen Year Old Living in Afghanistan, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁸ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²³⁹ Afghanistan CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. xxx

²⁴⁰ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, [url](#), p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, [url](#), p. 10; New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 8; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴² Tolo News, Insecurity, Drought Displace 300,000 Afghans, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

Jogis residing in the city because conflict disrupted their migration patterns and livelihood or because of increasing impoverishment.²⁴³

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the capital, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21.²⁴⁴ They do not necessarily live separated from the other urban dwellers and often mingle with other vulnerable groups such as the urban poor, returnees and economic migrants. The lack of adequate land and affordable housing in the urban area forces most new and protracted IDPs in Kabul to reside in one of the sixty to seventy informal and illegal settlements around the city. These are often referred to as '(Kabul) Informal Settlements', ISETs or KIS (most of them not in accordance with the Kabul City master plan) and include some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city.²⁴⁵ According to UN Habitat, quoted by humanitarian news agency The New Humanitarian, 80 % of urban areas in Kabul are informal settlements.²⁴⁶ Chaman-e Babrak and Chahari Qambar Camps (mostly hosting IDPs from the southern Helmand province) at the western edge of Kabul are examples of some of the largest illegal settlements in the city.²⁴⁷

In December 2018, Afghanistan Protection Cluster reports on worrying indications of rising poverty in Kabul's KIS-sites, contributing to street begging, over-crowded accommodation, and heightened risks of gender-based violence.²⁴⁸ A study of NGO IMPACT Initiatives published in December 2017 indicates a low level of exchange between people residing within and outside ISET's, revealing two distinct sub-communities within the broader community and a perceived isolation of the IDP families from surrounding host communities.²⁴⁹ The IDPs arriving and residing in Kabul add pressure on the community, basic services and social infrastructure, strongly affecting the absorption capacity of the city.²⁵⁰ More than 80 % of the Kabul IDP respondents of a Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) study published in January 2018 listed access to food and water as a major challenge in their daily life.²⁵¹ Afghanistan's capital has been facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people.²⁵²

²⁴³ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7

²⁴⁴ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, May 2017, 17 June 2017, [url](#), p. 1; EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection & ERM, IDP's Needs Assessment in Kabul Province, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴⁵ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Bjelica, J., Afghanistan's Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#); NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 53; Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#); UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs for Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), p. 35; Action Against Hunger, No Afghans Left Behind. Calling for a Collective People Centered Approach to Hunger, November 2018, [url](#), p. 12

²⁴⁶ New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), pp. 8-9; Tolo News, Make Overdue IDP Policy a National Priority, 10 August 2017, [url](#); Xinhua News Agency, Children Long for a Better Life in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, [url](#); Oxfam, Returning to Fragility: Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#); Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update November 2017, December 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ IMPACT Initiatives, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul Afghanistan, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²⁵⁰ UNHCR, UNHCR's Support Towards the Implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence Through Greater Responsibility Sharing 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5, 21-22; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

²⁵¹ NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

²⁵² AI, 'My Children Will Die This Winter' - Afghanistan's Broken Promise to the Displaced, 2016, [url](#), pp. 33-34; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results June 2017, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 25-26; Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, Kabul's Underground Water Reserves 'To Dry Up Within Years', 13 July 2018, [url](#); Kazemi, S. R., Blue Gold: The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#); DW, Can Religious Leaders Help Keep Kabul's Water Flowing?, 23 October 2018, [url](#); Tolo News, Kabul Residents Plagued by 'Severe' Lack of Water, 22 December

With limited job opportunities, few or no social protection nets, poor shelter/housing conditions, impeded access to education and healthcare and the continuous fear of eviction, displaced families in the KIS-sites face increased protection risks in their daily life and are often forced into secondary displacement and negative coping strategies like child labour, early marriage and reducing quantity and quality of food.²⁵³ In areas with a high concentration of IDPs, schools have been left overloaded and unable to cope with the influx of children received.²⁵⁴ Child labour appears particularly prevalent among the urban displaced in Kabul, due to the greater economic vulnerability of IDPs in the capital and the fact that the city's relatively vibrant economy creates more demand for child labour.²⁵⁵ IDPs in Kabul are more likely than their counterparts in the general population to be underemployed. Their lack of marketable skills in an urban area restricts them to unstable work. They mostly work as unskilled day labourers, competing for low paid and precarious jobs in the construction sector and to a lesser extent in agriculture.²⁵⁶

Apart from internal displacement due to the conflict in Afghanistan, Kabul city sees large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Iran), putting further strain on the city's services and its capacity to reintegrate these displaced people.²⁵⁷ A study by Oxfam among returnee populations in Kabul city indicates that many returnees end up in Kabul because of relatively higher security than in their regions of origin and because of expectations of more job opportunities and support facilities. Most returnees in Kabul city depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support. Those who have been in Kabul for several years report a deterioration of the situation for returnees in the city. According to Oxfam, the same general situation applies to both forced and voluntary returnees in Kabul: 'few tensions but increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fears among both returnees and host communities'.²⁵⁸ According to research by Victoria Metcalfe, there is an important difference between IDPs and returnees in Kabul. Many returnees are able to bring assets from abroad with them on return, while most IDPs have lost all their possessions in the process of flight. Possessing these assets means less investment is needed for returnees on arrival in the city.²⁵⁹

According to the World Bank quoted by the Guardian, around 80 % of Kabul's population, a mix of recent and long term IDPs, returnees, economic migrants and original inhabitants, lives in informal settlements. Not only newly displaced people or returnees, but also some older-generation IDPs and returnees still find it hard to integrate in the city and find stable employment, while they are often cut off from humanitarian help destined for recent arrivals. Within this context of massive and prolonged population movements, Nassim Majidi, director of the think-tank Samuel Hall, refers to the

2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Devastating Drought Dries up Kabul, 14 January 2019, [url](#); Washington Post (The), To Survive in Kabul Boys Scavenge for Treasure in the City's Trash, 11 February 2019, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³ Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, November 2017, December 2017, [url](#); NRC et al., Going Home to Displacement: Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 4 June 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Haymon B. S., The Cycle of Struggle: A Human Security Perspective on Afghanistan's IDP Women, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28; Reuters, Life in Kabul's Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

²⁵⁵ NRC et al., Going Home to Displacement: Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-7; NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 32-33

²⁵⁶ NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 27-28

²⁵⁷ ACAPS, Anticipatory Briefing Note - Afghanistan: Forced returnees: Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul, 17 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, 17 June 2017, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

²⁵⁸ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24

²⁵⁹ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 20

humanitarian situation in Kabul as a 'powderkeg, with poverty, greater risks of natural disasters, disease and social instability'.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

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