

COI Focus

AFGHANISTAN

Security Situation in Kabul City

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Cedoca

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List of abbreviations/acronyms used

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AGEs	Anti-Government Elements
AHRDO	Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation
AI	Amnesty International
AIHCR	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
AISS	Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANDSF	Afghan National Defence and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
AOAV	Action on Armed Violence
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation
BBIED	Body-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
CSO	Central Statistics Organisation
CRU	Crisis Response Unit
DW	Deutsche Welle
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
GCPSU	General Command of Police Special Units
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IGC	International Growth Centre
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPSO	International Psychosocial Organisation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
KSF	Kabul Security Force
Landinfo	Norwegian Country of Information Centre
LWJ	Long War Journal
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
MoI	Ministry of Interior

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NYT	(The) New York Times
PD	Police District
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RS	Resolute Support
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SMW	Special Mission Wing
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
US	United States
USDoD	United States Department of Defence
USDoS	United States Department of State
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VBIED	Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Device
VOA	Voice of America
WBG	World Bank Group

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 15 May 2019¹ and the Kabul City chapter taken from the *European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation*, published in June 2019². 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 report listed above, published in June 2019.

This report follows the structure of the individual provincial chapters in the June 2019 EASO report. 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 security trends, the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims are described within a timeframe from 1 April 2019 until 31 March 2020. Finally, a separate chapter is dedicated to population displacements caused by the conflict and the situation of internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees in Kabul City.³

This report presents information from 1 April 2019 until 31 March 2020, taken from a wide range of sources, including national and international organisations, governmental agencies as well as 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, '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.⁴

Although sources providing statistical data are limited, Cedoca has chosen -in line with EASO- 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 pretend to be. The listed incidents are featured because they are considered relevant for assessing the security situation.

Since January 2018, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an American non-profit conflict collection, analysis and crisis mapping project, releases data on 'political violence and protest' in Afghanistan.⁵ Afghan news agency Pajhwok Afghan News publishes monthly reports on attacks and casualties and in January 2020 it published annual figures for the year 2019.⁶ Since September 2018 international news agency The New York Times (NYT) publishes its monthly 'Afghan War Casualty Reports', compiling significant countrywide security incidents and casualties confirmed by NYT reporters.⁷ Because their use of a different data base, different definitions, methodologies and reporting periods make it difficult to incorporate them, Cedoca has chosen not to include these three

¹ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 15 May 2019, [url](#)

² EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation, June 2019, [url](#)

³ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) conflict-induced displacement data included in this chapter range from 1 April 2019 to 3 March 2020, according to the last accessed UNOCHA update.

⁴ Ruttig, T., More Violent, More Widespread: Trends in Afghan Security in 2017, AAN, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵ ACLED, Caucasus and Central Asia - Afghanistan, March 2020 (data accessed 27 March 2020), [url](#)

⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 22,300 People Killed, Injured in Afghanistan Last Year, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷ NYT, The Afghan War Casualty Report, n.d., [url](#)

sources' quantitative data in this report on Kabul City. Kabul City is generally well covered in analytical reports, better than 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. Analyst Thomas Ruttig points out the possibility that civilian casualties are 'non- or underreported' by UNAMA⁸, as its methodology requires that cases be verified through 'at least three different and independent types of sources' before being included in its reports.⁹

Finding sources that provide a comprehensive 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).¹⁰ AAN explains how UNOCHA collects statistics on IDPs by conducting joint assessments throughout the country and logging those assessments into a database.¹¹ 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 areas¹²- 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 chapter from the June 2019 EASO report, it is written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (June 2019) and the EASO COI Referencing Guide (June 2019).¹³

⁸ Ruttig, T., More Violent, More Widespread: Trends in Afghan Security in 2017, AAN, 29 January 2018, [url](#)

⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰ UNHCR, Afghanistan Fact Sheet, June 2016, [url](#)

¹¹ Bjelica, J., Over Half a Million Afghans Flee Conflict in 2016: A look at the IDP Statistics, AAN, 28 December 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 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.¹⁴ Surrounded by mountains, the city is located at 1 800 meters above sea level¹⁵ in the Central region of the country.¹⁶ While analyst Thomas Ruttig notes in a 2017 commentary that 'Kabul urban district' is identical to the city of Kabul,¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ A UNOCHA map, dated 4 January 2016, shows 22 police districts (PDs).¹⁹ 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/Pashtou term for city district).²⁰

Kabul is by far Afghanistan's most populous and influential city, characterized by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth.²¹ The City Mayors Statistics ranks Kabul as the fifth fastest growing city in the world, with an average annual growth rate of 4.74 %.²² According to United Nations (UN) Habitat, quoted by The Guardian, Kabul has seen a growth rate of 10 % during the last decade.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 Kabul's unregulated and burgeoning growth has compounded the problems already afflicting the capital, made their solution less likely and created new problems as well.²⁸ As described by several sources, the main problems currently afflicting the Afghan capital are inadequate housing and sanitation, overstretched basic services and resources, unemployment, land grabbing, lack of ownership documents, poverty, traffic and limited accessibility, severe air pollution and criminality.²⁹

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

¹⁵ REACH, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2017, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶ CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. 99

¹⁷ Ruttig, T., Kommentar zum Gutachten von Mag. Karl Mahringer (2017), 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016, [url](#)

²⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²¹ 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; NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 4 December 2019, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²² City Mayors Statistics, The World's Fastest Growing Cities and Urban Areas from 2006 to 2020, [url](#)

²³ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [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; NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11

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; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#); NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11

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

²⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; UN Environment Programme, Gasping for Air in Kabul, 29 April 2019, [url](#); NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11; Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban

According to American General Nicholson, the rapid growth of the city has complicated security in Kabul.³⁰ In a February 2020 dispatch for the AAN think-tank, Foschini describes 'post 2001 Kabul as an ever-changing city, in terms of boundaries and inhabitants, where many basic problems remain impossible to address'. Adding that the Afghan capital's 'rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation has created new economic and security challenges inside the city', with 'the residual urban social fabric that helped to preserve a certain social order, guaranteeing some degrees of security, now disappearing fast'.³¹ Acting Afghan Minister of Interior Massoud Andarabi points out that Kabul City lacks certain foundations on which a security layer can be built -referring to proper addresses, residents with official identity cards and a standardized municipal system.³²

More than three-quarters of Kabul province's population lives in the city of Kabul.³³ There is no consensus about its current population and growth.³⁴ According to the Afghanistan Central Statistics Organisation (CSO), Kabul City has an estimated population of 5 million in 2019-2020.³⁵ However, exact population figures are disputed and estimates range from 3.5 million up to a possible 6.5 million inhabitants in 2020.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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 organisations 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.³⁸

Kabul has historically been a majority Persian-speaking city with its own distinctive Dari dialect.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ Analyst Foschini describes central Kabul as 'cosmopolitan' and more mixed than in the past. According to Foschini, the constant movement of residents has a disruptive effect on social networks in the centre

Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 3, 7-8; DW, Kabul - Where Breathing Can Kill You, 6 December 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kabul, 17 Killed Due to Hazardous Levels of Air Pollution, 31 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁰ Washington Post (The), 'The Taliban is in the City': Secretive Raids with U.S. Forces Launched to Stop Kabul Attacks, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

³¹ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

³² NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

³³ CSO, Kabul Province Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Highlights, 13 January 2015, [url](#), p. 5

³⁴ 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

³⁵ CSO, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 2019, [url](#)

³⁶ 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; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 4 December 2019, [url](#); City Mayors Statistics, The World's Largest Cities and Urban Areas in 2020, [url](#)

³⁷ Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁸ 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

³⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 13

⁴⁰ 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

of the city.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³ For example, northern districts such as Khaikhana are primarily associated with Tajiks, whereas western outskirts such as Dasht-e Barchi primarily with Hazaras.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic compounds and national and international security forces, the capital has a different security outlook than most of Afghanistan's other districts and provinces.⁴⁶

2. Background on the conflict & actors in Kabul City

2.1. Type of violence, tactics used and main targets

In his 2019 periodical reports to the Security Council's General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) describes the security situation in Afghanistan as remaining 'volatile, with a high number of security incidents'.⁴⁷ The year 2019 was characterised by major fluctuations in countrywide conflict-related violence, coinciding with gains and setbacks made during the peace negotiations between the Taliban and the United States (US) in Doha.⁴⁸ The first half of the year saw an intense US airstrike campaign, while attacks by anti-government elements (AGEs) reduced considerably. UNAMA marks a significant decrease in suicide attacks attributed to the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)⁴⁹ in the first six months of 2019.⁵⁰ This was followed by a particularly violent third quarter, when UNAMA registers the highest number of civilian casualties of any quarter since it began systematic documentation in 2009. UNAMA attributes this to a spike in suicide and non-suicide improvised explosive device (IED) attacks by the Taliban, as well as to election-related violence (see

⁴¹ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴² Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6, 58

⁴³ APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, [url](#), p. 8; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-8

⁴⁵ 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

⁴⁶ 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](#)

⁴⁷ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁴⁹ 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](#)

⁵⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 11, 16-17, 32-33

below).⁵¹ Violence reduced again in 2019's last quarter. UNAMA correlates this with the significant setback of ISKP in Nangarhar province in November and the resuming of the Taliban-US peace talks in December 2019.⁵²

This nationwide fluctuation in violence is reflected in the evolution of the security situation in Kabul. The conflict in the city is characterized by asymmetric tactical warfare.⁵³ Although the Afghan capital remains under government control,⁵⁴ armed opposition groups have shown that they can infiltrate the city and have the capacity to carry out attacks.⁵⁵ Kabul regularly witnesses violence.⁵⁶ Large-scale suicide and complex attacks⁵⁷ causing hundreds of civilian casualties were recorded in previous years.⁵⁸ After an increase in the first half of 2018⁵⁹, the number of high-profile suicide and complex attacks in Kabul started to decrease from the second half of 2018 and further into 2019.⁶⁰ In its periodical reports, UNSG suggests the decrease in suicide attacks can be attributed to successful interdiction efforts and enhanced security measures by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) in the capital (see below).⁶¹ UNSG notes the decrease in suicide attacks in the first half of 2019 was accompanied by increased targeting of Afghan security facilities as opposed to civilian targets.⁶² As in the whole of Afghanistan, violence in Kabul intensified during the third quarter of 2019, with several suicide and complex attacks in the city in the months of July, August and September (see

⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 11, 16-17, 32-33

⁵² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 16-17, 32-33

⁵³ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den Sentrale Regionen og i det Sentrale Hoylandet - oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁴ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 18; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁵ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 18; Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Ruttig, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven Day 'Reduction of Violence', AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 39, 94

⁵⁶ Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5; Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Ruttig, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven Day 'Reduction of Violence', AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39

⁵⁷ 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'. UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 89

⁵⁸ See previous updates of this COI Focus: Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 24 April 2018, [url](#); Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 15 May 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹ 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](#); UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications For International Peace and Security, 27 February 2018, [url](#), p. 2; 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. 4-5

⁶⁰ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 25; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 14 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 18; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁶¹ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁶² UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

below).⁶³ In the last quarter, as in the rest of the country, fewer attacks were carried out in the capital.⁶⁴ A similar trend has continued into 2020, with few high-profile and suicide attacks recorded in the first months of the year.⁶⁵

Despite the overall reduction in high-profile attacks, Kabul remained the province suffering the highest number of suicide attacks (including complex attacks) in 2019, with UNAMA recording 15 suicide attacks in the capital out of a nationwide total of 26.⁶⁶

UNAMA reports on suicide IEDs, non-suicide IEDs and targeted/deliberate killings as the three main tactics used in Kabul in 2019.⁶⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG) analyst Borhan Osman notes 'high-profile attacks have become less frequent as the insurgents have shifted toward targeted assassinations (see below) -often using small magnetic bombs that kill fewer civilians'.⁶⁸ Shootings by assassins riding on the back of motorcycles, magnetic bombs attached to vehicles and remote IEDs are the tactics most often used for targeted killings.⁶⁹

Several media sources report on the decrease in mass casualty attacks in urban centres like Kabul City⁷⁰, suggesting however that this 'unusual calm' could be 'misleading'.⁷¹ According to analysts interviewed by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre Landinfo in October 2019, the Taliban's capacity is not diminished and their rhetoric has not changed -a warning that the insurgence group could turn back to large suicide attacks in Kabul to show its strength.⁷²

As in previous years, the main targets of the attacks in Kabul City during the reporting period were Afghan government departments and officials, the Afghan security forces and high-profile international institutions, both military and civil -including diplomatic and UN personnel and western non-governmental organisations (NGOs).⁷³ UNAMA expresses its concern on the additional targeting of judges and prosecutors, health care workers, aid workers and human rights defenders.⁷⁴ According to

⁶³ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁴ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25; USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁶⁵ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

⁶⁸ Osman, B., Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans' Hopes for Peace, ICG, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹ NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 44

⁷⁰ NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Despite Calm in Afghan Cities, War in Villages Kills Dozens Daily, 29 January 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan Violence Soars among US-Taliban Talks: Watchdog, 31 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#); InsideOver, Afghan Cities Blessed with Increasing Peace as Villages Burn, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹ NYT, Despite Calm in Afghan Cities, War in Villages Kills Dozens Daily, 29 January 2020, [url](#); InsideOver, Afghan Cities Blessed with Increasing Peace as Villages Burn, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷² Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁷³ Harvard University, Fragile Future: The Human Cost of Conflict in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), pp. 6-7; USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), p. 162; UNHCR comment on the Finnish Immigration Service's April 2019 Fact Finding Mission Report. Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 22; New Humanitarian (The), Afghanistan Attacks Spur Fresh Concern over Aid Worker Safety, 12 December 2019, [url](#); Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 24

⁷⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 7-8

UNOCHA's 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, the highest number of incidents involving aid workers being killed, injured or kidnapped in 2019 was recorded in Kabul.⁷⁵ Amnesty International (AI) notes that human rights defenders and activists working in Kabul City are generally more exposed to threats because of their level of public prominence in the capital.⁷⁶

Several sources report on a pattern of continued intimidation, threats and violence faced by media workers and journalists in 2019.⁷⁷ In June 2019, the Taliban issued a public statement warning journalists they would become a military target if they kept on publishing 'anti-Taliban propaganda'.⁷⁸ In March 2020, Kabul-based journalists reported to Afghan news agency Tolo News that lack of security remains one of their main problems.⁷⁹ UNAMA also reported on increased Taliban pressure on telecommunications companies to meet their demands. Throughout 2019, UNAMA documented several incidents of the Taliban deliberately targeting individuals and infrastructure associated with the Salaam Telecommunications Network, including a magnetic IED attack killing Salaam's chief commercial officer in Kabul City in the beginning of August. After the Taliban issued a statement declaring the telecommunications company and its infrastructure as military targets at the end of August 2019, UNAMA verified several incidents in which the Taliban attacked Salaam facilities in Kabul.⁸⁰

According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, 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'.⁸¹ The United States Department of Defence (USDOD) describes the objectives of the Taliban and ISKP in conducting suicide attacks in Kabul as attracting international media attention, creating the perception of widespread insecurity and undermining the Afghan government's legitimacy as well as the population's confidence in the Afghan security forces.⁸²

2.2. Main actors in the city

Kabul remains a target for insurgent groups and AGEs such as the Taliban and ISKP, who continue to carry out attacks in the city.⁸³ In an interview with EASO in January 2019, a military analyst specialized in Afghanistan pointed at the difference in strategies used by the Taliban and ISKP. While the Taliban mostly focus their attacks on security forces or Afghan government employees, trying to avoid

⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan January 2018 - December 2021, December 2019, [url](#), p. 35

⁷⁶ AI, Defenceless Defenders. Afghanistan's Human Rights Community under Attack, 28 August 2019, [url](#), p. 101

⁷⁷ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 10; HRW, Afghanistan's Media Self-Censors to Survive - Press Freedom at Risk in Deadliest Country for Journalists, 10 April 2019, [url](#); AIHCR, Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan: the First Six Months of 1398, 21 March - 21 September 2019, 21 October 2019, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2020 - Afghanistan, 14 January 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, Afghanistan: Deadliest Nation for Journalists, 20 January 2020, [url](#); AI, Human Rights in Asia Pacific - Review of 2019: Afghanistan, 30 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 7-8; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 45

⁷⁸ LWJ, Taliban Military Commission Threatens Afghan Media, 25 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Bombing Kills Dozens and Hurts Schoolchildren as Taliban Talks Resume, 1 July 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Tolo News, 14 Cases of Violence against Journalists Recorded This Year, 17 March 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁰ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2019, 17 October 2019, [url](#), p. 7; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 35

⁸¹ 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](#)

⁸² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 18, 30; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸³ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 14 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Ruttig, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven Day 'Reduction of Violence', AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36-37, 84-85

collateral damage among the civilian population, ISKP attacks are mostly designed to cause a high number of civilian casualties.⁸⁴

2.2.1. Taliban

Despite efforts to improve security in the capital, the Taliban were able to launch several attacks in Kabul throughout 2019, resulting in numerous civilian casualties.⁸⁵ According to USDoD, the Taliban continue to prioritize attacks in Kabul, although their ground movements in the capital have been reduced.⁸⁶ The tactics most frequently used by the Taliban in urban centres like Kabul are suicide attacks and truck bombs.⁸⁷ In December 2019, USDoD reported that the Taliban have the ability to conduct high-profile attacks against government and international coalition facilities in urban centres, while continuing to pressure the ANDSF through their military campaign. The Taliban strategy in the third quarter of 2019 is described as a mixture of 'fight and talk', combining several high-profile attacks in Kabul City with continuous peace negotiations for a US troop withdrawal.⁸⁸

According to UNAMA, suicide attacks by the Taliban increased substantially in 2019, as did the insurgency group's use of large vehicle-borne (VB) IEDs.⁸⁹ In 2019, UNAMA reported the highest nationwide number of civilian casualties caused by the Taliban from VBIEDs (133 % increase compared to 2018) since it began systematic documentation in 2009.⁹⁰ On the other hand, UNAMA reports a 6 % decrease in the countrywide number of civilian casualties from deliberate attacks against civilians attributed to the Taliban in 2019⁹¹, compared to a nearly 50 % increase⁹² in 2018⁹³.

During a briefing for a small group of western journalists in December 2019 in Nangarhar province, the acting director of the Taliban's military operations, Mauwlawi Muhammad Ali Jan Ahmed, referred to his militants' 'quest for legitimacy on the global stage'. Commanders and fighters describe their militancy as 'committed to the use of violence to achieve its goal of regaining political power'. Pointing to the resources freed up by the conclusion of the fight against ISKP in Nangarhar, a Taliban commander responsible for Kabul province declared to The Washington Post that 'the Taliban would be able to shift back to conducting more high-profile attacks in Kabul and elsewhere'. He added that the group launches attacks in Kabul because there are many targets there for them, referring to the large number of foreigners in the capital.⁹⁴

A diplomatic source, cited by Landinfo in January 2020, refers to a significant distance between the political and military wing of the Taliban. He describes the latter as 'hardliners' who believe in the possibility to win the war militarily, while referring to the political wing as having more faith in a breakthrough in the peace negotiations.⁹⁵ A Harvard University field analysis indicates the Taliban

⁸⁴ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan: Security Situation, June 2019, [url](#), p. 58

⁸⁵ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 20 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁶ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 20 August 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁸⁷ NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 15, 25

⁸⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 7, 38

⁹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 38

⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁹² This increase largely resulted from a suicide ambulance attack in Kabul City on 27 January 2018 and from election-related attacks on polling day for the 2018 parliamentary elections (20 October 2018). UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁴ Washington Post (The), Inside the Taliban's Afghanistan, Violence Remains the Path to Power, 19 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 17

remain politically present at both the local and national level and are visible in Kabul, from where decisions are made and communicated.⁹⁶

Researcher Antonio Giustozzi⁹⁷ and an international organisation interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service, both report on an infiltration of the Taliban in Kabul City -with strong information networks supporting the movement.⁹⁸ According to Giustozzi, there are three different Taliban intelligence organisations 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 districts⁹⁹, but with a high concentration in the districts where government offices and embassies are mostly located.¹⁰⁰

According to a military analyst in Kabul, cited by NYT, the Taliban 'are showing their capacity to undermine government functions anywhere in the country and thus not allowing it to protect major population centres'. He adds the Taliban are concerned about the morale of their fighters and commanders, trying to convince them they are winning the war.¹⁰¹

2.2.2. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)

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.¹⁰²

According to 2019 figures recorded by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and cited by UNAMA, ISKP security-related incidents have decreased in Kabul.¹⁰³ Due to continued ANDSF pressure to disrupt its activities, ISKP exhibited a reduced capacity to carry out high-profile attacks in 2019.¹⁰⁴ USDOD adds that the detention of several ISKP militants during raids in Kabul has temporarily degraded the group's attack tempo and denied propaganda victories.¹⁰⁵ However, at the same time, ISKP is reported to remain active, ambitious and threatening, maintaining an operational capacity in the capital.¹⁰⁶ According to USDOD reports published in July 2019 and January 2020, ISKP retains the

⁹⁶ Harvard University, *Fragile Future: The Human Cost of Conflict in Afghanistan*, December 2018, [url](#), p. 29

⁹⁷ Based on various Taliban sources.

⁹⁸ Giustozzi, A., *Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and the Intimidation Campaign*, Report for Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 10; Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, *Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul*, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 21-22

⁹⁹ Giustozzi refers to 17 city districts.

¹⁰⁰ Giustozzi, A., *Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and the Intimidation Campaign*, Report for Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰¹ NYT, *Suicide Bombing at University Kills 10 As Violence Surges in Afghanistan*, 19 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰² Landinfo, *Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering*, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 2; Landinfo, *Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019*, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰³ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019*, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁰⁴ Landinfo, *Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019*, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 17, 25; UNSC, *Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat*, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Washington Post (The), *Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence*, 9 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019*, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁰⁵ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019*, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 22; USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019*, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 25-26; Washington Post (The), *Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence*, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ UNSG, *The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security*, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6; An expert on Afghanistan interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service during their Fact Finding Mission in April 2019. Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, *Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul*, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNSC, *Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat*, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7; Withington, S. &

capability to conduct mass casualty attacks with the intent to weaken public support for the Afghan government and the Taliban. In 2019, the militant group's attacks primarily targeted the Afghan government and security forces, targets of opportunity related to the elections and members of the Shia religious minority (see below).¹⁰⁷

In 2019, UNAMA reported an overall reduction in civilian casualties from deliberate attacks against civilians attributed to ISKP as compared to 2018 when UNAMA documented record high numbers. Countrywide,¹⁰⁸ UNAMA attributes 157 incidents resulting in 1 223 civilian casualties to ISKP in 2019, which represents a 44 % decrease compared to 2018. This is mainly due to the above mentioned decrease in suicide attacks, including complex attacks and attacks targeting civilians in civilian-populated areas like Kabul.¹⁰⁹

BBC analyst Abid Zainul refers to *inghimasi* attacks as one of ISKP's main tactics in Kabul. These are operations carried out by well-trained fighters, mostly single attackers wearing a body-borne (BB) IED¹¹⁰, in which the assailant is not expecting to survive.¹¹¹ Several sources refer to a change in ISKP tactics in 2019, focusing more on defensive operations and IED emplacement¹¹² and causing a significant increase in civilian casualties attributed to the group from non-suicide IEDs (183 % increase) as well as from ground engagements (742 % increase).¹¹³ Researcher Amira Jadoon relates ISKP's interest in Kabul to various factors: Kabul City is the most densely populated region in the country, located quite close to ISKP's strongholds in the east, while also providing the insurgency group with greater opportunities to strike both state and civilian targets.¹¹⁴

While ISKP represents a diminished threat since receiving a significant setback in late 2019 in what had been its Afghan headquarters in Nangarhar province, several sources indicate the group has not been eradicated entirely and has shown notable resilience in the past. Grounds for concern are added that several ISKP groups might have relocated to Kunar and Kabul, raising the potential for a resurgence¹¹⁵ -although reviving the groups networks would probably need time¹¹⁶. Sources suggest

Ehsani, H., Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province, AISS, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 83

¹⁰⁷ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 22; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 47-49

¹⁰⁸ In its 2019 annual report on civilian casualties UNAMA doesn't specify the number of incidents attributed to ISKP in Kabul City.

¹⁰⁹ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 6; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 7; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 7, 36

¹¹⁰ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹¹ Abid, Z., Analysis: Mapping the Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan, BBC Monitoring, 17 October 2018, [url](#)

¹¹² USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 January - 31 March 2019, 17 May 2019, [url](#), p. 24

¹¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

¹¹⁴ Jadoon, M., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organisational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Combating Terrorism Center, 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹¹⁵ NYT, ISIS Is Losing Afghan Territory. That Means Little for Its Victims, 2 December 2019, [url](#); International source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 17; UNSC, Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 37

¹¹⁶ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the Recent Victory Against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

ISKP could aim to take over the role of main opposition force if the ongoing peace negotiations appear successful and the Taliban stop fighting the US and Afghan government.¹¹⁷

ISKP is reported to have created a network of cells in various Afghan cities, maintaining active cells in Kabul.¹¹⁸ Analyst Borhan Osman points out that it is difficult to estimate the number of ISKP fighters in the capital.¹¹⁹ Osman describes the leaders of these cells in Kabul as veterans, formerly of the Haqqani Network, the Taliban, or Al Qaeda, who have brought their expertise and network to ISKP.¹²⁰ An acknowledged analyst Landinfo spoke with describes the ISKP cells in Kabul as having 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.¹²¹ According to American officials cited by NYT, 'no ISKP cell is more threatening to maintain stability in Afghanistan than the one in Kabul', adding that the militant group in the capital has become increasingly skilled in avoiding detection.¹²²

ISKP is reported to have an effective (often online) recruitment strategy in the capital, conducting outreach activities in religious and academic institutions -including Kabul University. A significant number of Afghan youth from diverse social, economic and geographical backgrounds are drawn to its Salafi-jihadist ideology through its increased access to social media.¹²³ Educated urbanites are mostly recruited for logistical, financial or communication roles.¹²⁴ USDoD refers to social media as the primary method for ISKP affiliates to communicate as well as an important medium through which ISKP propaganda influences online.¹²⁵ According to a 2020 research paper from the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), ISKP's recruitment 'has also benefitted from prior Taliban relationships', referring to ISKP recruiters in universities in Kabul and Jalalabad openly recruiting for the Taliban.¹²⁶

A young ISKP fighter from a middle-class Kabul family, interviewed by The Washington Post in a National Directorate of Security (NDS) detention centre in the capital, said he was drawn to Nangarhar through online propaganda. After two months of training he returned to Kabul as a mid-level ISKP operative, working in a small underground cell facilitating several attacks in the city. Often, these young ISKP affiliates in the capital lead a double life. When he was not planning or carrying out attacks the young fighter studied at a private university in Kabul and ran a small grocery store to support his

¹¹⁷ Guardian (The), With Kabul Wedding Attack ISIS Aims to Erode Taliban Supremacy, 19 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, ISIS Is Losing Afghan Territory. That Means Little for Its Victims, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ UNSC, Eight Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7; USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹⁹ 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](#)

¹²⁰ NYT, Islamic State Claims Deadly Blast at Afghan Shiite Center, 28 December 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Kabul by - oppdatering, 9 May 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹²² NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, [url](#)

¹²³ Strait Times (The), ISIS Cells Operate in Kabul under Noses of Afghan and US Forces, 10 January 2018, [url](#); NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern 14 June 2019, [url](#); VOA, Afghan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, ISIS Is Losing Afghan Territory. That Means Little for Its Victims, 2 December 2019, [url](#); Bangkok Post, Stunned Residents Return after IS Losses in East Afghanistan, 3 December 2019, [url](#); UNSC, Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7; Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#); Withington, S. & Ehsani, H., Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province, AISS, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 86

¹²⁴ Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 22; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹²⁶ Withington, S. & Ehsani, H., Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province, AISS, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 38

family.¹²⁷ ISKP is said to pay its fighters higher salaries than their Taliban counterparts¹²⁸, but - according to an international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019- financing has recently become more difficult.¹²⁹

Despite the group's recent constriction, ISKP's bombings in Kabul inflicting numerous civilian casualties have reshaped the capital's residents' understanding of violence and caused a trauma that lingers on.¹³⁰

2.2.3. Haqqani

According to research by Stanford University, the Haqqani Network is believed to have introduced suicide operations as a fighting method in Afghanistan.¹³¹ Referring to the UN, the Long War Journal (LWJ) describes the 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'.¹³² According to USDoD and the UN, the Haqqani Network¹³³ has assumed an increasingly influential role in the Taliban's organisation and military operations.¹³⁴ The network has repeatedly targeted Kabul in recent years and is believed to be responsible for several complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of the city.¹³⁵ In December 2019, USDoD reported that the Haqqani Network did not conduct any high-profile attack in the capital region during the last quarter of 2019, but continues to be integral to the Taliban's effort to pressure the Afghan government in Kabul -as exemplified by a VBIED attack against a military convoy in the city on 5 September.¹³⁶ In addition to its funding from donors in Pakistan and the Gulf, the group has increasingly turned to criminal activities such as kidnapping, extortion and smuggling.¹³⁷

2.2.4. Unidentified armed groups or unclaimed attacks

Attacks in Kabul often remain unclaimed or are conducted by unidentified armed groups.¹³⁸ Analysts highlight the challenge in assessing the credibility of claims or denials of involvement in certain attacks

¹²⁷ Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸ NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁹ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹³⁰ NYT, ISIS Is Losing Afghan Territory. That Means Little for Its Victims, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³¹ Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organisations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#)

¹³² LWJ, UN: Al Qaeda Continues to View Afghanistan as a 'Safe Haven', 5 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³³ Since 2017 the UN mission in Afghanistan has attributed attacks believed to be committed by the Haqqani Network to the Taliban as the distinction could no longer be reliably established. According to UNAMA, in several cases, Haqqani attacks have been claimed by ISKP with the apparent tacit agreement of the Haqqanis. UNSG, Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 10 September 2019, [url](#), p. 4; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

¹³⁴ Katzman K., and Thomas, C., Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy, CRS, 13 December 2017, [url](#), p. 21; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 21; UNSG, Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 10 September 2019, [url](#), p. 4; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

¹³⁵ Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organisations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#); UNSG, Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, 10 September 2019, [url](#), p. 4; USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 281-282; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

¹³⁶ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 16, 25

¹³⁷ USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 281-282

¹³⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 73; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 28 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Kabul Car Bomb Kills 12, Including Children, 13 November 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Two Federal Prosecutors Shot and Killed Near Kabul, 16 November 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least Five Wounded in Kabul Grenade Attack, 18 November 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Blast Targets UN Vehicle in Afghanistan Killing One

and in attributing responsibility. On the one hand, there are indications that diverse pro-ISKP groups claim attacks that have not been carried out by them. On the other hand, the Taliban often deny their involvement in attacks causing high numbers of civilian casualties.¹³⁹ Additionally, analysts note that 'criminal networks and groups loosely connected with other insurgency actors are able to provide ISKP with one-off help in exchange for financial incentives'¹⁴⁰ 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 sailing under an IS[KP] banner, and violent Pakistani sectarian (anti-Shia) groups'¹⁴¹.

2.3. The Kabul security plan

The security plan for Kabul City, called the 'Zarghun Belt' (Green Belt) and announced 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.¹⁴² 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 announced¹⁴³ and the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone (ESZ) was established.¹⁴⁴

New security measures implemented since then 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; more comprehensive searches of large vehicles entering Kabul's international zone; 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.¹⁴⁵

In March 2019, Kabul police chief Sayed Mohammad Roshandil reported that the city police were preparing to create a 'Blue Zone' surrounding the 'Green Zone', stretching the fortified area by 1.5 to 4 kilometres. Additionally, the number of closed-circuit cameras throughout Kabul were planned to be

Foreigner, 24 November 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Kabul Blast Kills Two, 31 January 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Provincial Council Member Killed in Kabul Gun Attack, 8 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹ 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, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁴⁰ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ 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](#)

¹⁴² 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](#)

¹⁴³ RFE/RL, New Security Plan In Kabul After Deadly Attacks, 7 February 2018, [url](#); Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul, 20 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2018, 3 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 15, 43, 46-47; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2018, 20 December 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁴⁵ 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, 20 December 2018, [url](#), p. 36; Khaama Press, Deputy Interior Minister Replaces Police Chiefs of 11 Police Districts in Kabul City, 11 March 2019, [url](#); USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), p. 163

more than doubled to 800.¹⁴⁶ Trained sniper dogs were deployed at checkpoints in the city to detect explosives.¹⁴⁷

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.¹⁴⁸ Voices of protest have also been reported among civilians residing in the area of Kabul's Green Zone, stating that 'the presence of foreign camps close to a common residential area is like a death threat to the people [living there]'.¹⁴⁹ AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig describes this 'development of the Green Zone and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) military base in the middle of a crowded city as showing sheer disrespect for the security of local people'.¹⁵⁰ After a third attack on the Green Village fortified compound in the east of Kabul City in September 2019, hundreds of angered residents surged through the capital's streets demanding that foreigners vacate their neighbourhoods.¹⁵¹

Under the new measures, responsibility for Kabul's enhanced security zone has been transferred to the Kabul Security Force (KSF) -replacing a patchwork of police, military and private security contractors, previously reporting to different chains of command. Afghan National Police (ANP) forces maintain responsibility for security within Kabul City. Afghan National Army (ANA) troops secure the perimeter of the city. The NDS corps ensures that information and intelligence collection and sharing remain focused on the prevention of high-profile attacks in Kabul.¹⁵² A previously established separate special Crisis Response Unit (CRU 222) within the ANP in Kabul is responsible for preventing and responding to (high-profile) attacks.¹⁵³ According to the US Department of State (USDoS) these specialized CRUs continue to thwart attacks in Afghanistan's major cities and their operations are planned to be doubled throughout the country.¹⁵⁴ The ANA has an independent Capital Division (111) that is responsible for security in Kabul.¹⁵⁵ In mid-2019, USDoD reported that Kabul security remained a top priority for the ANDSF, focusing on strategic threats to the capital.¹⁵⁶ The Special Mission Wing (SMW), an ANDSF unit established in 2012, has several assault squadrons in Kabul to conduct counterterrorism and counternarcotic missions.¹⁵⁷ In the second half of 2019, about 10 % of US' and Afghan Forces' operations focused on the Kabul region, preventing high-profile attacks.¹⁵⁸ During the

¹⁴⁶ South China Monitoring Post, Life Inside Kabul's Fortified Green Zone for Foreigners, 19 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ DW, Kabul's Sniffer Dogs Detect Explosives, 16 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ 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](#)

¹⁴⁹ South China Monitoring Post, Life Inside Kabul's Fortified Green Zone for Foreigners, 19 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ South China Monitoring Post, Life Inside Kabul's Fortified Green Zone for Foreigners, 19 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵² USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url](#), p. 23; USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), p. 163; USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁵³ LWJ, NATO Touts Efficacy of Afghan Crisis Response Unit, 22 August 2018, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2019, [url](#), p. 99

¹⁵⁴ USDoS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), p. 163

¹⁵⁵ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 53; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁵⁶ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 30; USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 20 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2; USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁵⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 169; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 95, 162; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 117

¹⁵⁸ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 13, 17; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 7

same period, the operational tempo of the General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU)¹⁵⁹ within Kabul increased by 300 %.¹⁶⁰

Since autumn 2018, under Kabul police chief Roshandil, Afghan police and intelligence forces have begun a concerted effort to restore order in Kabul and to dismantle Taliban and ISKP cells in and around the city.¹⁶¹ For example, the Afghan intelligence arrested six ISKP media activists in Kabul City in a special operation in April 2019.¹⁶² According to Ministry of Interior (MoI) officials, the Afghan security forces foiled 35 attacks in Kabul during the three days of the Islamic holiday of Eid Al-Fitr in June 2019.¹⁶³ According to analyst Thomas Ruttig, these claims are however difficult to verify.¹⁶⁴ In the same month, an NDS Special Unit arrested six ISKP members in Kabul, allegedly involved in kidnappings, transferring of weapons and explosives and relocating of ISKP members to Nangarhar.¹⁶⁵ In July 2019, four ISKP operatives were arrested during a counterterrorism raid in Kabul, including a lecturer and graduates from Kabul university.¹⁶⁶ Beginning of August 2019, Afghan Special Forces and ANP raided three ISKP cells in Kabul's PDs 8, 11 and 15, resulting in the arrest and killing of several ISKP members. According to the Afghan intelligence agency, this operation destroyed a 'bomb-making cache' and several hideouts where militants were planning to carry out activities in the city.¹⁶⁷ In February 2020, nine ISKP sympathisers were arrested during an operation in Gulbahar Centre in Kabul. The second floor of this landmark mall in the city housed a shop providing financial support to the insurgency group.¹⁶⁸

2.4. Criminality

The Asia Foundation's 2019 Survey of the Afghan People records the highest experienced crime rate in Kabul since they began asking this question to their respondents.¹⁶⁹ In a February 2020 dispatch, AAN analyst Foschini points out the importance of recognizing that security in the Afghan capital is not about insurgent attacks alone but includes criminality. According to Foschini, 'nowadays criminality constitutes the biggest threat and concern for a majority of the city's inhabitants'. He suggests several aspects and current trends that have contributed to Kabul's rising crime scene. In the first place, a significant urban growth and city population surge combined with declining economic opportunities and rising unemployment seem to have driven more people into illegal activities as a means of survival. Secondly, the influence and fearlessness of heavily armed and politically-connected criminal networks in Kabul has grown. Thirdly, Foschini considers the impact of changing patterns in the social behaviour of Kabul's youth. Certain groups of young people, who are deprived of education and exposed to a tough life on the capital's streets, have developed a more rash and cynical attitude and have lost respect for traditional values. Foschini refers to the Khairkhana city neighbourhood where a kind of

¹⁵⁹ A Ministry of Interior (MoI) Afghan Special Security Force.

¹⁶⁰ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 78

¹⁶¹ NYT, In Chaotic Afghan Capital, Crackdown on Crime is Turning Heads, 16 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶² 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](#)

¹⁶³ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Foiled 35 Attacks in Kabul During Eid Days Including a Car Bombing Plot, 7 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Ruttig, T., Before Doha 7: Afghanistan Peace Efforts Recovering from a Lull?, AAN, 29 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ Tolo News, Afghan Forces Arrest Six Daesh Members in Kabul, 9 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ VOA, Afghan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Afghan Forces Raid Militants Hideouts in Kabul, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Khaama Press, NDS Forces Arrest 9 ISIS Sympathisers from a Landmark Mall in Kabul City, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 64

'Afghan gangsta style' has emerged among youngsters, developing manners and a language typical of city gangs. These local youth gangs are likely to join the ranks of armed and criminal groups.¹⁷⁰

Foschini differentiates between targeted killings disguised as criminally-motivated attacks (see below) and common criminality in Kabul City.¹⁷¹ He describes newly appearing typologies of crimes and worsening already existing patterns. Home raids by armed burglars and personally-driven murders are recently happening in central city areas that used to be considered relatively safe (e.g. Kart-e Naw, Wazirabad and Khairkhana). Petty theft such as pickpocketing and robbery has become organised on public transport (especially shared taxis) and on the streets (e.g. in areas such as Mandawi Chawk, Kot-e Sangi, Chehel Sotun and the edge of PD 7, Kart-e Naw, Jalalabad Road, Taimani and Qala-ye Fatullah, Wazirabad, Khairkhana and PD 21). Robberies and car-jacking often involve weapons and appear to have an increasingly violent outcome. Organised criminal gangs engage in kidnappings and extortion, targeting a range of businesses from petrol stations to factories (e.g. in neighbourhoods such as PD 3, 4 and 10, Kart-e Naw, Koh-e Asmai/TV Mountain and Aliabad Hill, Jalalabad Road, Taimani and Qala-ye Fathullah, Khairkhana, higher Paghman valley, Qasaba and PD 17). An unprecedented expansion of the Kabul drug market has led to a significant increase in narco-trafficking and drug-related crimes in the city (e.g. in areas such as Shahrara and Pul-e Sukhta, Kot-e Sangi, Deh Afghanistan, Quwa-ye Markaz, Bagh Ali Mardan and PD 1 and 2).¹⁷²

Media sources report on a significant increase in criminal activities in Kabul City during the research period¹⁷³ -including murder¹⁷⁴, armed robbery¹⁷⁵, kidnappings¹⁷⁶, extortion¹⁷⁷, drug-related criminality^{178,179} and land grabbing¹⁸⁰. In January 2020, the Kabul police headquarters is reported to have registered over a 100 criminal cases in one month.¹⁸¹ According to UNHCR, cited by the Finnish

¹⁷⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷² 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; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, Concerns over Rise of Criminal Offenses in Kabul City, 21 May 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Police Detain 1,400 Crime Suspects in 4 Months, 18 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 523 Kabul Residents Killed in a Year in Crime Acts, 23 December 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Kabul Residents Complain of Lack of Security, 19 January 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Lack of Security Raises Concern for Kabul Residents, 20 January 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, Residents: Crime Level Increasing in City of Kabul, 25 January 2020, [url](#); Frontier Post (The), Crime Level Increasing in City of Kabul: Residents, 27 January 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, Kabul Residents Call on Security Forces to Crackdown on Crime, 22 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Tolo News, 4 Members of One Family Killed in Kabul, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Afghanistan Times, Young Man Stabbed to Death in Kabul during Attempted Laptop Robbery, 5 January 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, University Professor Wounded as Armed Robbery Increases in Kabul, 8 January 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, KP Reporter Traumatized after Being Robbed at Gunpoint close to Kabul Police Station, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Tolo News, Concerns Rise on 'Increasing' Threats to Business Community, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kidnapped 8-Year-Old Boy Found Dead in Kabul, 27 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, The Money Changer of Kabul, His Daughter and Her Kidnappers, 12 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6-Member Gang of Kidnappers Busted in Kabul: NDS, 26 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ Tolo News, Concerns Rise on 'Increasing' Threats to Business Community, 23 April 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Wanted Man Says 'NDS Asked Him to Commit Assassinations' in Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Al Jazeera, 'It's Something We Use for Fun': a New Street Drug in Afghanistan, 21 July 2019, [url](#); 1TV News Afghanistan, Kabul's Top Anti-Drug Official Arrested on Drug Charges, 6 February 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, Interior Ministry Pledges Crackdown on Drug Dealers, 7 February 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kabul Killings Highlight Rising Drug Addiction in Afghanistan, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ In its July 2019 Quarterly Update SIGAR reports Kabul together with Nangarhar as the provinces with the most cases related to drug smuggling and trafficking. SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 171

¹⁸⁰ Tolo News, Strongmen Defy Govt in the Capital: Residents, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Tolo News, University Professor Wounded as Armed Robbery Increases in Kabul, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

Immigration Service, kidnapping is a major concern for many Kabul citizens.¹⁸² UNAMA notes the underreporting of abductions (including NGO workers and UN staff members) by armed groups and criminal gangs in 2019.¹⁸³ An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in 2019, describes a change in the profile of potential targets for kidnappings in Kabul. In addition to foreigners, wealthy Afghans are targeted as well.¹⁸⁴ City residents complain of increasing lawlessness -resulting in people changing their routes to work, carrying guns and keeping weapons at home. Cited by news agency France 24, the Deputy Minister of Interior points at the psychological/mental toll crime is taking on the capital's inhabitants.¹⁸⁵

Several sources report on the ineffective police response to Kabul's rapidly expanding crime scene. According to Afghan security officials, cited by NYT, Afghanistan's 'law enforcement has been so militarised over the past two decades of war with the Taliban that officers are profoundly unprepared for the basic needs of policing in times of peace'. Only 1 200 of the 15 000 Kabul City police personnel are assigned to criminal investigations. Colonel Aryan Faizy, head of Kabul's Criminal Investigations Department, points at the problem of accessibility in the city, often impeded by road blocks, blast walls and watchtowers. Faizy declares his department's priority is the improvement and expansion of centrally managed local information networks.¹⁸⁶ Analyst Foschini describes the development of a *modus vivendi* between police and criminals in many Kabul City neighbourhoods. Despite efforts to break the connections between organised crime and the police, such as reforms within the Ministry of Interior and rotations of police commanders, powerful and deeply-rooted (political) interests often result in impunity.¹⁸⁷

According to Foschini, the recent spike in crime frequency in Kabul and the increased level of violence involved have changed the attitude of the city's residents. Having spoken to several crime witnesses, Foschini suggests that the previously noticed degree of public response towards instances of criminality seems to have decreased and the capital's residents have adopted a more cautious attitude towards getting involved.¹⁸⁸

3. Recent security trends in Kabul City

3.1. Civilian casualties: general

Without providing data on civilian casualties for its individual districts, UNAMA counts Kabul province in 2019 as the first among five provinces where the inhabitants are most impacted by the conflict.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁸⁴ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

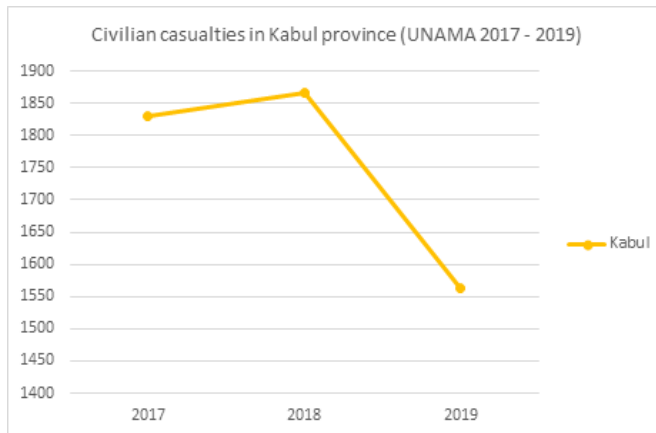
¹⁸⁵ France 24, Never Mind the War: Kabul Residents Fear Surge in Violent Crime, 22 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 March 2019, 24 April 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2019, 17 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 12; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan January 2018 - December 2021, December 2019, [url](#), p. 13



Graphic 1: Number of civilian casualties documented by UNAMA in Kabul province in 2017-2019. Graphic made by Cedoca, based on UNAMA data.

In 2019, UNAMA documented 1 563 civilian casualties (261 deaths and 1 302 injured) in Kabul province¹⁹⁰. Although this is a 16 % decrease compared to 2018, Kabul province remains the province with the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide. As in 2018,¹⁹¹ the majority of civilian casualties in Kabul in 2019 were caused by suicide and non-suicide IEDs, followed by targeted/deliberate killings.¹⁹² According to UNAMA, over half of all civilian casualties from suicide attacks in 2019 were counted in 15 such incidents in Kabul City.¹⁹³

In line with UNAMA, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports in his 2019 quarterly updates on fluctuating countrywide civilian casualty numbers, alongside shifting violence patterns throughout the year (see above). In the first two quarters of 2019, a 32 % decrease in civilian casualties compared to the same period in 2018 is reported by Resolute Support (RS) to SIGAR.¹⁹⁴ Kabul is mentioned as the first among three provinces with the most civilian casualties (about 15 % of the total number or 402 casualties) during this period.¹⁹⁵ In the third quarter of 2019, UNAMA registered the highest number of countrywide civilian casualties of any quarter, since the start of its systematic documentation in 2009. This is mainly attributed to a significant increase in civilian casualties from suicide and non-suicide attacks by the Taliban.¹⁹⁶ In July 2019, research and advocacy organisation Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) recorded the highest number of monthly civilian casualties in Afghanistan since it began monitoring civilian casualties from explosive violence in October 2010.¹⁹⁷ Reporting to USDoD, RS mentions 1 437 nationwide civilian casualties in July 2019.¹⁹⁸ According to AOAV 'Kabul was the city most impacted in July 2019, with almost a third of all civilian casualties occurring in the capital (30 %).¹⁹⁹ In the last quarter of 2019, the countrywide number of civilian casualties decreased again. The NATO RS mission reported a 20 % reduction compared to the same period in 2018.²⁰⁰ According to RS data the total number of civilian casualties

¹⁹⁰ In its annual report covering 2019, UNAMA doesn't provide specific civilian casualty data for Kabul City.

¹⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. iii, 94

¹⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39

¹⁹⁴ Most civilian casualties during this period are recorded in the months March and May.

¹⁹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 70-71

¹⁹⁶ AAN, Thematic Dossier XXIV: Ten Years of Reporting on Civilian Casualties, Still No Ceasefire, 30 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁹⁷ AOAV, Worst Month for Afghan Civilians in Over Eight Years of Casualty Recording, 5 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ USDoD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁹⁹ AOAV, Worst Month for Afghan Civilians in Over Eight Years of Casualty Recording, 5 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 70

rose in most provinces (19 out of 34) in 2019 compared to 2018. In both years, the highest number of civilian casualties was recorded in Kabul and Nangarhar province.²⁰¹

3.2. Impact on the civilian population

Concerning the everyday life strategies of Kabul's residents to minimize and cope with the risks of attacks, several sources mention a combination of fear, frustration and habituation or numbness.²⁰² 85 % of the respondents in the Asia Foundation's 2019 Survey of the Afghan People living in Kabul reported a feeling of fear when travelling.²⁰³ UNOCHA, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and several media sources report a high percentage of trauma²⁰⁴ cases in Kabul, caused by witnessing or losing a relative/beloved person in a deadly attack.²⁰⁵

A representative of the International Psychosocial Organisation (IPSO), interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service in Kabul in April 2019, describes the situation in the capital as 'a mixture of hope and fear'. According to him 'people do not care about small explosions anymore because there have been too many of them'. 'People live their lives and if something happens, for a couple of days, they remember it, and then they move on.'²⁰⁶ An expert on Afghanistan, also cited by the Finnish Immigration Service, reports a difference in the situation in Kabul in 2019, compared to previous years. According to him, Kabul was like a ghost city with few people on the streets in the wake of several large-scale attacks in 2017 and 2018, but mid-2019 'people are feeling more confident about security in Kabul (...), it is possible to feel life on the streets of Kabul again and people are going out'. The expert however points at the volatile security situation with no guarantee that the circumstances will remain like this.²⁰⁷

3.3. Attacks against places of worship and religious leaders

In 2019, UNAMA documented a 48 % decrease in civilian casualties from attacks targeting places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers, compared to 2018. This is mainly due to a reduction in such attacks by ISKP. Despite this overall decrease, civilian casualties from these kinds of attacks attributed to the Taliban more than doubled in 2019, according to UNAMA.²⁰⁸ Suicide attacks remained the leading tactic used for these attacks, followed by the use of non-suicide IEDs.²⁰⁹ For example, in

²⁰¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 70

²⁰² Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#); NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, One Minute It Was an Afghan Wedding. The Next a Funeral for 63, 18 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 63

²⁰⁴ Often resulting in depression and anxiety.

²⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 38-39; NYT, A Taliban Attack on Children Causes Outrage, Everywhere but at Peace Talks, 2 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#); Reporterly, Harbours Hope Amidst Despair: Routine Attacks in Kabul Shake Families, Their Spirits Remain Intact, 14 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, [url](#); Foreign Policy, Endless Conflict in Afghanistan Is Driving a Mental Health Crisis, 27 September 2019, [url](#); HRW, Afghanistan: Little Help for Conflict-Linked Trauma, 7 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 21-22

²⁰⁶ Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²⁰⁷ Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

²⁰⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 46

²⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47

May 2019 a remote-controlled IED detonated inside the Al-Taqwa mosque in Kabul while over 700 people were gathered during Friday prayer. The explosion, attributed to the Taliban, killed 3 civilians, including well-known religious leader Mauwlawi Rayhan, and wounded 34 people.²¹⁰ A few days later, unknown gunmen shot and killed Mauwlawi Kamawal in the capital, a prominent religious and academic scholar who had called on anti-government forces to stop waging war.²¹¹ According to NYT reporters, these kinds of attacks on religious leaders reflect an enduring Taliban strategy, targeting people with religious influence in order to 'exert their power far from the battlefield and mute those who could question their legitimacy'.²¹² End of March 2020, ISKP gunmen stormed a Sikh Temple and housing complex in the Shorbazar area in Kabul, taking 80 people hostage and killing at least 25 in a six hour siege.²¹³

3.4. Sectarian-motivated violence

UNAMA continued to document sectarian-motivated violence by AGEs, mainly ISKP, against the Shi'a Muslim religious minority population (most of whom belong to the Hazara ethnic group). In contrast to the high number of civilian casualties resulting from sectarian-motivated attacks in previous years, UNAMA documented a 35 % decrease in civilian casualties from such attacks in 2019.²¹⁴ Most casualties were caused during cultural and religious activities of the Shi'a Muslim community. This includes 'the single most deadly incident documented in 2019' according to UNAMA, when ISKP -citing a sectarian motive- carried out a suicide attack on the Dubai City Wedding Hall in PD 6 in western Kabul mid-August. The ceremony was mainly attended by Shi'a Muslims, resulting in 234 civilian casualties (91 killed and 143 injured), including 50 children (15 killed and 35 injured).²¹⁵ During the reporting period, ISKP claimed one other sectarian-motivated attack in the capital: on 6 March 2020 two gunmen opened fire on a ceremony commemorating the killing of ethnic Hazara leader, Abdul Ali Mazari²¹⁶. The attack killed at least 32 civilians and wounded 58. The gathering was attended by several politicians and high-level officials, including Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who escaped unharmed.²¹⁷

UNAMA expresses its continuing concern about 'the safety and security of the Hazara minority group and the negative impact on their freedoms of religion and movement and their quality of life'.²¹⁸ UNAMA adds that the attacks on Shi'a Muslims 'infringe their human rights to express their culture

²¹⁰ NYT, Bombing at Afghan Mosque Kills Popular Religious Scholar, 24 May 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Well-Known Religious Scholar Killed in Kabul Explosion, 24 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Defence Counsel Association Member Shot Dead in Kabul, 26 May 2019, [url](#); USDoS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²¹² NYT, Bombing at Afghan Mosque Kills Popular Religious Scholar, 24 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹³ NYT, Terror Attack Strikes Afghan Capital as Another City Is Locked Down for Corona Virus, 25 March 2020, [url](#); BBC, Afghanistan Conflict: Militants Storm Sikh Temple in Kabul, 25 March 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Gunmen Storm Sikh Religious Complex in Kabul, Many Feared Trapped, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²¹⁵ NYT, 63 Killed as Explosion Turns Kabul Wedding Into Carnage, 17 August 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Suicide Attack at Kabul Wedding Kills over 60 Civilians, 18 August 2019, [url](#); BBC, Afghanistan: Bomb Kills 63 at Wedding in Kabul, 18 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, One Minute It Was an Afghan Wedding. The Next a Funeral for 63, 18 August 2019, [url](#); BBC, Afghanistan War: Tracking the Killings in August 2019, 16 September 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2019, 17 October 2019, [url](#), p. 7; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 20, 47-48; USDoS, Afghanistan 2019 Human Rights Report, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 40

²¹⁶ Mazari, the political leader of the Hezb-e Wahdat party, was killed by the Taliban in 1995.

²¹⁷ NYT, Gunmen Kill Dozens at Event Attended by Afghan Politicians, 6 March 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Dozens Killed in Kabul Attack Claimed by Islamic State, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

and religion freely (...) and to carry out normal lives'.²¹⁹ According to an international organisation, cited by the Finnish Immigration Service, the sectarian-motivated attacks on the Hazara population in Kabul have a long-lasting psychological impact on the community, causing for example a decline in school attendance in certain city areas.²²⁰ From the second half of 2018, Hazara residents of neighbourhoods in western Kabul have been seeking to arm themselves and taking over responsibility for security in their areas.²²¹ This has resulted in several hundred informal Hazara security personnel protecting approximately 100 Shi'a mosques across Kabul.²²²

3.5. Election-related violence

On 28 September 2019, after multiple delays, Afghanistan's fourth²²³ presidential elections took place. According to UNAMA, the overall civilian casualty figures related to the electoral process were significantly lower in 2019 as compared to the parliamentary elections in 2018, both during the registration period and on polling day.²²⁴ From the start of the registration process on 8 June until the end of 2019, UNAMA verified 277 election-related incidents, resulting in 474 civilian casualties (91 killed and 383 injured) countrywide.²²⁵ The deadliest election-related incident recorded in Kabul was an unclaimed complex attack targeting vice-presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh's office of the Green Trend political party on 28 July 2019, causing 71 civilian casualties (21 deaths and 50 injured).²²⁶ UNSG reported on a high tempo of small-scale attacks to prevent or disrupt the 2019 electoral process, with the highest number of security incidents on election day in Kunduz and Kabul City.²²⁷ According to UNAMA, however, no mass-casualty incidents were recorded in the capital on 28 September.²²⁸

UNAMA attributed more than 80 % of all civilian casualties of election-related violence in 2019 to the Taliban.²²⁹ In the period leading up to 28 September, the Taliban indicated their intention to disrupt the presidential elections, issuing several public statements warning civilians not to participate. Election-related attacks targeted voters, election workers and campaigners, election rallies, candidates and polling centres. The majority of election-related Taliban violence was caused by indirect fire, such as rockets, grenades and mortars and the emplacement of IEDs near polling centres.²³⁰ AAN reports to have been informed that the Taliban warned students and teachers not to work as polling site staff

²¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

²²⁰ Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 24

²²¹ RFE/RL, Under Threat, Kabul's Hazara Make Call to Arms, 20 September 2018, [url](#)

²²² Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 24

²²³ Since 2004.

²²⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 45

²²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Death Toll from Attack on Saleh Office Rises to 20, 29 July 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, 20 Killed in Blast, Gun Battle at Afghan VP Candidate's Office, 29 July 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Kabul Attack: 20 Killed, 50 Injured in Bombing and Gun Battle at Politician's Office, 29 July 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁷ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²²⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 1; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 17

²²⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 8, 17, 45-46

through 'night letters' in some neighbourhoods in Kabul.²³¹ UNAMA additionally expresses its concern on a pattern of abductions, threats, intimidation and harassment attributed to the Taliban, causing a serious disruption in voting due to polling centres being closed or prevented from opening.²³² Alongside a general low interest in voting, even in big cities like Kabul, and voter frustrations with politicians,²³³ sources link the Taliban's intimidation campaign to the countrywide historically low voter turnout.²³⁴ Just over a fifth of registered voters actually voted in Kabul.²³⁵

On 9 March 2020, six months after the elections, both president Ashraf Ghani and his rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah took the oath of office as president of Afghanistan. During their inauguration speeches, several rockets were fired at the sites where the ceremonies took place in the capital. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack.²³⁶

3.6. Suicide attacks and complex attacks

As mentioned previously, the majority of suicide and complex attacks recorded in Kabul during the research period happened in the third quarter of 2019 (see above). Examples of suicide and complex attacks carried out in the city -causing several civilian casualties²³⁷- include: an ISKP-claimed suicide attack and subsequent siege that lasted for several hours targeting the Ministry of Communication mid-April 2019, causing at least seven people being killed and several others wounded²³⁸; a suicide attack carried out by the Taliban against NGO Counterpart International in the beginning of May, killing 8 civilians and injuring 27, with the Taliban claiming that the organisation had 'promoted intermixing between men and women' and implemented 'pro-western objectives'²³⁹; two unclaimed car bomb attacks targeting two minibuses carrying government employees at the end of May and beginning of June 2019, killing 5 people and wounding 20²⁴⁰; a Taliban-claimed complex attack on the logistics and engineering department of the Ministry of Defence on the first day of July 2019, causing a large impact on surrounding houses, businesses and schools, resulting in 151 civilian casualties (7 deaths and 144 injured)²⁴¹; an unclaimed VBIED attack near the gates of Kabul University, where a number of students

²³¹ Adili, A. Y. et al., Afghanistan's Election 2019 (9): Presidential Poll Primer, AAN, 25 September 2019, [url](#)

²³² UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²³³ Adili, A. Y. et al., Afghanistan's Election 2019 (10): What to Watch Out for on Election Day?, AAN, 26 September 2019, [url](#); Osman, B. and Smith, G., Afghanistan's Low-Turnout Election, Insecurity and Low Prospects for Peace, ICG, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴ Osman, B. and Smith, G., Afghanistan's Low-Turnout Election, Insecurity and Low Prospects for Peace, ICG, 2 October 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (19): an Ambiguous Picture of E-Day Civilian Casualties, AAN, 17 October 2019, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2020 - Afghanistan, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵ Adili, A. Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (24): Disputed Recount, Threats Not to Accept the Results and Some Interesting New Data, AAN, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶ NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷ The casualty numbers mentioned in the incidents listed below are according to UNAMA records, if UNAMA is mentioned as source in the footnote.

²³⁸ 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](#)

²³⁹ NYT, Taliban Attack Aid Group Office in Kabul, in Setback to U.S. Peace Talks, 8 May 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban Attack on US-Based Aid Group Raises Concern in Kabul, 9 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 7; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁴⁰ RFE/RL, Kabul Minibus Bombing Wounds 10, 27 May 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Five Killed in Bus Bombing in Kabul, 3 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹ DW, Afghan Capital Kabul Rocked by Powerful Explosion, 1 July 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Six Killed, More Than 115 Hurt As Powerful Blast Rocks Kabul, 1 July 2019, [url](#); BBC, Taliban Bomb and Gun Attack Leaves Three Dead in Kabul, 1 July 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2019, 17 October 2019, [url](#), p. 4; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 27

were waiting to sit an exam, mid-July, killing at least 8 people and wounding 33²⁴²; an ISKP-claimed suicide bombing of a bus with employees from the Ministry of Petroleum and Mines a few days later, killing at least 11 and wounding dozens²⁴³; an ISKP-claimed magnetic IED bomb targeting a bus carrying employees of private TV station Khurshid at the beginning of August, resulting in two deaths and three people injured²⁴⁴; a Taliban-claimed suicide bombing targeting the Green Village compound in the east of the city at the beginning of September, resulting in at least 16 people killed and injuring more than 100²⁴⁵; an unclaimed car bombing targeting a private security company's convoy in the Qasaba area in PD 15 in mid-November, causing 12 deaths and wounding 20²⁴⁶.

3.7. Attacks against the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF)

As in 2018²⁴⁷, several attacks in Kabul in 2019 and during the first months of 2020 were directed against the Afghan security forces. For example: an attack on a police checkpoint in the Doghabad area of PD 7 in mid-May 2019, claimed by the Taliban, killing three ANP officers and injuring several others²⁴⁸; an ISKP-claimed suicide attack on the Marshal Fahim Military University at the end of May 2019, killing at least seven people and wounding several others²⁴⁹; a Taliban-claimed bomb blast a day later, targeting a foreign forces' convoy in the Yakatoot area in PD 9, where ANDSF forces equally maintain facilities, killing several civilians and wounding four US service members²⁵⁰; a Taliban-claimed car bombing targeting the police station of PD 6 in western Kabul in the beginning of August 2019, killing at least 14 people and injuring 100 or more²⁵¹; a Taliban-claimed VBIED attack in the beginning of September targeting an ANDSF checkpoint in Shash Darak, a heavily fortified area near the Green Zone close to the US embassy and NATO headquarters, killing at least 10 civilians, 2 foreign troop members and injuring more than 40 people²⁵²; a Taliban-claimed suicide car bomb attack targeting the Chaharasyab Afghan Special Forces base on the outskirts of the capital in mid-

²⁴² NYT, Suicide Bombing at University Kills 10 As Violence Surges in Afghanistan, 19 July 2019, [url](#); DW, Kabul University Hit by Deadly Bomb Blast, 19 July 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Blast Kills At Least Eight outside Kabul University, 19 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Women, Child among 11 Killed in Kabul Attack, 25 July 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Three Bombs Rock Afghanistan's Kabul, Killing More Than a Dozen, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ RFE/RL, Afghan TV Bus Bombed in Kabul, Killing Two, 4 August 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Explosion Targets Media Workers in Kabul, Kills Two, 4 August 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 45

²⁴⁵ DW, Afghanistan: Taliban Attack Kabul As UN Envoy Visits, 3 September 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Blast Hits Kabul after Briefing on US-Taliban Deal to Withdraw 5,000 Troops, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ RFE/RL, Car Bomb Explodes in Afghan Capital, Killing at least 12, 13 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Attack: 20 Dead, Foreigners among 20 Injured, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Several examples are given in the previous update of this COI Focus. Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 15 May 2019, [url](#), p. 22

²⁴⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Police Killed, 3 Wounded in Taliban Attack in Kabul, 20 May 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Gunmen Target Policemen in Deadly Kabul Checkpoint Attack, 20 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, Suicide Bomber Targets Afghan Military Training Centre in Kabul, 30 May 2019, [url](#); LWJ, Suicide Bomber Strikes Military Academy in Kabul, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Civilians Killed, US Troops Among 10 Injured in Convoy Attack, 31 May 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Car Bomb Rocks Afghan Capital, 31 May 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Car Bomb Targets Convoy of Foreign Forces in Kabul, 31 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵¹ NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 Killed, 146 Wounded in Kabul Bombing, 7 August 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Kabul Attack: Nearly 100 Injured in Taliban bombing, Say Officials, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵² BBC, Afghanistan Violence: Car Bomb Attack in Kabul Kills 10, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), US Service Member among Dead in Kabul Suicide Attack in Kabul, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban Claim Deadly Attack near US Embassy in Kabul, 5 September 2019, [url](#); UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

September, killing at least four and wounding three soldiers²⁵³; another attack -this time unclaimed- targeting the Marshal Fahim Military University in PD 5 in mid-February 2020, killing at least five people and injuring a dozen more²⁵⁴.

USDoD, cited in SIGAR's January 2020 quarterly update, reports on a slight increase in the countrywide casualty number among Afghan security forces in the second half of 2019, compared to the same period in 2018. The majority of casualties among ANDSF forces, like in previous years, are caused by Taliban attacks on checkpoints.²⁵⁵ Afghan officials, cited by NYT, point out that the attacks on military targets in the city often result in a significant number of civilian casualties.²⁵⁶

3.8. Targeted assassinations

In 2019, UNAMA mentioned targeted killings as the third highest tactic in terms of the number of civilian casualties in Kabul province.²⁵⁷ According to an international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, the civilians most targeted in this kind of attack in 2019 were Afghan security personnel, high-ranking officials and individuals perceived as supporting or connected to the Afghan government.²⁵⁸ UNAMA expresses its concern on the spike in civilian casualties caused by deliberate attacks targeting judges and prosecutors, healthcare and aid workers, human rights defenders, media workers and religious scholars.²⁵⁹

At the end of 2019, media sources reported an increase in targeted killings in Kabul City, referring to several (attempted) assassinations targeting high-profile political or military figures.²⁶⁰ According to government officials cited by NYT, 'smaller more targeted attacks have been on the rise' in the Afghan capital. NYT reports that this increase has raised the fear of Kabul becoming like other Afghan cities, such as Kandahar in the south, where a decrease in large-scale attacks has been replaced by a sustained rise in targeted killings.²⁶¹ According to AAN analyst Foschini, 'Afghanistan's capital is plagued by targeted killings'. He refers to many examples of privately-driven targeted assassinations camouflaged as criminally-motivated attacks in the past years (see above). Foschini suggests that the currently rising criminality 'can offer a new cover for such private feuds, especially in an environment like Kabul'.²⁶²

During the reporting period, several instances of (attempted) targeted killings were recorded in Kabul City. In mid-May 2019, political advisor and former TV journalist Mina Mangal was assassinated by unknown assailants in PD 8 while waiting for a car on her way to work.²⁶³ In June 2019, unidentified

²⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Security Personnel Killed in Kabul Explosion, 12 September 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attack in Kabul Kills Afghan Troops, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ Guardian (The), At Least 5 Dead in Suicide Attack on Kabul Military Academy, 11 February 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 5 Killed in Suicide Blast Near Kabul Military Academy, 11 February 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, Six People Killed in Kabul Suicide Attack, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 41, 65, 77; Al Jazeera, Afghanistan Violence Soars among US-Taliban Talks: Watchdog, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶ NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²⁵⁸ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 24

²⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 7, 8, 35, 44-45, 46-47

²⁶⁰ Ariana News, Badghis Police Chief Assassinated in Kabul, 24 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶¹ NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶² Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³ RFE/RL, Prominent Afghan TV Journalist Shot Dead in Kabul, 11 May 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghan Parliament Advisor and Former Journalist Killed in Kabul, 11 May 2019, [url](#); BBC, Mina Mangal: Outcry Over Killing of Afghan TV Presenter, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

gunmen shot dead the Afghanistan National Boxing Federation's secretary general in PD 3.²⁶⁴ In separate attacks in July and November 2019, four prosecutors and one judge were killed and injured in armed attacks in different city districts.²⁶⁵ In October-November 2019, the district chief of Jaghatu district (Maidan Wardak province)²⁶⁶, a high school principal²⁶⁷, an employee of the Ministry of Finance²⁶⁸, the Badghis provincial police chief²⁶⁹ and an intelligence agent²⁷⁰ were gunned down in different neighbourhoods in the capital. At the beginning of March 2020, a Logar provincial council member and his bodyguards were killed by unknown gunmen in the Kart-e Naw area of PD 8.²⁷¹ At the end of March 2020, Zarifa Ghafari, the female mayor of Wardak province, was attacked by unknown gunmen in PD 5. She survived the assault.²⁷² On the last day of March 2020, the female head of the NDS Gender Department died in a blast caused by a magnetic IED attached to her vehicle.²⁷³

In February 2020, news agency Foreign Policy reported on a 'chain' of (attempted) targeted assassinations of political dissidents in Kabul City linked to pro-government forces, mainly the Afghan intelligence agency NDS. Reference is made to the attempted assault on political activist Hassan Haqyar at the end of October 2019²⁷⁴ and the killing of political analyst Wahid Muzhda mid-November 2019²⁷⁵. Interviewed by Foreign Policy, political analyst Nazar Motmaeen claims to have escaped an attack in the centre of the capital in 2019, alleging his armed attackers belonged to the NDS.²⁷⁶ In the beginning of January 2020, another targeted killing linked to the Afghan intelligence agency was reported in Kabul, when former mujahedeen leader, militia commander and political figure Abdul Sattar Ghorbandi and four of his relatives were assassinated during an operation.²⁷⁷ The direct motives for these targeted attacks remain unclear.²⁷⁸

3.9. Rockets and grenades

Occasionally, AGEs target the capital with rockets and grenades. During the research period, national and international media reported on several rocket attacks in Kabul City. For example: in mid-September 2019, on the anniversary of 9/11, a rocket exploded at the Afghan Ministry of Defence compound near the American embassy, no casualties were reported²⁷⁹; beginning of October 2019, two rockets were fired at the area of the Darulaman Palace in PD 6, no casualties were reported²⁸⁰;

²⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Top Afghan Boxing Federation Official Killed in Kabul, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Judge Gunned Down in Kabul, 2 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Prosecutor Killed, Another Wounded in Kabul, 6 July 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Two Federal Prosecutors Shot and Killed Near Kabul, 16 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jaghatu District Chief Gunned Down in Kabul, 13 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, School Principal Gunned Down in Kabul, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ministry Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis Police Chief Gunned Down in Kabul, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Intelligence Agent Gunned Down in front of Kardan University, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁷¹ RFE/RL, Afghan Provincial Council Member Killed in Kabul Gun Attack, 8 March 2020, [url](#); Tolo News, Logar Provincial Council Member Killed in Kabul, 8 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷² Tolo News, Afghan Female Mayor Attacked in Kabul, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷³ Tolo News, Female Head of NDS Gender Dept Dies in Kabul, 31 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ Tolo News, Wahid Muzhda, Political Analyst, Assassinated in Kabul, 20 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Political Expert Wahid Muzhda Killed in Kabul, 20 November 2019, [url](#); Tolo News, Wahid Muzhda, Political Analyst, Assassinated in Kabul, 20 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ Foreign Policy, Is Afghan Intelligence Building a Regime of Terror with the CIA's Help?, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁷ Tolo News, Ghani Orders Probe into NDS Kabul Operation that Killed Five, 6 January 2020, [url](#); Foreign Policy, Is Afghan Intelligence Building a Regime of Terror with the CIA's Help?, 6 February 2020, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Foreign Policy, Is Afghan Intelligence Building a Regime of Terror with the CIA's Help?, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ Al Jazeera, 'Explosion Caused by a Rocket' Near US Embassy in Kabul, 10 September 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Explosion at U.S. Embassy in Kabul at 9/11 Anniversary, 10 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Rocket Lands near Ministry of Defence, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Rockets Fired into Kabul; No Casualties, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

mid-November 2019 a hand grenade attack at the Kabul Military Training Centre injured four ANA soldiers and one civilian²⁸¹; later in November 2019, a grenade attack targeted a UN vehicle on a busy road in PD 9, killing a foreign UN worker and wounding several other civilians²⁸²; at the beginning of March 2020, several rockets were fired at the area of the presidential palace during the simultaneously held inauguration ceremonies of Ashraf Ghani and his rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah (see above), ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack²⁸³; one day later, a grenade attack destroyed the studio of a well-known Kabul artist²⁸⁴. UNAMA expresses its concern that the use of grenades and rockets in densely populated areas can carry a high risk of civilian harm, due to the nature of the weapons.²⁸⁵

4. Displacement & the situation of IDPs and returnees in Kabul City

According to UNOCHA assessments, no conflict-induced displacement was reported from Kabul district²⁸⁶ between 1 April 2019 and 3 March 2020, while during that same period Kabul district received 3 064 conflict-induced IDPs (439 families).²⁸⁷ This number represents a decrease of more than 50 % compared to the reporting period of the previous update of this COI Focus, from 1 April 2018 until 31 March 2019.²⁸⁸ The IDPs arriving in Kabul district during the reporting period came from a range of different provinces, such as Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamiyan, Balkh, Daykundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Kapisa, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Takhar and Wardak.²⁸⁹ In 2019, UNOCHA registered a peak of 133 IDPs (19 families) coming from Khwaja Umari district in Ghazni province in the beginning of June²⁹⁰, after the district was recaptured from AGEs²⁹¹, and a peak of 140 IDPs (20 families) coming from Dahan-e Ghor district in Baghlan province in mid-November.²⁹² The IDPs who have so far arrived in Kabul district in 2020 are from the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunduz, Logar, Baghlan and a peak of 231 individuals (33 families) from the Central Highland region (provinces Bamiyan and Daykundi) in the beginning of January.²⁹³

²⁸¹ RFE/RL, At Least Five Wounded in Kabul Grenade Attack, 18 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Soldiers among 5 Wounded in Kabul Attack, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁸² UN News, UN Condemns Deadly Attack on One of Its Vehicles in Afghan Capital, 24 November 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Blast Targets UN Vehicle in Afghanistan Killing One Foreigner, 24 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁸³ Reuters, Islamic State Claims Rocket Attack Targeting Afghan Inauguration: Statement, 9 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, ISIS Claims Responsibility for Attack Targeting Presidential Inauguration in Kabul, 9 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ RFE/RL, Grenade Destroys Studio of Afghan Artist Praised for Trudeau Portrait, 10 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 71

²⁸⁶ 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.

²⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 20 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ Cedoca, COI Focus Afghanistan. Security Situation in Kabul City, 15 May 2019, [url](#), p. 24

²⁸⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 20 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 20 March 2020, [url](#)

As many as two-thirds of all Afghans displaced outside their home province have moved to the five regional capitals.²⁹⁴ Kabul's growth has been particularly significant (see above).²⁹⁵ The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey of CSO published in September 2018 reported that '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'.²⁹⁶ According to analyst Foschini, 'more than half of Kabul's residents were not born there'.²⁹⁷ Based on data from March to June 2019, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that about 8 % of Kabul's population are either displaced by war or returnees who previously fled the country. IOM ranks Kabul district at the sixth place of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs.²⁹⁸

The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known, as the capital has witnessed a constant flow of people arriving and departing. Movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods.²⁹⁹ 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.³⁰⁰ In February 2019, news agency Reuters reported that an estimated 100 000 displaced people have joined Kabul's urban sprawl.³⁰¹ 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 Jogis residing in the city because conflict disrupted their migration patterns and livelihood or because of increasing impoverishment.³⁰²

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the capital, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21.³⁰³ 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 tents, mud brick and tarpaulin shelters in one of the more than 55 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), varying in size from dozens to hundreds of dwellings. These settlements include some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city.³⁰⁴ According to UN Habitat, quoted by news agency the New Humanitarian, 80 % of urban

²⁹⁴ NRC, Displaced: If You're a Thirteen Year Old Living in Afghanistan, 30 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ 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

²⁹⁶ CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. xxx

²⁹⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 8 March-June 2019, 30 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 6

²⁹⁹ 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; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

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

³⁰¹ Reuters, Life in Kabul's Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁰² Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7

³⁰³ Protection Cluster Afghanistan, 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

³⁰⁴ 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](#); NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), p. 3

areas in Kabul are informal settlements.³⁰⁵ 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.³⁰⁶ Afghanistan's capital has been facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people.³⁰⁷ According to UNOCHA's December 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, this could be a potential source of future community tension, given the growth of the city's informal settlements.³⁰⁸

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 precarious living conditions and increased protection risks in their daily life. They are often forced into secondary displacement and negative coping strategies like child labour, drug use/addiction, early marriage and reducing quantity and quality of food.³⁰⁹ In areas with a high concentration of IDPs, schools have been left overloaded and unable to cope with the influx of children.³¹⁰ 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.³¹¹ 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.³¹²

A 2019 Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) study describes the situation in Kabul's informal settlements as a 'complex story of land ownership and private interests', challenging the already vulnerable displaced families. KIS residents are often forced to pay bribes to local police forces when arriving on a plot of land. Once settled, they are obliged to pay monthly rent to self-proclaimed landowners (often supported by the authorities), while living under sub-standard shelters. As the settlements are seen as temporary, landlords or the city have forbidden shelter improvements in most areas. This allows

³⁰⁵ New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ 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; IDMC, A Different Kind of Pressure. The Cumulative Effects of Displacement and Return in Afghanistan, January 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³⁰⁷ 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](#); Tolo News, Kabul Residents Plagued by 'Severe' Lack of Water, 22 December 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Devastating Drought Dries up Kabul, 14 January 2019, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, War, Drought, Diplomatic Rifts Deepen Afghanistan's Water Crisis, 5 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 43

³⁰⁹ NRC et al., Going Home to Displacement: Afghanistan's Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-7; 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](#); Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#); NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 35, 94; NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-4, 10-12, 14-16; Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 8

³¹⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 32

³¹¹ 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

³¹² 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

landowners to protect the land they have grabbed before possibly enforcing an eviction, pushing the settlements' residents into another cycle of displacement.³¹³

In August 2019, news agency Al Jazeera reported on growing frustration among residents of Kabul's IDP settlements, stemming from a steadily deteriorating situation. IDPs from various camps claimed the Afghan government and president Ashraf Ghani hadn't complied their promise to provide them plots of land and support in return for votes. At the same time, Al Jazeera reported that several camps, most of which are located on state owned land, have experienced pressure not to expand further.³¹⁴

Apart from internal displacement due to conflict, Kabul City sees large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Iran)³¹⁵³¹⁶, putting further strain on the city's services and its capacity to reintegrate these people.³¹⁷ UNOCHA and IOM also reported on a significant recent growth in the number of people arriving in Kabul after being deported from Turkey.³¹⁸ A June 2019 study published by the World Bank (WB) and UNHCR indicated that Kabul and Nangarhar province alone account for a third of all returnees nationwide.³¹⁹ Many returnees end up in Kabul City because of relatively higher security than in their regions of origin and because of expectations of more job opportunities, better services and support facilities and prospects of social acceptance.³²⁰ According to the 2018 Asia Foundations Survey of the Afghan Returnees, only 23.9 % of returnees in Kabul are registered.³²¹

Most returnees in Kabul City depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support.³²² The importance of social networks is reported to be vital for returnees. When originally not from Kabul and without a safety net or extended family in the capital, returnees face difficulties supporting themselves, finding jobs or renting accommodation. Hazara returnees coming to Kabul can generally count on better support. The Hazara community in Kabul is more organized and cohesive than other settlements and can provide services to new arrivals through a range of sophisticated social networks.³²³

³¹³ NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), pp. 11, 15-16

³¹⁴ Al Jazeera, 'Poor People's Eid': How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵ According to an expert of Afghanistan, interviewed by the Finish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019, the number of returnees from Iran is high because the same people come and go several times, while there have been fewer recent returns from Pakistan. Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 10

³¹⁶ The recent Covid-19 health crisis is causing a mass return of Afghan refugees from Iran since February 2020. NYT, Fresh from Iran's Coronavirus Zone, Now Moving across Afghanistan, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15; IOM and UNHCR, Returns to Afghanistan 2018 - Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 25 June 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7; ; NYT, Fresh from Iran's Coronavirus Zone, Now Moving across Afghanistan, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁸ IOM interviewed by the Finish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019. Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 82

³¹⁹ WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 16, 22

³²⁰ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24; MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees, January 2019, [url](#), p. 31; Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan Returnees - 2018, 14 May 2019, [url](#), p. 106; WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 16, 22

³²¹ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan Returnees - 2018, 14 May 2019, [url](#), p. 20

³²² Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24; MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees, January 2019, [url](#), pp. 33, 39-40

³²³ According to sources cited by the Finnish Immigration Service. Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 25-26

Several sources report on few tensions but an increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fears among both returnees and host communities.³²⁴ A June 2019 study by WB and UNHCR finds a difference in the job situation between pre- and post-2013 refugee returnees in Kabul, with the latter being worse off -often suffering from high job insecurity.³²⁵ In a February 2020 dispatch for AAN, analyst Foschini points out the worsening situation of drug-addicted returnees from Iran in Kabul, due to a lack of access to medical services and the easy availability of drugs in the city.³²⁶ A study from the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) suggests that psychosocial needs may be the largest reintegration challenges for returnees in Kabul.³²⁷

Several sources report on the risk of recruitment of IDPs or inhabitants of informal settlements in Kabul by insurgent groups³²⁸ and the possible radicalisation of returnees and people deported from Europe³²⁹. In May 2019, The Guardian quoted an IDP from Nangarhar province living in Kabul, who declared that members of insurgent groups have occasionally attempted to recruit people for money in his neighbourhood.³³⁰ According to a Save the Children report on experiences of child returnees from Europe, one out of five of their respondents cites attempts of recruitment by armed groups to fight or commit acts of violence.³³¹

In a May 2019 The Guardian article, inhabitants from several of Kabul's informal settlements report on signs of change, with their living areas slowly becoming more developed and organized.³³² The Afghan Land Authority Arazi, in cooperation with UN Habitat, has started a registration project of Kabul's ISETs³³³, adding to a growing database of city areas being formalised.³³⁴ According to a senior official from the Ministry of Urban Development and Land, the Afghan government aims to provide informal settlers with one million 'occupancy certificates' over the next three years. The authorities plan to allocate part of a 400 000 hectares land bank to build low-cost housing for returning refugees and migrants from rural areas. The occupancy certificate will give inhabitants the right to occupy a plot without eviction for five years, after which they are eligible to apply for a land title. However, due to limited financial and management capacities, the implementation pace of this plan is slow. In PD 1, about 550 households have received occupancy certificates so far.³³⁵ According to an NRC study, these occupancy certificates are only given to people who have built permanent homes in the settlements and lived there for at least 15 years. They don't apply to the mud-brick and tented settlements hosting many displaced families, 'who will be moved'.³³⁶

³²⁴ Oxfam, *Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan*, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24; Asia Foundation (The), *A Survey of the Afghan Returnees - 2018*, 14 May 2019, [url](#), p. 97; WBG and UNHCR, *Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees*, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

³²⁵ WBG and UNHCR, *Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees*, June 2019, [url](#), p. 16

³²⁶ Foschini, F., *Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld*, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷ MMC, *Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees*, January 2019, [url](#), p. 28

³²⁸ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#); NRC and ACAPS, *Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios*, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11; Al Jazeera, 'Poor People's Eid': How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

³²⁹ DW, *Deported Afghans at Risk of Radicalization: Study*, 26 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁰ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

³³¹ Save the Children, *From Europe to Afghanistan: Experiences of Child Returnees*, 19 October 2018, [url](#), p. 37

³³² Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

³³³ According to an expert of Afghanistan, interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019. *Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul*, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 14

³³⁴ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

³³⁵ Reuters, *Afghanistan Struggles to Find Housing for Returning Refugees*, 21 October 2019, [url](#); Reuters, *After Four Decades of War, Afghan Widows Battle for Homes*, 22 January 2020, [url](#)

³³⁶ NRC and IDMC, *Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements*, 2019, [url](#), p. 4

Summary

Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, is by far the country's most populous and influential city, characterized by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth. Kabul's rapid expansion has complicated living conditions as well as security in the city. Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic compounds and national and international security forces, the capital has a different security outlook than most of Afghanistan's other districts and provinces.

The conflict in the Afghan capital is characterized by asymmetric tactical warfare. Suicide and non-suicide IEDs as well as targeted killings are reported as the current three main tactics used in Kabul. The main targets in the city remain Afghan government departments and officials, individuals perceived as supporting or connected to the Afghan government, the Afghan security forces and high-profile international institutions. The 2019 countrywide fluctuation in violence is reflected in the evolution of the security situation in the capital. A significant decrease in conflict-related incidents during the first six months was followed by a spike in suicide and complex attacks in the third quarter, and another decline in conflict-related violence in 2019's last quarter. Despite the overall reduction in high-profile attacks, Kabul City suffered the highest nationwide number of suicide and complex attacks in 2019. The decrease in large-scale attacks in the capital is reported to have been accompanied by a sustained rise in targeted assassinations.

Although Kabul remains under government control, armed opposition groups such as the Taliban and ISKP demonstrated their capacity to infiltrate the city and carry out attacks -aiming to attract international media attention, create a perception of widespread insecurity and undermine the Afghan government's legitimacy. The Taliban's 2019 strategy was described as a mixture of 'fight and talk', combining high-profile attacks in Kabul City with peace negotiations for a US troop withdrawal. Due to continued ANDSF pressure, ISKP security-related incidents (including sectarian-motivated attacks) decreased significantly in Kabul. However, the group retains an operational capacity in the city. Both insurgency groups are reported to maintain strong information networks and active cells in the Afghan capital.

Security in the capital remains a top priority for the ANDSF. Since the beginning of 2018, the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone is being established, with several new security measures implemented so far. Security concerns in Kabul, however, are not limited to insurgent attacks alone. They also include a significant rise in criminality. Incidents of murder, armed robbery, kidnappings, extortion, petty theft and drug-related criminality were increasingly reported in 2019 -with a police force proving unable to respond effectively.

Despite a 16 % decrease compared to 2018, Kabul remained the province with the highest number of civilian casualties in 2019. Over half of all civilian casualties from suicide attacks in 2019 were reported in 15 such incidents in Kabul City. Kabul is mentioned as the first among five provinces whose inhabitants were most impacted by the conflict in 2019. Civilian casualties due to election-related violence in 2019 were significantly lower than in 2018. A high number of small-scale attacks to prevent or disrupt the electoral process were reported, mostly attributed to the Taliban.

Although the number of IDPs finding refuge in Kabul district decreased by more than 50 % compared to the previous reporting period, Kabul remains the main gravitational centre for migrants in the country -putting further strain on the city's services and absorption capacity. The total number of IDPs and returnees in Kabul is not known, as movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin. 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 due to tenure insecurity or land grabbing, IDP's and returnees in the capital's numerous informal settlements face precarious living conditions and are often forced into secondary displacement as well as negative coping strategies.

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