

AFGHANISTAN

One year into the Taliban takeover



Thematic report
9 September 2022

INTRODUCTION

On 15 August 2021, the Taliban captured Kabul. Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the country along with many Afghan government officials and elites, resulting in the fall of the republic and the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan by the Taliban, hereafter called the Taliban Government. In September 2021, ACAPS convened a group of experts and aid workers in a workshop to understand the many ways displacement and access could play out in Afghanistan over the following 18 months. *The resulting scenarios* were published in October 2021.

One year after the fall of Kabul, this report revisits and reassesses the four scenarios developed in October 2021 in light of the current context. It aims to highlight the key developments over the past year from a humanitarian perspective. It is not an in-depth analysis of the changes across the country.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the review of the scenarios developed in October 2021 and of the ACAPS scenario methodology, followed by a secondary data review of humanitarian and media sources published between August 2021 and August 2022. The goal was to understand how, in what form, and to what extent the various aspects highlighted in the scenarios materialised. A team of ACAPS analysts reviewed the information and compared it to each of the four scenarios to understand what did and did not materialise and determine 'where we are' now. We conducted additional interviews with five experts in July–August 2022. Two experts on Afghanistan, one of whom was involved in the scenario-building last year, reviewed the final report.

LIMITATIONS

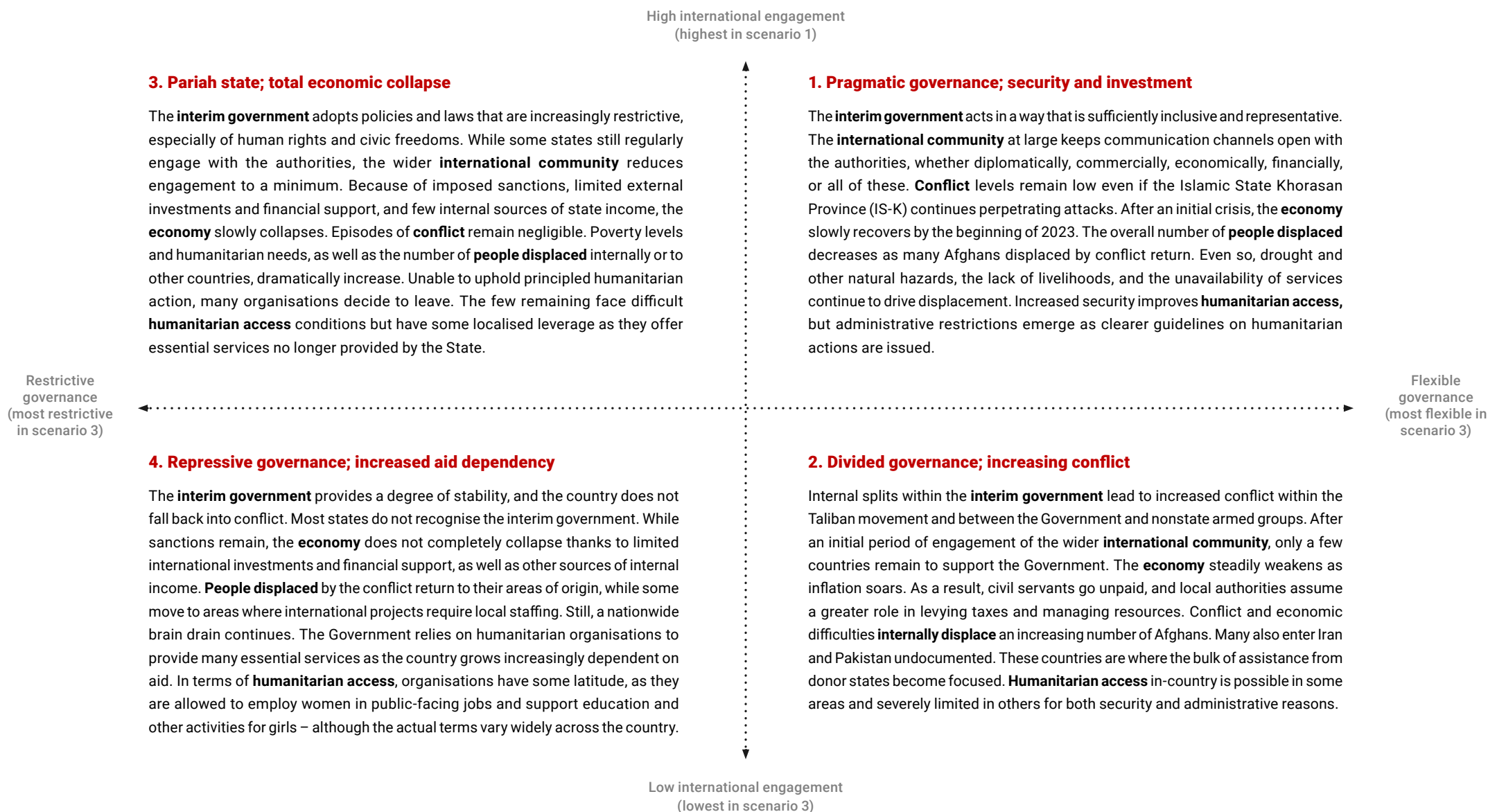
This analysis relies entirely on secondary data and a small number of key informant interviews. It was difficult to find publicly available information that was representative, and most of the data was not comparable because of different data collection methodologies. Where possible, the report highlights contradictory findings.

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SCENARIOS DEVELOPED IN SEPTEMBER 2021

In August–September 2021, ACAPS and the Norwegian Refugee Council conducted four working sessions with 11 humanitarian and academic organisations and independent experts to analyse different plausible futures for Afghanistan over the following 18 months. We then reviewed and further developed the four most relevant and consequential scenarios. Below is a summary of these four, along with their likelihood of occurrence.



OVERVIEW: WHERE WE STAND NOW

The current situation mostly falls within two of the four scenarios: scenario 3 (pariah state; total economic collapse) and scenario 4 (repressive governance; increased aid dependency).

Some key elements that were highlighted in the scenarios and that materialised are below.

Humanitarian needs and presence

- Humanitarian needs increase (scenario 3); many Afghans become dependent on aid (scenario 4).
- Humanitarian funding continues but at lower rates than pre-August 2021 (scenario 1).
- Humanitarian aid becomes politicised (scenario 2).

Displacement

- Afghan refugees from other countries are forcefully repatriated (scenario 1).
- Afghans who can do so immediately leave the country early on, contributing to a nationwide brain drain (scenario 4).
- The number of people seeking to leave the country increases (scenario 3).
- The number of people internally displaced by conflict decreases (scenario 1).
- Cross-border movement mainly through smuggling routes increases (scenario 3).

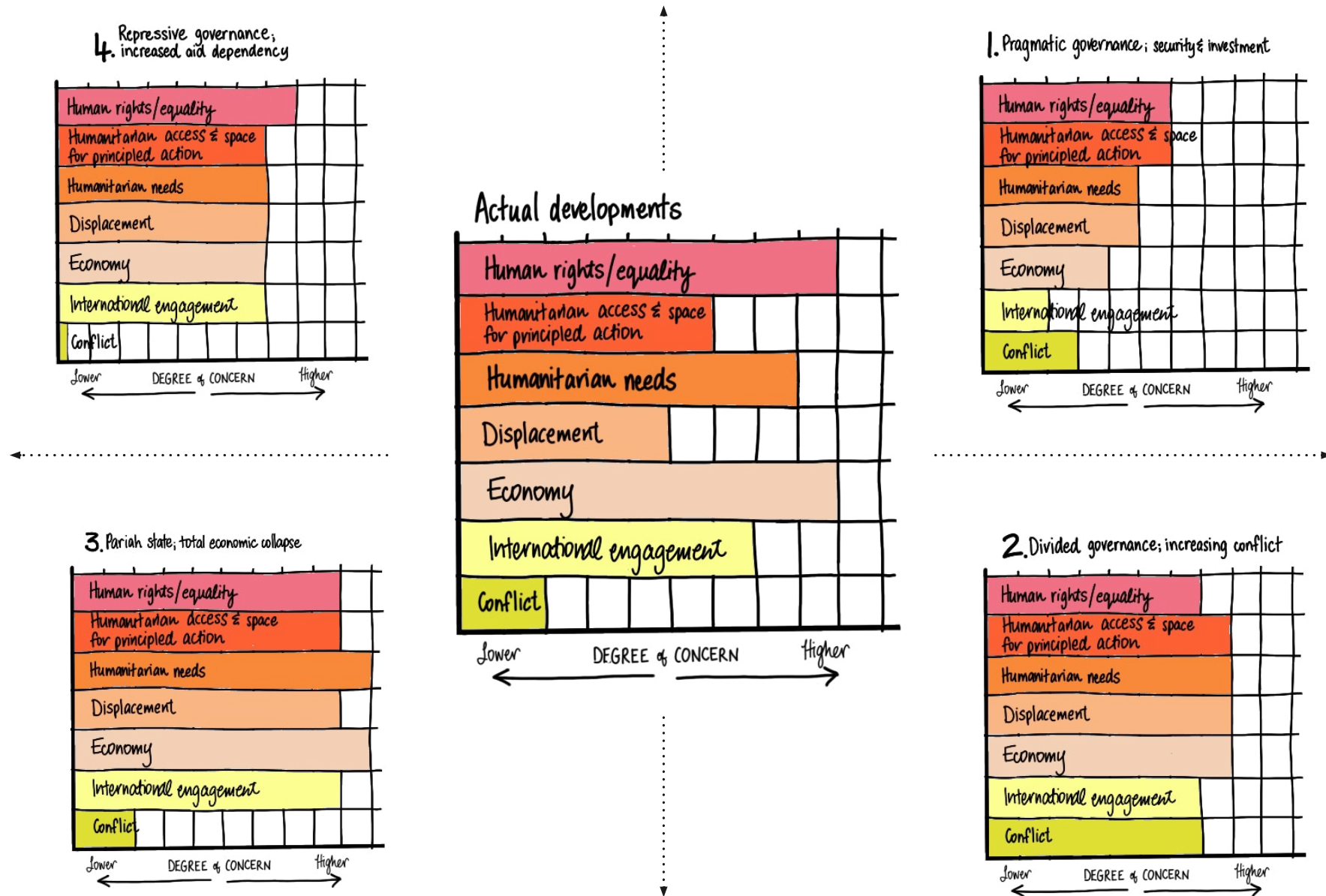
Governance and security

- The Taliban Government brings some stability (scenario 4).
- The international community continues to not recognise the Taliban Government (scenario 4) and reduces engagement to a minimum (scenario 3).
- The Taliban Government adopts increasingly restrictive policies and laws (scenario 3), sticking to ideologies that restrict personal freedom, especially for women (scenarios 3 and 4).
- Western states condemn the regime (scenario 3).
- The Taliban Government is unable to provide basic public services, requiring humanitarians to step in for support (scenario 3); responders are given some latitude, which varies across the country (scenario 4).
- Humanitarian access continues to improve (scenario 4), but operational challenges and restrictions on women aid workers remain (scenarios 3 and 4).

Economy

- International sanctions and the freezing of Afghan assets have resulted in economic collapse, while unemployment has risen sharply (scenario 3); international sanctions persist (scenario 4).
- Multiple banking issues emerge and remain unaddressed (scenario 2).
- The economy declines and a liquidity crisis emerges (scenarios 3 and 4).
- The Taliban Government seeks to supplement its limited income by levying taxes and imposing customs duties (scenario 3).
- Cross-border trade starts to grow (scenario 4).

Bar charts 1–4 were developed in 2021 to visually interpret the various elements analysed in each scenario and their degree of concern to humanitarians. The bar chart in the middle, **Actual Developments**, is ACAPS' visual interpretation of the current situation.



Governance

Since assuming power, the Taliban have been seeking international diplomatic recognition while establishing governance structures that reduce its likelihood. The dissolution of the Independent Electoral Commission, the Electoral Complaints Commission, the Ministry for Peace, and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs suggest a return to an undemocratic system. The abolition of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and recreation of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice signals the intention to ignore international calls for greater inclusivity (CNN 27/12/2021; Reuters 17/12/2021). A broad range of human rights violations persist despite an amnesty for former government officials and security force members, the 3 December decree on women's and girl's rights, and a code of conduct relating to prisoners (UNAMA 20/07/2022). The Taliban have regularly issued decrees steadily restricting individual freedoms and rights. They also gave their last-minute refusal to permit adolescent girls to return to school. These actions have further alienated the international community and are evidence of either the Taliban's emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada, increasing control and clerics seeking more conservative policies, the leadership's efforts to maintain internal unity at the expense of effective governance and international acceptance, or both.

The all-male, predominantly Pashtun, interim government established in September 2019 remains in place, without prospects of a more multi-ethnic inclusive cabinet (France 24 14/08/2022). A large gathering that closely resembled the *loya jirga* – Afghanistan's mechanism of establishing political legitimacy – took place in June. All 3,000 participants were men and there was no real debate permitted (CTC Sentinel 03/08/2022).

While all decrees originate from Kabul, the manner and extent of their implementation vary across the country depending on the provincial and local authorities, many of whom, including governors and key provincial-level post holders, have been changed multiple times (CTC Sentinel 03/08/2022). The Taliban Government continues to seek increased influence over the distribution of foreign aid in Afghanistan and has requested for the international community (UN and other donors) to use the Government's capacities (Al Jazeera 13/01/2022). While national and local NGO project registration procedures remain the same as under the previous Government, the process has become less time-consuming in Kabul and at the provincial levels – although other reporting requests have increased (KII 08/08/2022). The Government's attitude towards national NGOs also varies at the provincial and district levels depending on the individual Taliban official. NGOs with experience liaising and negotiating with the Taliban before August 2021 are in a better position to engage with them. In some provinces, the Taliban also require NGOs to obtain a Non-Objection Certificate from the Ministry of Interior for current and upcoming projects and operations, but the procedure for acquiring the certificate is unclear (ICVA 10/03/2022). (Scenarios 3 and 4)

Human rights

Since assuming control in August 2021, Taliban authorities have introduced a series of measures that have resulted in an increasingly restrictive environment for everyone, decreasing people's freedom of peaceful assembly and association, opinion, and expression. Those most affected include women and adolescent girls, members of minority groups, previous government officials, and human rights activists and journalists.

The Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) has also carried out attacks against the Taliban and minority groups across many provinces in the country, to which the Taliban have responded with a brutal campaign relying heavily on extrajudicial detentions and killings of suspected IS-K members (ICG 12/08/2022; UNAMA 17/11/2021).

Women and adolescent girls

Despite promises made during the peace negotiations, on 7 May 2022, the Taliban Government banned secondary education for girls and placed restrictions on the types of jobs women could hold (The Diplomat 12/05/2022). Young women who were already enrolled in colleges before the fall of Kabul can still pursue their degrees, but the lack of professors to teach women alongside strict dress codes appears to have kept many college-age women home (The Guardian 03/02/2022). Women can still work in the health and education sectors, but those who previously worked as journalists, government employees, and police officers have been asked to stay home. Women government workers continue to receive part of their salaries despite not being allowed to work, but recent reports say that Taliban officials have asked women to recommend male relatives to now work in their stead (The Guardian 16/05/2022 and 18/07/2022; Time 17/05/2022 and 02/03/2022). Just days before the anniversary of the Taliban takeover, around 40 women marched in front of the education ministry demanding rights to work and political participation. Taliban fighters cut the demonstration short and chased after and beat women with their rifle butts (The Guardian 13/08/2022). In early May, the Taliban Government ordered women to cover their faces in public (Al Jazeera 07/05/2022). The Government then banned women from appearing in TV dramas and as news anchors. It also banned films and entertainment shows against their interpretation of Shari'a law or Afghan values, as well as foreign films promoting foreign culture (BBC 21/11/2021). (Scenarios 3 and 4)

Minority groups

People of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) have historically been stigmatised and exposed to serious risks in Afghanistan. Authorities in the Taliban have made recent statements that death sentences will be reinstated for gay men (ASEAN SOGIE CAUCUS, 2021). People of diverse SOGIESC have historically been at risk of honour killings, sexual abuse and trafficking, physical violence, and forced marriages

(BBC 07/10/2016; openDemocracy 03/03/2017). The Taliban takeover has made them a more overt target. Taliban officials have carried out door-to-door searches to identify people who they believe pose a threat to Islam, resulting in people – including those of diverse SOGIESC – living in a constant state of fear and going underground (The Guardian 20/09/2021). There have been reports of targeted attacks, including rape and murder, by Taliban officials on people of diverse SOGIESC (HRW 26/01/2022).

Previous government officials

According to UNAMA, there have been continuous grave human rights violations across the country since the Taliban takeover. UNAMA monitoring indicates a clear pattern regarding the targeting of former government officials, former members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, individuals accused of being affiliated with armed groups, media workers, and civil society members. In the ten months following the Taliban takeover, the Government carried out extrajudicial killings on 160 former members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and government officials and 59 individuals affiliated with the IS-K (UNAMA 20/07/2022).

Human rights advocates

As at May 2022, the Taliban Government had dissolved Afghanistan's Human Rights Commission (Reuters 17/05/2022). There have been reports of door-to-door searches of human rights defenders and journalists (AI accessed 29/06/2022). The arbitrary detention of journalists and human rights defenders have increased people's fear of repercussions, resulting in self-censorship and reducing human rights activities (UNAMA 20/07/2022).

While the Taliban Government has imposed restrictions on certain groups, they have made announcements to support others. Families of suicide bombers were promised cash and plots of land and the suicide bombers praised for their role in the war against the former Government and its Western allies (Reuters 20/10/2021). In February, the Taliban Government also approved a plan to assist victims of war including providing aid to orphans of the Islamic Emirate and former government forces as well as victims of the past four decades of conflict, including martyrs' families and people with disabilities (BS 02/12/2022).

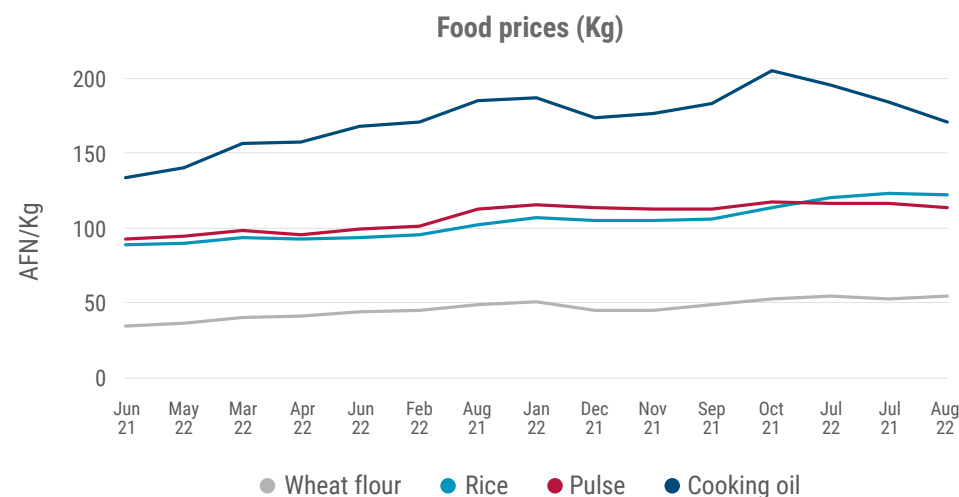
Humanitarian needs

24.4 million people are projected to need humanitarian support in Afghanistan in 2022, up from 18.4 million in 2021 and 14 million in 2020 (OCHA 19/12/2020 and 19/06/2022). The UN has appealed for USD 5 billion to support Afghans in need (UN News 11/01/2022). (Scenarios 3 and 4) It has become increasingly difficult for Afghans, especially women and girls, to meet their basic and practical needs. Violence against women was widespread in Afghanistan long before the Taliban resurgence. While statistics are incomplete, almost 90% of Afghan women have experienced at least one form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence in their lifetime

(UNAMA 25/11/2021). Safehouses for women have been shut since the Taliban takeover, the healthcare system is collapsing, food insecurity is increasing, and the economy is crumbling (IRC 24/11/2021 and 07/01/2022). International donors used to fund the entirety of the primary healthcare system in the country, with NGOs delivering support. The Ministry of Public Health led the design, contracting, and some level of monitoring and evaluation (MOPH 08/2019). As the aid from donors dried overnight on 15 August 2021, the health system funding ended, leaving primary healthcare under threat (WHO 24/01/2022). Currently healthcare facilities are being run at a smaller scale by humanitarian agencies (ICRC 04/08/2022; UNICEF 15/06/2022).

More than 700,000 people have lost their jobs or been pushed out of work since the Taliban takeover, and child labour is reported to have increased (UNSC 15/06/2022). Children in Afghanistan are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, armed conflict, and forced labor in the production of bricks and carpets, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (Scenario 3)

While income has fallen, food prices have significantly increased. The drought in 2021, combined with the ensuing economic collapse and very high inflation after the Taliban takeover, resulted in a significant increase in food prices (TNH 15/02/2022). The global increase in food prices resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further increased domestic food prices. The prices of basic commodities, such as wheat flour, rice, oil, and pulses, were 47% higher in April 2022 than in June 2021 (WFP 19/05/2022). Nearly half of Afghanistan's population is suffering from acute food insecurity (WFP 23/07/2022).



Source: WFP Countrywide Weekly Market Price Bulletin for Afghanistan

Afghanistan is highly susceptible to natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and landslides. Between January–July 2022, natural disasters affected around 39,060 people across 16 provinces, higher than the 26,703 people in 12 provinces during the same period in 2021 (OCHA accessed 07/08/2022; OCHA accessed 10/08/2022). In June 2022, an earthquake of magnitude 5.9 hit Paktika and Khost provinces. This earthquake was the worst in the last two decades; it killed over 1,000 people and injured 6,000 more (UN News 18/07/2022). The UN launched an emergency appeal of USD 110 million to respond to the earthquake (UNHCR 06/07/2022).

Natural disasters recur in Afghanistan, but the economic downturn combined with the increase in the prices of food and other basic goods and services has diminished the resilience of Afghan families, increased the overall number of people in need, and made humanitarian response to natural disasters significantly more expensive than before.

Humanitarian assistance, presence, and access

Around USD 1.7 billion worth of aid has arrived in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover (OCHA accessed 12/07/2022). Before then, around 75% of Afghan public expenditure came from foreign assistance (The Economist 19/02/2022). In 2020 alone, Afghanistan received USD 4.21 billion in aid and development assistance (WB accessed 30/07/2022). The Taliban have been providing security to UN personnel and ensuring broad humanitarian access, allowing humanitarians to provide assistance in parts of the country previously inaccessible because of the security situation (UNAMA 17/11/2021). (Scenario 1)

193 humanitarian organisations (106 NGOs, 75 INGOs, and 12 UN agencies) provided humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan in the second quarter of 2022 (OCHA accessed 11/08/2022). Humanitarian access in Afghanistan has improved compared to July 2021, although humanitarians continue to face operational challenges (ACAPS 07/07/2022). These challenges fall under three main categories:

- Financial access and liquidity: the Taliban imposed withdrawal limits to buy time to liquidate banks as reserves are frozen and the inflow of USD has stopped. People lined up in front of banks for days to withdraw money. The reduced liquidity in the market has led to a further reduction in purchasing power and demand for business.
- Bureaucratic impediments to access and operational challenges: linked to funding constraints, political instability, and governance. Some reporting mechanisms that the Taliban Government have proposed are against the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, and organisations fear that these mechanisms will hinder programme implementation.
- Restrictions on women's participation: the Taliban have restricted women's mobility and participation in the workforce (ACBAR 23/03/2022). (Scenarios 3 and 4)

Both national and international NGOs face operational challenges because of national and international politics (ICVA 10/03/2022). (Scenario 2) The Taliban's control over local NGOs gives them access to supplies, which they often redirect to Taliban supporters and soldiers. Some NGOs and INGOs have reported not having the capacity to challenge authorities (FP 24/06/2022). In October 2021, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations issued a letter to the provincial directorate allowing essential female NGO staff to distribute aid under limited circumstances. In reality, the situation has varied from district to district (ICVA 10/03/2022; RI 18/08/2022).

Many civil servants, bankers, academics, and doctors fled when Kabul fell, contributing to a wider brain drain and creating a vacuum in technical personnel (The Economic Times 14/01/2022). This brain drain is also affecting the humanitarian community, which is struggling to hire qualified personnel, affecting the overall humanitarian response (KII 08/08/2022). (Scenarios 3 and 4)

Displacement

Internal displacement and cross-border movements increased in the first half of 2021 and right after the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021 but have been decreasing since. While most of those fleeing have gone to neighbouring countries like Iran and Pakistan, others have sought refuge in the US, the UK, and the EU.

Internal displacement

In 2021, 866,672 people were newly displaced internally in Afghanistan, compared to 399,515 in 2020. The number of displaced people was especially high in July 2021, just before the Taliban takeover, because of the nationwide Taliban offensive. Displacement resulting from conflict decreased between January–July 2022, with 7,420 people newly displaced in that period, mostly from Sar-e Pul (6,265) and Baghlan (763) provinces (OCHA accessed 06/07/2022). (Scenario 1) While numbers are difficult to confirm, since August 2021, the number of returnees who returned to community of origin has increased to around three million (IOM 02/03/2022).

Cross-border displacement and returns

Iran: there is no definitive record of the number of Afghans who have fled to Iran to seek refuge since the Taliban takeover, but figures range from 500,000 to one million (UNHCR accessed 15/08/2022). This number adds to the existing 780,000 Afghan refugee card holders and 2.1 million undocumented Afghans already living in Iran (UNHCR accessed 04/08/2022). The total number of people crossing the border from June 2021 to June 2022 is higher and counts up to 1.3 million (IOM 15/07/2022).

In May 2022, the Iranian Government launched a countrywide headcount exercise to identify undocumented Afghans in the country, including new arrivals, and provide them with temporary

stays of up to six months that can be extended (Al Jazeera 12/06/2022). Some Afghans who did not participate in the census raised fears about forced returns. The Iranian Government has deported and continues to deport Afghans who it believes are in Iran irregularly. These deportations occur despite UNHCR's reminder of the non-return advisory calling on all states to halt returns to Afghanistan, even for those whose asylum claims have been rejected. In the first half of 2022, an estimated 462,000 Afghans returned (voluntarily or by force) to Afghanistan from Iran compared to around 663,000 during the same period in 2021 (OCHA 26/07/2022 and 22/08/2021).

Pakistan: 250,000 Afghans have entered Pakistan seeking international protection since the Taliban takeover, taking the total number of registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan to 1.28 million, with an additional 1.7 million undocumented (UNHCR accessed 17/08/2022; EUAA 20/05/2022; UNHCR 01/08/2022). The total number of Afghans having crossed the border with Pakistan is much higher, with 2.5 million estimated to have travelled from Afghanistan since July 2021 (IOM 26/07/2022).

Around one million new smart identity cards have been issued to refugees, with children under the age of five included on their parents' cards. The cards are valid until 30 June 2023. Registered Afghan refugees are able to update their registration data at 11 dedicated centres across the country (UNHCR 03/06/2022). (Scenarios 2 and 3)

In 2022, an estimated 46,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan (OCHA 26/07/2022).

At least 78,000 Afghans were resettled in the US. The US Government announced that Afghans already in the country would receive a temporary protected status allowing them to stay in the country for at least 18 months (USCIS 03/16/2022). The UK Government also announced planning to resettle 20,000 Afghans in the UK over the next few years under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) (UK Gov't 18/08/2021). Around 85,000 Afghans fled to countries near the EU, but EU member states agreed to resettle only 40,000 Afghan refugees (Al Jazeera 09/12/2021; EU 28/06/2022).

Socioeconomic environment

Loss of economic growth and consequent rise in unemployment and prices

Afghanistan has lost much of the economic growth it achieved over the last 15 years. Income, urban employment, and agricultural output have decreased, contributing to an approximately 34% fall in per capita income (WB 13/04/2022). (Scenario 3)

Afghanistan's economy over the last two decades was highly dependent on military and civilian aid flows (up to USD 8.5 billion) and expenditure by international coalition troops (AAN 11/11/2021). The gradual reduction in the presence of international coalition troops that began in 2014 caused significant economic decline (Gandhara 01/05/2021). The cessation of both military and civilian aid flows in August 2021 resulted in the immediate collapse of business activity and mass unemployment. A lack of sectoral diversity in the economy to reallocate labour and capital from collapsing sectors significantly decreased purchasing power and increased poverty and the risk of severe and acute food insecurity.

The banking sector experienced serious challenges immediately after the Taliban takeover. Most of the Afghan population, particularly those in urban areas, used various private banks to receive their salaries. The temporary closure of all banks and subsequent withdrawal limits – e.g. a USD 200 per week limit that was only recently removed – created liquidity issues and further straining the already collapsing economy (Business Standard 29/08/2021).

Financial sanctions initially disrupted remittances to Afghanistan – an important income source for a significant proportion of Afghan households, with the country receiving over USD 800 million annually – although a special license exempted them later (Reuters 03/09/2021; Reuters 11/12/2021).

Uncertainty and fear have resulted in a loss of confidence in investing in the private sector, while the outflow of tens of thousands of highly educated Afghans resulted in the loss of human capital. Reduced female participation in the public and private sector has also contributed to the loss of productivity (WB 13/04/2022). According to the ILO, in the third quarter of 2021, women's employment decreased by approximately 16% (ILO 19/01/2022).

Exports from Afghanistan to Pakistan have significantly increased, providing much-needed revenue to the Taliban Government. The price of coal increased following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Taliban has been trying to overcome Afghanistan's economic challenges by increasing coal exports to Pakistan (VOA 04/06/2022).

Iranian exports to Afghanistan have decreased, mainly because of the change in the Afghan Government resulting in changing trade regulations in Iran, and exporters being concerned about sending products to Afghanistan. Several construction projects being implemented by the former government or international organisations were also shut down after the Taliban takeover, decreasing exports of construction materials from Iran (Tehran Times 05/04/2022). Cross-border trade with Central Asian countries has also decreased, mainly because of a fall in fuel imports (XCEPT 13/07/2022). (Scenario 4) The exchange rate to USD has slightly appreciated, mostly because of the continued inflow of USD for humanitarian aid into the economy (WB 18/04/2022).

USD to AFN Chart

US Dollar to Afghan Afghani

1 USD = 87.8501 AFN Jul 4, 2022, 06:51 UTC



Source: XE (accessed 04/07/2022)

China has made plans to initiate projects to rebuild Afghanistan, support the restarting of mining in the country, and facilitate Afghan exports – although these may take time to materialise (The Diplomat 06/07/2022). India is also planning to push for the use of Chabahar Port as a link between the Central Asia-Afghanistan-Indian Ocean region and Indian markets (The Economic Times 15/07/2022).

Raise in revenue

The Taliban Government set the national budget for fiscal year 1401 (2022) at AFN 231 billion (USD 2.65 billion). They announced in May that their revenue target is AFN 186.7 billion (USD 2.14 billion), leaving an anticipated AFN 44.7 billion (USD 512 million) shortfall. This shows that the Taliban are focused on government finances and economic governance (USIP 02/02/2022). While the Government relies heavily on taxation to fund its budget and has introduced new and increased tariffs on cross-border trade (such as on freight and coal exports), it has also reduced tax rates for small businesses to boost the economy (Hasht e Subh Daily 10/03/2022; Gandhara 16/06/2022). The Taliban Government has been successful in collecting taxes despite being cut off from the global economy, possibly the result of two decades of experience collecting taxes during its insurgency against the previous Government and allied troops (The Economist 08/06/2022). (Scenario 3)

In the last four months of 2021, the Taliban Government collected USD 400 million in revenue through customs and taxes, less than half of the previous Government's revenue for the same period in 2020 (USIP 02/02/2022). This reduction in tax revenue may be due to some of the tax reductions, as well as the dismantling of networks of roadside checkpoints and the closure of smuggling routes (through which Taliban insurgents and powerbrokers used to earn revenues) to significantly reduce corruption (XCEPT 13/07/2022).

COVID-19

The number of COVID-19 cases per day significantly decreased in the past year. The daily caseload spiked once in February 2022 to around 900 but decreased again afterwards, remaining below 100 cases per day on average (WHO accessed 22/06/2022). A likely reason is the low rate of COVID-19 testing, but the COVID-19 positivity rate also declined and stood below 10% by the end of June 2022 (WHO 28/06/2022). In July 2022, however, the positivity rate rose to 16%, an upward trend in positivity rates that has also been seen in the rest of the world (WHO 25/07/2022).

At the end of January 2022, the Taliban's Minister of Public Health asked Afghans to get vaccinated against COVID-19 (BS 30/01/2022). As at July 2022, only 13.01% of the population had been fully vaccinated (JHU accessed 21/07/2022). The low turnout is the result of a combination of vaccine unavailability, vaccine hesitancy, and decreased availability of funding for health facilities (The Conversation 29/03/2022). WHO announced a COVID-19 vaccination campaign for Afghanistan in June 2022, intending to cover all 34 provinces and targeting more than five million adults (WHO 24/05/2022). The campaign has already begun in three provinces (Arezo News 17/07/2022).

In Afghanistan, where poverty rates are high and many essential needs remain unmet, masking to prevent COVID-19 is not of the highest of priority for many people. Although COVID-19 awareness is high among Afghans, fewer than half of all households reported wearing masks in 2020, perhaps because of their distance to healthcare facilities or receiving inadequate information (IMPACT Initiatives et al. 25/04/2022).

International engagement

As at August 2022, no country had recognised the new Taliban Government. Four countries – **China, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan** – had accredited Taliban-appointed diplomats, while other countries maintained some level of contact to facilitate humanitarian assistance (VOA 09/04/2022 and 15/06/2022). (Scenario 4) Russia has signalled that it might strengthen its relationship with the Taliban Government; In June 2022, officials from Afghanistan's Chambers of Commerce and Industries and Russia's Business Council for Cooperation with Afghanistan signed a deal to expand trade relations. A follow-up visit to Moscow by the Taliban Minister for Commerce occurred mid- August. (VOA 24/06/2022; VOA 19/08/2022). Indian officials met with the foreign minister of Afghanistan to discuss bilateral ties and humanitarian aid at the beginning of June 2022. While India has provided humanitarian and medical assistance to Afghanistan, it has not officially recognised the Taliban administration, although the country has re-established diplomatic presence by reopening the Indian embassy in Kabul (Al Jazeera 03/06/2022; VOA 07/07/2022).

The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban Government has deteriorated. Pakistan carried out air strikes in eastern Afghanistan targeting the terrorist group Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan on 17 April 2022, killing 47 civilians (The Economic Times 27/04/2022; The Diplomat 19/05/2022). Diplomatic tensions between Iran and Afghanistan persist (Al Jazeera 12/06/2022).

Sanctions and financial access

In December 2021, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2615, which affirmed that humanitarian assistance and other activities supporting basic human needs in Afghanistan do not violate the asset freeze against listed individuals and entities associated with the Taliban (UNSC 22/12/2021). In early February 2022, the US announced that international banks could transfer money to Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes and aid organisations could pay teachers and healthcare workers at state-run institutions without fear of breaching sanctions on the Taliban (USD 02/02/2022). That said, the Afghanistan Central Bank (Da Afghanistan Bank) remains cut off from the international banking system, and foreign banks remain unwilling to process foreign currency transactions with Afghan banks (HRW 04/08/2022).

Afghan private banks do not have enough physical cash to cover withdrawals by humanitarian organisations and depositors. Da Afghanistan Bank is short on both USD and Afghani banknotes. The shortage has resulted in severe withdrawal limits on Afghans and the prohibition of different types of electronic transactions in USD. Banks are also facing difficulties settling incoming USD transactions via correspondent accounts at private banks outside the country, most likely because of the fear of foreign banks that they may be violating UN and US sanctions (HRW 01/03/2022). Companies and households continue to struggle to access cash (WB 18/04/2022). (Scenario 2)

Humanitarian organisations working in Afghanistan are forced to use informal and unregulated methods to transfer money into Afghanistan so they can pay salaries and obtain cash, like the Hawala system or money exchangers. These systems involve large transactional costs and cannot be used to bring in enough funds for the scope of humanitarian operations responders hope to undertake (HRW 04/08/2022). The UN has repeatedly called on the US Government to unblock more than USD 7 billion in foreign assets in Da Afghanistan Bank to enable the unimpeded provision of humanitarian assistance (UN 25/04/2022). (Scenario 4)

Conflict and physical security

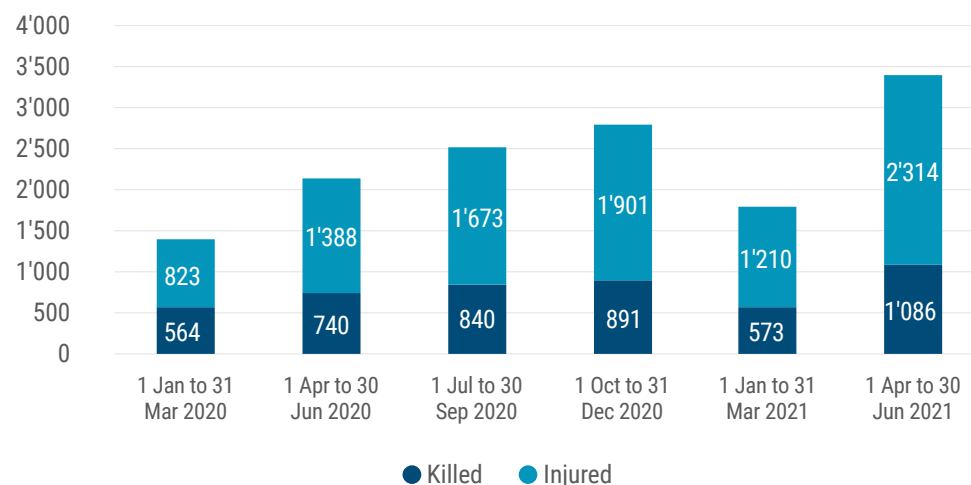
IS-K/domestic terrorism

The Taliban's victory, the collapse of the Afghan Government, and the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan ended two decades of generalised conflict and violence in the country. The number of military and civilian casualties declined over the last year. The reduction in conflict decreased civilian casualties by 78% in the six months following the fall of the previous

Government (UN 02/03/2022). Although the total number of civilian casualties has decreased, the number of casualties from attacks on minority groups has increased (OHCHR/UNAMA 23/02/2021; UNAMA 26/07/2021). While UNAMA has not published its quarterly Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict report since July 2021, their ten-month update published in July 2022 reported 2,106 civilian casualties between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022, most of which were attributed to IS-K (UNAMA 20/07/2022). The group perpetrated several suicide and non-suicide attacks against minority groups, particularly Shia Muslims from the Hazara ethnic group (OHCHR 07/03/2022; KII 08/08/2022). IS-K also claimed the attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul in June 2022, as well as the killing of a senior Taliban cleric in Kabul in June, among other attacks on the Taliban and their leaders (Al Jazeera 18/06/2022).

While precise data on the number of minority casualties since the Taliban takeover is not available, most attacks against civilians have been against minorities (UNAMA 20/07/2022).

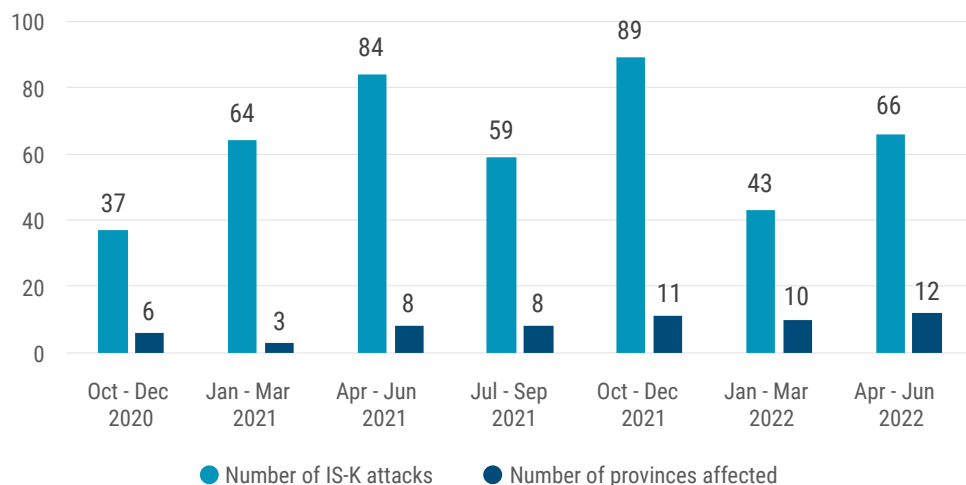
Civilian casualties from general violence



Source: UNAMA (accessed 30/06/2022)

Although minority casualties in attacks attributed to IS-K have increased, the overall number of attacks claimed by IS-K decreased in 2022. The geographical scope of these attacks, however, has expanded to include several more provinces, including Badakhshan, Balkh, Helmand, and Zabul (UNGA/UNSC 28/01/2022; UNSC 15/06/2022). The figures reported by UNSC (in January and June) and by ACLED show the same trend, despite discrepancies between the numbers. These discrepancies may have resulted from difficulties in independently verifying the identity of the perpetrators.

IS - K Attacks



Source: ACLED (accessed 24/07/2022)

The rise in casualties among minority groups and expansion of areas where attacks occur could be the result of several things: the previous collaboration between the Taliban and US troops to fight IS-K ending when the US withdrew its troops, the Taliban forces having become overstretched fighting two insurgencies (IS-K and the National Resistance Front or NRF), the Taliban lacking the willingness or ability to protect minorities at risk, or any combination of these three. The Taliban Government has also struggled to exercise effective control over all of Afghanistan because of a lack of funds, personnel, and structure (Steinberg and Albrecht 21/02/2022; CFR 14/04/2022).

Although violence decreased in 2022, the Taliban Government still faces threats from IS-K, the NRF, and the Afghanistan Freedom Front. It is not unreasonable to assume that violence in the country may increase again (UNSC accessed 14/08/2022).

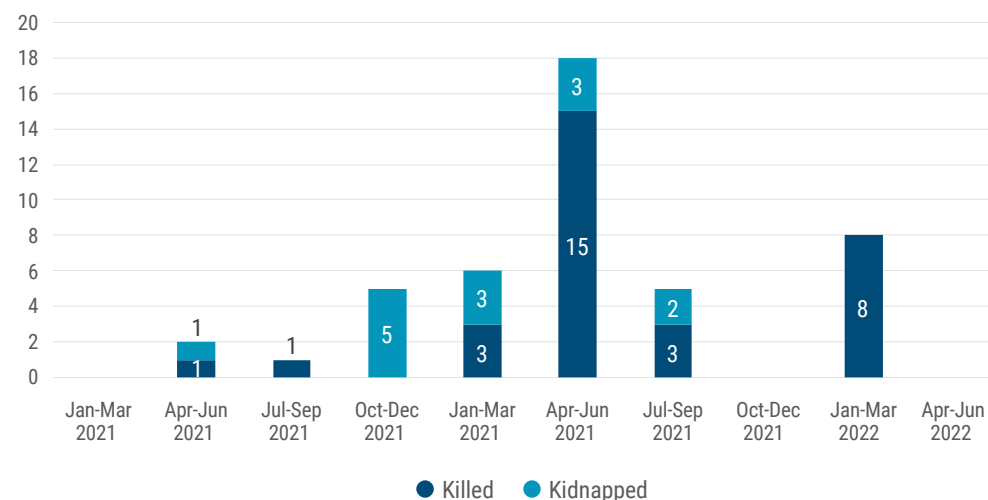
Intra-Taliban tensions

Intra-Taliban tensions along ethnic fault lines and competition over positions have also increased, resulting in violence and internal tensions over various policies (UN accessed 14/08/2022; ACLED 14/04/2022). In the eight months after the Taliban takeover, ACLED recorded 33 events of Taliban forces clashing between themselves. Several of these clashes took place in areas where the NRF had been active, while others took place in Farah and Samangan provinces, which had not seen much activity before (ACLED 14/04/2022).

Security and humanitarian workers

The overall security situation for aid workers has improved compared to 2021 (ACAPS 07/07/2022). Physical access has significantly improved, but threats of attacks on humanitarian workers, facilities, and assets continue, and responders still face interference in implementing activities (OCHA 26/05/2022). Unknown attackers killed eight polio vaccination workers in separate incidents in Takhar and Kunduz provinces on 24 February 2022. This is the only reported attack on humanitarians in 2022.

Attacks on humanitarians



Source: AWSD (accessed 27/07/2022)

Transnational terrorism and terrorist groups

Despite an agreement between the Taliban and the US for the Taliban not to harbour 'international terrorists', a targeted US air strike on a villa in Kabul owned by senior Taliban member Sirajuddin Haqqani on 31 July killed Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri (BBC 02/08/2022; The Diplomat 03/08/2022). The incident indicated an active link between Al Qaeda and some members of the Taliban (BBC 02/08/2022). The Taliban Government maintains not having any knowledge of al-Zawahiri's presence in Kabul (VOA 04/08/2022).

The UN reports that the Taliban Government does maintain a close relationship with Al Qaeda. That said, neither al-Qaeda nor IS-K are expected to be able to launch international attacks before 2023 (UNSC 26/05/2022). Given the success of the air strike that killed al-Zawahiri (and produced no civilian casualties), the US can be expected to carry out similar attacks, which could increase Taliban resentment against the US and perhaps US civilians, as well as those who have previously worked with them.