The Civil Half of the Afghan War: Dealing with the Political, Governance, Economics, Corruption, and Drug Threats

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Every war has both a military and a civil dimension. This is especially true of counterinsurgency campaigns like Afghanistan, where the civil dimension is always a critical half of the battle. The U.S. now seems to be making real progress in reshaping its approach to fighting the military half of the war in Afghanistan, but it is far from clear that it is playing an effective role in helping Afghanistan deal with the critical problems it faces in dealing with the civil side of the war -- the lack of security in civil life, chronic failures in governance, and massive economic challenges.

On the military side, the U.S. finally seems to be providing the levels of air support and train- and assist personnel necessary to give the Afghan forces a fighting chance. It now is committed to providing the needed support long enough to allow Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to stand on their own. It has gained support from some of its NATO allies in enhancing the military advisory and support mission, and it seems committed to a conditions-based security strategy, rather than one with arbitrary deadlines for withdrawal.

What is far less clear is that the U.S. has an effective strategy to deal with the civil side of the war -- the "hearts and minds" aspects necessary to win popular support for the government, to counter the Taliban and other threats at the local and provincial level, and to create the kind of support within the ANSF for the government that can win a counterinsurgency conflict (rather than attract recruits simply because no other jobs or sources of income are available).

Two sets of civil challenges are involved. One is the immediate set of political problems caused by a deeply divided government: President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah lead alongside a thug – Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostom, over an ineffective parliament, and a mix of power brokers, warlords, and uncertain Provincial and District leaders outside the capital at “Kabulstan.”

Leadership and political credibility are key short-term issues, as are elections. There are also serious questions about the real-world effectiveness and impact of yet another reform program, which seems better oriented to deal with Afghanistan’s international financial problems than the needs and loyalties of its people.

The second set of civil challenges consists of far deeper structural problems that affect the civil dimension of the war and that will take years to solve, affect any prospect for a stable peace and recovery, and have a major impact on the Afghan people. These challenges tend to receive only minimal attention at the policy level. However, it is far from clear that any counterinsurgency campaign can be won unless these challenges are addressed and the Afghan people at least become confident that their lives will improve in each area.

There are three key problem areas that shape the civil dimension of the Afghan conflict:

- Afghan civilians are still concerned with the lack of day-to-day security at the civil level, and the failure to create an effective rule of law. This is especially true at the level where a transition occurs between the military and civil dimensions of the war. It is still unclear that the U.S. has the strategy, plans, and resources needed to help the Afghan government create effective Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), and justice system capabilities -- or to deal with internal corruption in the military and justice system.
- Afghan civil governance has some of the worst performance indicators in the world at every meaningful level. Even if one ignores Afghanistan's deep political divisions, the tensions between its power brokers and warlords, and permeating corruption, its governance fails at the functional levels necessary to earn popular respect and support.
- The Afghan economy still has erratic growth in terms of GDP, but the poverty level has increased since 2008, and employment is seen as a critical problem by most Afghans -- especially the younger ones entering the labor force. Far too much of Afghanistan lacks economic security and its growing dependence on a narco-economy is compounding the problem.

This analysis addresses each problem area in turn, and provides a wide range of indicators to show the seriousness of each problem and quantify the trends that now impact the war. It draws on a number of sources -- most notably analysis by the World Bank, IMF, UN, and CIA -- to address the seriousness of the structural pressures affecting the civil side of the war. It also draws heavily on an annual poll of Afghan public opinion by the Asia Foundation to examine Afghan popular perceptions of these problems and the correlation between them and Afghan "hearts and minds."

It should again be stressed that the analysis focuses on the underlying structural problems and trends involved, rather than Afghan politics; human rights issues like the role of women; the country's ethnic, sectarian, and tribal divisions; and the impact that Afghanistan's neighbors and other outside powers have on its civil life and economy. These too are critical aspects of the civil dimension of the war. They do not, however, lend themselves to the same degree of quantification and trend analysis. As a result, it should be clear that the need for effective U.S. and other outside aid in nation building is even more critical than this study indicates.
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THE CIVIL DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT

The U.S. always faces three threats in fighting a major counterinsurgency campaign.

- One is the enemy: the direct military and terrorist threat imposed by the insurgents.
- The second is the failures of the host country government it is seeking to aid, and the reality that only "failed states" with many critical failures are normally vulnerable to the rise of a serious insurgency.
- The third is U.S. ignorance of the political, economic, cultural, and governance structure of the country it is seeking to intervene in, a tendency to try to transform the state it is aiding in its own image, denial of the seriousness of the host government's problems, and an equal tendency to focus on the fighting rather than the need to help the host government win back the support of its own people.

It has long been clear that Afghanistan is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, that its politics are deeply divided and often prevent it from making key reforms and winning popular support, that its government ranks as one of the least competent and most corrupt in the world, and that it is failing to win the kind of popular support it needs to defeat the ideological and military threat posed by insurgents like the Taliban.

Work by organizations like the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), press and NGO reports, and leaks of intelligence reporting by the CIA have made it all too clear that U.S. reluctance to face these realities, coupled with grossly exaggerated claims of progress in the civil sector, have led the U.S. to understate and sometimes ignore the need to deal with the failures of the Afghan host government -- failures compounded by efforts to remake Afghanistan in its own image and many of the same bureaucratic problems that the U.S. faced in Vietnam.

The civil problems created by rushing into a weak and divisive new constitution, a lack of any effective planning and coordination of the international aid effort, a corrupt and power-broker oriented Karzai government, and a deeply divided and ineffective Ghani-Abdullah-Abdullah government are so great, however, that they can potentially offset any progress that Afghan forces, the U.S. government, and NATO make in the military dimension. Even if one ignores the stream of headlines focusing on these problems, there is a wide body of evidence that make it clear that winning half a war is not enough.
LOOKING AT THE PRIORITIES SET BY AFGHAN PUBLIC OPINION

“Hearts and minds” may be cliché in analyzing counterinsurgency, but it also reflects the reality that the civil dimension of such wars is influenced by popular perceptions and not simply by metrics and data on the scale of a given nation’s problems. One key source of data on Afghan “hearts and minds” are the results of the better polls of Afghan public opinion.

The course of the fighting does shape which side controls or influences a given part of the population. Intimidation, violence, and repression are key tools in controlling the population, as is military control over the local economy, the justice system, political and religious institutions, education, and the media. In a case like Afghanistan, however, the government must win popular support to offset a highly disciplined set of extremists, motivate its own forces, and create a coordinated counterinsurgency effort.

Afghan popular attitudes that affect the fighting are the core source of such data and finding ways to analyze "hearts and minds." At the same time, popular attitudes are often harder to measure than the more physical aspects of the war. Any poll of Afghan popular opinion presents major problems in terms of choosing how to poll public opinion on key issues and the difficulty of data collection, particularly in conflict areas, from poorer Afghans, and in the many semi-isolated parts of the country.

Getting a truly representative and statistically valid sample in a war-torn nation with many key factions and major geographic barriers is difficult at best. It is also almost always misleading to draw conclusions from even the best survey data -- particularly when it is based on current attitudes rather than trends and draws major conclusions from a few punchline questions and numbers taken out of context and presented without a clear explanation of the sample, methodology, uncertainty, and analytic controls.

Anyone using any poll of Afghanistan should examine the detailed results of the entire poll and the description of its methodology, and should be aware that the real-world level of uncertainty in every poll can be far higher than the estimated statistical level of confidence. In practice, however, the trends in such polls can still be highly revealing if the questions are valid and shaped to fully test popular attitudes, and if the sampling methods cover a large enough sample and are relatively consistent over time.

The Asia Foundation has done an exceptional job over the years of doing such consistent polling, and of covering a broad range of Afghanistan -- despite the many problems in sampling the entire country in an active war zone; the many geographic, ethnic, sectarian, and tribal divisions; the radically different levels of access to given areas and parts of the population; and the divisions by insurgent and power broker/warlord influence and control.1

Its latest survey Afghanistan in 2017: A Survey of the Afghan People, was released in November 2017. It is available on the web at https://asiafoundation.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/survey/, and is the thirteenth in a series that began in 2006. Its Appendix One provides a detailed explanation of its methodology, and a short summary of its sampling and other techniques can be found in the following footnote to this analysis.2

The Best News in the Civil Dimension of War is the Unpopularity of the Insurgent Threat

The most positive civil result of the survey in terms of the civil dimension of warfighting is the
continued unpopularity of the insurgent groups, although this varied by province and the Taliban was found to be considerably more popular than ISIS.

The trends in Afghan distrust and rejection of the Taliban and ISIS are shown in Figure One. They reflect one of the most consistent trends in the Survey over time, and the 2017 report notes that,³

... Afghans appear to have been losing sympathy for the struggle of armed opposition groups (figure 2.16). When asked about this last year, 77.1% of Afghans professed “no” sympathy, 40.7 percentage points more than in 2009. Those with a lot of sympathy declined by 16.1 percentage points during the same period, to 5.5%. The question was reworded in 2017 in order to gauge perceptions of the Taliban and Daesh separately from each other and from other insurgent groups. This year, 4.8% of Afghans overall express “a lot” of sympathy, and 10.9% express “a little” sympathy for the Taliban. Among intercept interviewees, however, the proportion declaring “a lot” of or “a little” sympathy for the Taliban is higher (10.4% and 18.0%, respectively).

While the Taliban still arouse some sympathy among the population, ISIS/Daesh lacks any substantial public support. The vast majority of Afghans (91.5%) declare themselves to have “no sympathy” at all for the group. Of the 2.6% overall who express some sympathy for ISIS/Daesh, most are in Wardak, where 15.9% express some sympathy for ISIS/Daesh, and in the West, in the provinces of Herat and Ghor (8.8% and 6.0%, respectively) Also of interest is the presence of ISIS/Daesh sympathizers in Khost province (6.0%). According to respondents, including their few supporters, the factors driving ISIS/Daesh’s involvement in Afghanistan are the desire to gain power (19.5%) and support from foreign countries (12.3%)
Figure One: Afghan Attitudes Towards the Insurgents

There is Bad News, but Some Good News in Polling on Confidence in the Future

Afghans do, however, have many reservations about the course of the war, their government, and their economy. Twice as many Afghans have a negative view of the future as a positive one, although it is important to note that the Survey did not find the Afghan people as a whole lacked optimism, or did not have hope in the future. The Survey noted that,

...the Survey has always begun by asking Afghans whether the country is moving in the right direction, an indication of optimism, or in the wrong direction, an indication of pessimism. This is year, the downward trajectory in national mood which began in 2013 has reversed, and optimism has risen marginally, from 29.3% in 2016 to 32.8% in 2017. This year’s slight increase in optimism is difficult to explain. On the surface, it would appear to be just a continuation of the status quo. However, regional and provincial changes are significant and paint a complex picture.

These negative and positive trends are summarized in Figure Two. It is again important to stress the need to examine the full Survey to put such data in its full context. It also is not possible to distinguish the cause of the positive impacts of trends shown in Figure Two for 2016.

The impact of the shift in U.S. strategy from a fixed deadline for withdrawal to conditions-based support of Afghan forces may well have been the critical factor rather than any action by the Afghan government. It may have offset the negative impacts of the rising levels of violence in the fighting during 2016 and the deep divisions in Afghan politics.

It is equally impossible to be sure how much of the limited positive trends in 2015 vs. 2016 are truly statistically valid. The level of improvement is too low relative to the inherent uncertainties in the sampling and methodology.

A few excerpts from the Survey illustrate the difficulty in drawing clear conclusions:

This year, and for the first time since 2013, the number of Afghans who say the country is moving in the right direction has increased, albeit marginally. In 2016, 29.3% of respondents expressed optimism. This year, the proportion has risen slightly, to 32.8%. Conversely, the number of Afghans who say the country is moving in the wrong direction has decreased, from 65.9% in 2016 to 61.2% this year (figure 1.1). Each year, the Survey finds that around 4% to 8% of respondents say they don’t know the answer to this question. This year, that figure is 5.3%.

The two most frequently cited reasons for optimism relate to the themes of improved security and rebuilding the country (50.6% and 51.0% of respondents, respectively). These reasons emerge in almost equal proportions among Afghan men (50.1% and 50.3%, respectively) and women (51.1% and 51.8%, respectively). They are also the most frequently cited reasons among the main ethnic groups. Among Pashtuns, 54.4% point to improved security. This falls to 50.8% for Hazaras, 48.6% for Uzbeks, and 45.6% for Tajiks.

Improved security is more likely to be cited as a reason for optimism by rural than by urban respondents (52.9% vs. 41.9%). Interestingly, this finding diverges from 2016, when rural and urban Afghans differed little on this measure (50.6% vs. 51.5%). Similar proportions of rural and urban Afghans point to rebuilding as a reason for optimism (50.3% and 53.9%, respectively).

...This year, almost a third of respondents (32.7%) say they “don’t know” what is going well locally, and nearly one in five (19.0%) say “nothing.” These are marginal increases from last year’s findings (30.0% and 17.0%, respectively). Urban Afghans are nearly twice as likely to report nothing is going well as those living in rural areas (28.4% vs. 15.9%). Afghans who cite good security, building dams, development of the country, and availability of jobs as things that are going well locally are most likely to say the country is moving in the right direction. Those pessimistic about the direction of the country are much more likely to report nothing is going well than those who are optimistic about Afghanistan’s direction...
Figure Two: A Halt to the Negative Trend in Afghan Public Opinion of the Broad Trends in the Country's Direction in 2016?

The Key Negative Aspects of “Hearts and Minds” and the Civil Dimension of War Are Fear of Violence, Economics and Jobs, and Poor Governance and Corruption

Figure Three summarizes the key areas where the Survey found the Afghan people were pessimistic about the civil dimension of the war. Few who have worked in Afghanistan and dealt with both its military and civil issue will question its results. The fear of violence clearly is a critical factor shaping Afghan “hearts and minds”, although poll after poll -- and analysis after analysis -- has shown that economics and jobs, the quality of governance, and corruption are key factors as well.

Figure Three warns that public attitudes varied sharply by province and there are radical differences in polling by province or by region. In fact, some of the worst polling results occurred in the Kabul area – or “Kabulstan” -- where the central government is the key focus. The Survey notes that,5

Reported levels of optimism and pessimism…vary regionally this year. Afghans in the East are the most likely to report an optimistic outlook about the direction of the country, followed by those living in the South East and the South West, (45.3%, 42.8%, and 42.2%, respectively). These regions are predominantly Pashtun.

The polling on national mood and optimism vs. pessimism also reflected limited support for the government or faith in the Afghan political process. A total of 37% of the Afghans who were pessimistic about the future cited the quality of governance versus 27% of those who were optimistic.

North West and West, where the proportions of those with a pessimistic outlook are marginally higher than 2016. Afghans living in Central/Kabul most frequently report that Afghanistan is moving in the wrong direction (70.5%). This finding, which reflects a 10-percentage point reduction from 2016, incorporates particularly high rates of pessimism in the provinces of Panjshir (95.2%) and Kabul (76.6%). Afghans in the North West region are the second-most likely to report that Afghanistan is moving in the wrong direction: here, pessimism increased marginally, from 63.3% in 2016 to 66.2% this year. Rates of pessimism are also notable in the Jawzjan province in the North West region (76.6%). This is an area where support for General Dostum has been high, and where militant groups have recently made significant inroads.

There is little difference in the levels of pessimism reported by respondents in the North East and Central/Hazarajat (62.7% and 62.3%, respectively). In the West, over half of respondents in 2017 believe the country is going in the wrong direction (58.1%)—a marginal increase from 56.4% last year—led by the Western province of Farah (78.2%), an area that is also reported to be particularly vulnerable to conflicts between the ANSF and the Taliban.

Looking across provinces respondents from Paktika report the highest levels of optimism (69.1%), and more than half of respondents in Helmand, Laghman, Logar, and Khost report that they believe Afghanistan is moving in the right direction (54.8%, 53.3%, 52.4%, and 51.6%, respectively). Respondents in Panjshir are the least likely to say the country is going in the right direction (4.2%), followed by Faryab (19.5%) and Jawzjan (19.9%).

It is important to note that the Asia Foundation survey did find a number of positive trends, and areas where many Afghans were optimistic, as well as key areas where their attitudes were negative and they were pessimistic. Nevertheless, it is the negative trends that must be given key consideration in determining what the Afghan government needs to improve and reform. The poll found that,6

Insecurity, economic concerns, and governance issues are by far the three most commonly cited reasons for pessimism about the country’s direction. Concerns relating to security or crime are the reasons that Afghans say most frequently that the country is moving in the wrong direction, cited by 69.5% of pessimistic respondents. Over a third of respondents (39.9%) cite economic concerns, most related to unemployment (27.2%). Similarly, 37.2% of pessimistic Afghans point to governance issues, with a large proportion of these
particular responses (21.1%) citing corruption as a reason they think the country is moving in the wrong
direction. Lack of infrastructure is less frequently cited as an issue (9.5%).

While insecurity, economic concerns, and governance issues predominate across regions, other reasons for
pessimism about the direction of the country do reveal regional differences (Figure 1.10). For example,
foreign intervention is cited by 5.9% of respondents as a reason for pessimism. Afghans who live in
Central/Hazarajat are the least likely to cite this as a reason for their pessimism (1.2%), whereas those
bordering Pakistan, in the South East, are the most likely (10.4%). In contrast, Afghans in Central/Hazarajat
are the most likely to refer to a lack of international assistance as a reason for pessimism, while Afghans in
Central/Kabul are the least likely to raise this issue (6.4% vs. 0.8%).

Overall, only small proportions of respondents cite injustice or human rights (3.9%) or lack of international
assistance (1.7%) as reasons for their pessimism. Less than 1% of respondents refer to issues with
morality/religious direction.

… When asked about the biggest problems in their local area (figure 1.13), Afghans most frequently point to
unemployment and security issues (31.0% and 24.1% of respondents, respectively). These are followed by
issues with electricity (21.9%); drinking water (17.6%); roads (14.5%); education, schools, and literacy
(9.3%); health-care facilities (8.6%); poor economy (6.5%); and high prices (5.9%).

Here, one key point deserves constant attention throughout this analysis. Major insurgencies
always involve deeply divided factions within a given country. In Afghanistan, acute divisions
exist by sect, ethnicity, tribe, education, class, urban vs. rural, and often by power broker and
political alignment. Any assessment that focuses only on nationwide results, or narrowly defined
regions, can only provide a limited picture of the factors driving the military and civil sides of the
war.
**Figure Three: Key Reasons for Afghan Popular Pessimism**

**Nationwide**

[Bar chart showing reasons for pessimism with percentages for urban and rural areas.]

**FIG. 1.9: Q-3.** (If Q-1 answer is “wrong direction”) What are two reasons you think that Afghanistan is going in the wrong direction?

**By Region**

[Bar chart showing reasons for pessimism by region.]

**FIG. 1.10: Q-3.** (If Q-1 answer is “wrong direction”) What are two reasons you think that Afghanistan is going in the wrong direction?

**Locally**

[Bar chart showing what is going well in local area.]

**FIG. 1.12: Q-4.** In your view, what is going well in your local area?

THE WORST ASPECT OF THE CIVIL DIMENSION: INSECURITY AND RISING CIVIL VIOLENCE

Winning or losing in military encounters is a critical aspect of war, but so is the degree of public or civil confidence in security. Defeating the Taliban and other insurgents in the field and in tactical encounters is a critical step in achieving any stable victory. So, however, is creating a “hold” phase where civilians have lasting security and an effective rule of law, and so is eliminating the constant threat the war will expand to new areas, the central government will fail, and day-to-day security will not be available.

Current estimates of Afghan popular security are anything but reassuring, and – as the next section in this report shows – Afghan concerns are compounded by major failures in governance, corruption, and broad failures in establishing a rule of law.

Figure Four supplements the maps that show who is winning or losing the fighting by providing a UN estimate of the severity of the level of fighting by district. Like all such maps, experts differ over the accuracy of the details. No expert, however, is likely to argue over the fact that the patterns of violence in Afghanistan remain severe, or that estimates of the levels of violence will often differ sharply from maps of nominal government, Taliban/insurgent control, and where there is fighting for disputed districts.

The data in Figure Four show why so many Afghans fear violence at the civil level, and why insecurity is the greatest single cause of Afghan pessimism. Yet, it still understates the level of civil violence. It does not fully reflect the impact of several kinds of terrorist attacks, and the expansion of conflict areas in 2017.

At the same time, these concerns over security are broadly supported by estimates of Afghan civilian casualties. These numbers are uncertain, as are the trends involved. Collection capability is limited and estimates are often disputed. Nevertheless, the broad trends in UN casualty estimates shown in Figure Five seem highly likely to be correct. More recent UN estimates also show that civilian deaths rose from 2,769 in 2013 to 3,498 in 2016, and there were 1,662 deaths between Jan. 1 and June 30 in 2017. Similarly, the estimated number of civilian wounded rose from 4,821 in 2012 to 7,920 in 2016.  

If one counts total casualties, a study by the Afghan Analysts Network notes that 11,418 civilians were killed or injured in 2016 -- the highest number recorded by UNAMA in any year since it started systematic documentation in 2009. The new 2017 figures bring the total number of casualties registered by the UN since 2009 to more than 26,500 dead and just under 49,000 injured. These figures, however, may sharply underestimate the actual totals.
Figure Four - Part One: Comparative Estimates of the Threat to Civilians

UNOCHA Estimate of Severity of Conflict by District: 1/2016-9/2016

Institute for Study of War Estimate: March 2017
Figure Four - Part Two: Comparative Estimates of the Threat to Civilians

Institute for the Study of War: Taliban Control in Afghanistan, November 2017

New York Times/ISW Estimate of Zones of Taliban Control, June 2017
Figure Five - Part One: UN Estimates of the Trends in Civilian Casualties

![Graph showing Civilian Deaths and Injuries from January to December 2009 to 2016.](image)

<table>
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Afghan Perceptions of the Trends in Violence

It is scarcely surprising under these conditions that the more detailed polling results in the Asia Foundation survey show that popular fear of violence has risen ever since 2012. A break out of these results is shown in Figure Six. The trends clearly reflect a high degree of popular fear for personal safety, fears that have increased steadily since 2012, and fears that clearly link such perceptions to the outcome of the military side of the conflict.

The Survey notes that:16
Security continued to deteriorate in 2017, though less rapidly than in previous years. Fear for personal safety increased by 0.9 percentage points in 2017, to a total of 70.7% of Afghans who fear for their personal safety “always”, “often”, or “sometimes” … Findings aggregated at the provincial level still offer meaningful insights. For instance, elevated levels of fear for personal safety recorded in Uruzgan (94.0%), despite the gravitation of data collection towards the provincial center of Tarin Kowt, underline the urgency of the security situation in that province. In the West, growing insecurity in the provinces of Badghis (83.0%), Ghor (83.4%), and Farah (90.1%) from 2016 to 2017 illustrates the advancing encirclement of neighboring Herat (75.6%). In the North, Kunduz, which has been repeatedly threatened by Taliban offensives over the years, shows greater fear for security in 2017 (89.4%) than 2016 (75.8%), despite the Survey’s restricted outreach in the province.

…Pashtuns remain the ethnic group most affected by insecurity, although fear for their personal safety has gradually decreased over the past three years, from 77.3% in 2015, to 75.8% in 2016, to 73.4% in 2017. Tajiks, on the other hand, have grown more insecure over the same period, rising from 59.8% in 2015, to 67.1% in 2016, to 72.2% in 2017, almost closing the gap between the two ethnicities. With levels comparable to 2016, Uzbeks (64.7%) and Hazaras (66.0%) feel relatively less insecure in 2017 than Pashtuns and Tajiks. As in 2016, more urban Afghans in 2017 fear for their safety (75.9%) than rural respondents (69.0%), a marked change from 2015, when the urban population trailed rural residents by 9.2 percentage points. The presence of armed opposition groups is felt more in rural areas than in urban areas, as 2.3% of rural respondents report armed opposition groups are providing security in their local area, compared to 0.3% in urban areas…

…Similar to previous years, respondents from regions where armed opposition groups are reported to provide security have higher levels of fear for their own or their families’ safety than respondents from areas controlled by the ANSF... Findings differ somewhat between the main sample and the intercept interviews, conducted with respondents from inaccessible areas. Intercept interviewees, for instance, are more often fearful than respondents from the main sample of participating in elections (67.7% vs. 51.5%) and running for public office (82.7% vs. 72.7%). Intercept interviewees are also more fearful than respondents from the main sample of encountering the ANA (57.2% vs. 39.6%) or the ANP (60.0% vs. 43.3%).
Figure Six - Part One: Growing Afghan Fear for Personal Safety

**Figure 2.1: Q-17.** How often do you fear for your own personal safety or security or for that of your family these days? Would you say you always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never fear for you and your family’s safety? (Percent who respond “always,” “often,” or “sometimes.”)

**Fear for Personal Safety, by Province**

**Figure 2.2: Q-17.** How often do you fear for your own personal safety or security or for that of your family these days? Would you say you always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never fear for you and your family’s safety? (Percent who respond “always,” “often,” or “sometimes.”)
Uncertain Popular Perceptions of Who Provides Security

The impact of security on the civil side of the war is also heavily dependent on the level of trust that Afghans place in the government security forces. As Figure Seven shows, The Asian Foundation survey does attempt to measure perceptions of who the Afghan public hold responsible for security at the provincial level.

However, such polls in Iraq and Afghanistan have always been surprisingly favorable – perhaps because citizens see any level of positive action in favorable terms, and are far less sensitive to corruption and weaknesses in the forces involved.

The polling data also do not reflect the quality of security provided. The previous data of the perceptions of violence and the threat of violence indicate that many Afghans feel the security provided is grossly inadequate.

**Figure Seven: Uncertain Estimates of How Afghans Assign Responsibility for Security**

*WHO PROVIDES SECURITY IN THE LOCAL AREA, BY PROVINCE*

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**FIG. 2.10: Q-11. There are many security forces in the country. Which of these groups would you say is most responsible for providing security in your village/gozar?**

Some Positive Trends in the Security Services but Not in Law Enforcement and the Rule of Law

Security is not simply a matter of military, terrorist, or other factional threats. It is dependent on popular perceptions of the legal system, the protection offered by the police and courts, and perceptions of the quality of the rule of law. **Figure Eight** shows that the World Bank ranks the Afghan rule of law as dismally ineffective—a ranking that virtually all independent observers would echo and one where U.S., German, and other efforts to transform the Afghan system have not only had little impact, but been more than offset by undermining the traditional justice system, the corrupting effect of poorly managed aid funds and security contracts in increasing the tolerance of corruption, and leaving the real world legal system badly underfunded.

At the same time, the Asia Foundation survey did find some important positive results in terms of Afghan perceptions of the security services. **Figure Eight** shows that the Afghan people differ in their perceptions, depending on whether they are urban or rural, and the level of actual contact with elements of the ANSF, but do not broadly see the security services as actively repressive, threatening, or corrupt in ways that disrupt their daily lives.

These results are important because they show that Afghans only have a limited fear of their security services, and many feel that the security services are getting better. But, they do not mean that the Afghan people trust military and police to provide adequate security, law enforcement, or be honest.

Public perceptions of the ANP, which after 2014 declined in all categories of capacity and performance assessed by the Survey, have stabilized in 2017. The proportion of Afghans who “strongly” agree that the ANP “helps improve security” has stopped falling; a slight uptick of 2.0 percentage points can be seen this year in assessments that the ANP is “efficient at arresting criminals;” and those strongly agreeing that the ANP is “honest and fair” have increased by 7.2 percentage points over 2016… (p. 52)

… At first glance, it does not appear that any distinct factors are driving the positive trend in perceptions of the ANSF. The improvements are seen in all regions and most provinces. When urban and rural responses are compared, however, the positive trend appears to be predominantly urban, while rural perceptions remain closer to 2016. This may relate to the significantly higher rate of TV viewing among urban than among rural respondents, which is associated with more positive views about the ANA and the ANP (about 10 percentage points).

Whether urban or rural, respondents who report watching TV are more likely than nonviewers to strongly agree that the ANA is “honest and fair” (63.2% vs. 53.3%), “improves security” (57.2% vs. 47.8%), and “protects civilians” (55.6% vs. 45.2%). TV viewers are also more likely than nonviewers to say the ANP is “honest and fair” (46.2% vs. 40.7%), “improves security” (41.2% vs. 35.9%), and is “efficient at arresting criminals” (37.5% vs. 30.5%) (p. 54).

Afghans acknowledge the apparent positive trend in ANA and ANP job performance. A majority (57.7%) see the ANA “getting better,” and 48.2% say the same of the ANP (vs. 23.2% who say the ANP is “getting worse”). Respondents are more divided over the ALP: 29.6% say they are “getting better,” 27.7% say they are “getting worse,” and 32.8% say they have not changed. The ALP continues to be well regarded in the East (“getting better,” 46.3%), but approval has fallen in the North East, from 51.3% “getting better” in 2016 to 27.5% in 2017 (p. 54).

…Overall, the levels of violence and crime experienced by Afghans fell slightly in 2017, by 0.8 points, to 18.5%, but intercept interviews recorded higher levels in insecure areas (31.1%) than in 2016 (26.3%). In the South West, where inaccessibility is linked to the presence of opposition forces, more reports of violence and crime in intercept interviews (37.7%) than in the standard sample (29.6%) undermines the narrative that the Taliban enforce the rule of law more effectively in the areas under their control.
Figures on crime and violence from 2017 reinforce previous findings that there is a limited correlation between perceptions of security and personal experience of violence. Crime and violence occur more frequently, for example, in rural areas (21.0%) than in urban areas (11.1%), yet fear for personal safety is higher among urban respondents. Furthermore, the difference in fear for personal safety between respondents who have experienced

The police are more critical in determining broad Afghan perceptions than the ANA since they are constantly present in daily life in government controlled areas. The Asia Foundation survey made it clear that perceptions of the ANP were relatively positive, although it was routinely necessary to bribe it. Once again, however, those with actual contact with the ANP were less favorable than those who relied on media reports.17

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There also was growing faith in the legal processes in the regular courts in spite of their endemic corruption, although Figure Eight also shows that the Survey found large numbers of Afghans relied on the traditional justice system.18

When asked which type of defense lawyer they would trust if they were arrested, Afghans continue to express the highest levels of confidence in defense lawyers hired by government (62.0%), followed by defense lawyers not hired by either the government or an organization (59.0%), defense lawyers hired by a civil society organization (50.3%), and defense lawyers hired by an international organization (40.1%). There is some variation by province, with Badakhshan showing the highest level of confidence in lawyers hired by government (84.0%) and Zabul reporting the lowest (25.0%). … The use of legal-defense services in criminal cases around the country has been a major achievement for justice reform efforts in Afghanistan. This year, however, 18.8% of Afghans report that they or someone they know has been represented by a defense lawyer in a criminal case, down slightly from 21.0% in 2016. Of those who report that they or someone they know was represented by a defense lawyer, 61.3% report paying for the lawyer’s services.
Despite a very slight decline in 2017, the use of national and local judicial institutions (Huquqs and local shuras/jirgas) for dispute resolution has been steady for the past few years (figure 5.5). One in five Afghans (20.4%) report that they have applied to the Huquq (rights) Department or a local shura/jirga in the past two years in order to settle a dispute or a formal case. Rural respondents (23.2%) are twice as likely as urban (12.0%) to say they have used the Huquq Department or a local shura/jirga. Respondents in Helmand (51.5%), Wardak (39.2%), and Paktika (39.0%) report the highest use of these institutions, while respondents in Panjshir (4.9%), Kabul (7.2%), and Bamyan (7.0%) report the lowest use.

At the same time, the Survey warned that, 19

For the first time, the 2017 Survey asks respondents about the amount, or the equivalent cash value, of the favor or gift they most recently had to provide to obtain services. In descending order, Afghans report giving the largest bribes on average to the judiciary/courts, followed by when applying for a job, and to the provincial governor’s office …

All of these data should be evaluated in terms of the problems with corruption that have been mentioned previously. The later Figures in this analysis show all too clearly that the Afghan government suffers from a permeating level of corruption that cripples much of the process of government, the use of aid, and some aspects of the security services. These figures also warn that corruption drives, and anti-corruption measures, have had little if any real-world impact to date – something characteristic of almost all anti-corruption activity in the developing world. Anti-corruption far too often is used to punish scapegoats and rivals, and proves to be a dismal substitute for effective management and fiscal controls.

Furthermore, as is addressed at the end of the analysis, narcotics trafficking has become the dominant part of Afghan exports and a key aspect of its conflict, and the role of power brokers in many areas. A narco-economy is not compatible with an effective rule of law.
Figure Eight: The Uncertain Afghan Rule of Law

World Bank Dismal Rating of Afghan Government Performance in Rule of Law

Mixed Popular Attitudes Towards the Afghan Security Forces

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Reliance on the Traditional Justice System

Sources are footnoted.
WHY AFGHANS SEE THEIR GOVERNMENT AS A FAILURE

There are equally good reasons why Afghan perceptions of Afghan governance are so negative, and why Afghans ranked it with the problems in their economy as the second leading cause of pessimism about the future. Some of the reasons are the immediate political situation. Virtually every media report on the Afghan political system provides a new indication that the Ghani/Abdullah Abdullah government remains deeply divided and is partially paralyzed by these internal divisions and lack of basic capability to govern.

Others include factors that are not addressed in this analysis. Afghanistan has made only limited real world progress in key human rights issues like the role of women, and dealing with ethnic and sectarian differences, discrimination, and tension.

But, the key factors lie in the broad lack of effective governance at every level, and in deep structural problems that affect Afghans at every level from “Kabulstan” to the local District. Much of the area nominally under government control is actually controlled by warlords and power brokers, and the basic structure of the Afghan government gives the President far too much control over the nation's funds, leaves the Parliament weak and lacking in responsiveness to any clear constituency, and encourages corruption and power broker rule at the Provincial and District levels.

Dismal Overall Effectiveness of Governance

Once again, intentions are no substitute for implementation. President Ghani began to take some steps to reduce corruption, reform governance, and improve the rule of law during the course of 2017. The fact remains, however, that he still faces political problems in the central government in “Kabulstan” that are all too real, but are only part of a permeating failure to create an effective level of governance. The trends in the quality of Afghan governance are shown in Figure Nine, and they do not reflect any of the improvements that the U.S. government and other outside observers sometimes claim have taken place.

The World Bank still rates Afghanistan as having one of the worst overall levels of governance, corruption, and political stability and violence in the world. The World Bank gives Afghanistan an overall governance score of 8.17 -- which compares with 27.4 for a country as poorly governed as Pakistan, and 89.9 for the U.S. It gives Afghanistan even more dismal scores for the rule of law and limits to violence -- key aspects of both the civil and military side of a counterinsurgency effort.23

The Afghan government also remains something approaching a kleptocracy. The World Bank's score for Afghan capability to limit corruption is only 4.81 versus 23.81 for Pakistan and 89.9 for the US. Transparency International, widely accepted as the best single NGO effort at comparing international corruption, rates Afghanistan at 169 -- making it the seventh most corrupt country in the world.24

The government also has failed to unite the country at the ethnic, sectarian, and tribal levels, and at the geographic level. This is critical in a country where the CIA estimates that:

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

- Sects in a population that is 99.7% Muslim include: Sunni 84.7 - 89.7%, Shia 10 - 15%), other 0.3% (2009 est.)
- Language differences include Afghan Persian or Dari (official) 50%, Pashto (official) 35%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4%, much bilingualism, but Dari functions as the lingua franca. (Note: the Turkic languages Uzbek and Turkmen, as well as Balochi, Pashai, Nuristani, and Pamiri are the third official languages in areas where the majority speaks them.)

Figure Nine: World Bank Trend Analysis of Afghan Governance

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

Other Indicators Do Show Some Progress in Popular Support for Afghan Governance, but Not for Afghan Politics or the Parliament

The Asia Foundation survey did find that Afghanis sometimes have a relatively positive perception of given parts of their government in spite of its ineffectiveness and corruption. Most Afghans have no practical experience with anything better and this may do much to explain why the Survey got a positive popular response to the question: “Thinking of the different levels of government in Afghanistan, do you think that overall the [insert item], is doing a very good job, a somewhat good job, a somewhat bad job, or a very bad job? (a) National Unity Government. (b) Provincial government. (c) Municipal authorities (ask urban residents only). (d) District government (ask rural residents only).”

The key results are shown in Figure Ten, but it is important to note that the Survey still found favorable attitudes among roughly half the population.26

After a two-year decline in the Afghan public’s assessment of the performance of various government institutions, including a historic decline in 2016, opinions have rebounded slightly this year… More than half of Afghans surveyed (56.2%) believe the NUG is doing a good job (15.2% “very good,” 41.0% “somewhat good”), a 7.1-point increase over 2016 (49.1%). Perceptions of provincial governments showed similar improvement, with 56.9% of Afghans judging their performance “very good” or “somewhat good.” Urban respondents’ satisfaction with municipal government rose this year, from a record low of 42.4% in 2016 to 47.2% in 2017. Rural respondents, on the other hand, report higher levels of satisfaction with district governments in this year (50.7% in 2016, 55.8% in 2017).

Women and men report similar levels of satisfaction with the NUG (55.7% and 56.8%, respectively). Rural respondents (57.4%) are slightly more likely to express satisfaction with the NUG than are urban respondents (56.8%). Afghans in the East region (83.2%) are the most likely to say the NUG is doing a “somewhat good” or “very good” job, while Afghans in the North West are the least likely (41.1%). Pashtuns (66.4%) are more likely than Tajiks (53.3%), Hazaras (46.8%), and Uzbeks (41.1%) to say they are satisfied with the performance of the NUG.

After a sharp decline to 52.9% in 2016, 56.9% of Afghans this year report satisfaction with provincial governments. Rural respondents (57.8%) are more likely than urban respondents (54.2%) to say their provincial government has done a “somewhat good” or “very good” job. The highest levels of satisfaction with provincial government are in Panjshir (77.6%), Kandahar (77.2%), Laghman (77.1%), and Nangarhar (74.0%). The lowest are in Zabul (32.6%), Ghor (40.3%), Kabul (43.8), and Faryab (43.8%).

Limited Faith in Parliament and Representatives

At the same time, the Survey also found only limited faith in the Afghan Parliament or political process:27

In 2017, for the second consecutive year, Afghans report the highest levels of confidence in their religious leaders (67.3%), followed by the media (65.7%) and community shuras/jirgas (65.7%). They reserve their lowest levels of confidence for members of parliament (MP) (35.4%), government ministers (35.9%), and the parliament as a whole (36.8%). The most significant changes in confidence concern community development councils, which rose from a record low of 53.4% in 2016 to 57.9% in 2017, and the IEC, which also rose from a record low, 33.7%, last year to 38.1% this year.

Rural respondents are more likely to express “some” or “a lot of” confidence in religious leaders (68.0%) and community shuras/jirgas (67.9%) than are urban respondents (65.0% and 59.1%, respectively). Urban respondents, as in all previous years, report higher levels of confidence in the media (72.2%) than rural respondents (63.6%).

Only a quarter of Afghans (25.2%) say their MP has done something positive for their province (resolving a problem or issue). Rural residents (28.6%) are more likely than urban residents (15.2%) to say their MP has done something positive for their province, and Pashtuns (36.2%) are more likely than Tajiks (20.1%),
Uzbeks (20.4%), and Hazaras (14.3%). Provinces with the highest opinions regarding the positive role of their MPs are Laghman (61.3%), Paktika (50.7%), and Helmand (49.6%), while respondents in Kabul (5.5%), Badakhshan (6.1%), and Balkh (8.4%) have the lowest opinions in this regard.

“Corruptocracy” or Kleptocracy?

It is also impossible to clearly separate any favorable policing results from the fact that a far greater percentage of Afghans find their government to be corrupt. President Ghani has made some serious efforts to punish corrupt officials and officers, but past failures warn that such efforts can easily fade away, become political tools for purging opponents, do not reduce the broader impact of corruption, and end by purging the anti-corruption officials rather than the corrupt.

Figure Nine has already shown that the levels of corruption are also so high in Afghanistan, and UN and other reporting shows that the Afghan government is so linked to narcotrafficking at the power broker level in some areas, that the government approaches a “kleptocracy.” Figure Ten shows that Afghans take a permeating level of corruption for granted in every aspect of government.

These reports and polls show that the vast majority of Afghans see corruption as a critical problem – mirroring the assessments of the World Bank. As might be expected, they also pay the most in the areas that have the most direct impact on their lives: problems with the courts, getting a job, and influencing officials at the highest levels. “In descending order, Afghans report giving the largest bribes on average to the judiciary/courts, followed by when applying for a job, and to the provincial governor’s office.”

Transparency International, the leading NGO ranking international corruption, ranks Afghanistan as 169th out of 176 countries ranked – making it the seventh most corrupt country in the world. An October 2016 report by Transparency International notes that,

…the pace of implementing anti-corruption reforms by the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan must be speeded up to safeguard aid from the international community and help improve the lives of long-suffering Afghans.

The international community is meeting on 5 October to sign a new four-year US$12 billion aid package for Afghanistan. On 28 September, the NUG announced a new anti-corruption law. It is estimated as much as US$1 billion out of every US$8 billion in aid is lost to corruption.

“Corruption continues to fuel the ongoing war in Afghanistan and undermines the effectiveness of billions of dollars of international aid. Promises to reform must be backed up with actions. The new draft anti-corruption law is welcome on paper but unless it is passed by the parliament and implemented immediately nothing will change for the millions of Afghans who suffer the consequences of corruption,” said Srirak Plipat, Regional Director for Asia Pacific at Transparency International.

Since 2014, the NUG has made over 50 commitments to address corruption. Transparency International with civil society experts, representatives from international governments and the Afghan government identified the 22 deemed most crucial to tackling corruption in Afghanistan. Of the 22 commitments only two have been fully implemented.

One bright spot is the government’s newly-established National Procurement Agency which has saved more than US$200 million that might have been lost to corruption. Another is the new Anti-Corruption Justice Center (ACJC), which aims to investigate and prosecute grand corruption.

The new report makes the following recommendations:

Judicial Reform: The government must introduce merit-based appointments of judges by an independent judicial services commission, focus on training qualified prosecutors and speed up prosecutions.
The new Anti-Corruption Justice Centre has dealt with fewer than 20 cases at a time when hundreds of corrupt acts take place daily. The attorney general’s office lacks qualified and professional prosecutors and is subject to political interference.

**Anti-corruption agency:** The NUG must establish an independent and well-resourced anti-corruption agency that is based on the United Nations Convention against Corruption framework and involves civil society.

Mandated asset declarations: All senior civil servants, politicians, and senior staff in the executive, legislative and judicial sectors must publish asset declarations. These declarations need to be verified and monitored to ensure that no one is using their positions of power for personal enrichment.

**Civil Society and access to information:** The NUG must recognize the important oversight role that civil society plays in monitoring anti-corruption. Transparency International recommends:

- The NUG signs the Open Government Partnership
- Implements the 2014 Access to Information Law
- Includes representatives from civil society and the Afghan parliament as participants or observers in the newly established High Council for Governance, Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption

A similar report, issued on April 27, 2017, noted that,

…corruption is deeply entrenched in the economy and systems of governance in Afghanistan. The country ranks as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, at 166 out of 167 on the 2015 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.

This study found corruption risks in a number of stages within the program cycle of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. The most notable times included during the negotiation of conditions for access and area selection for programming; the awarding of contracts (to private contractors and humanitarian agencies) and the procurement of goods and services; and the selection and targeting of aid recipients. Corruption risks were also found to result from nepotism and ethnic bias in staff hiring; a lack of means to reliably hold corrupt staff and organizations accountable; and a lack of transparent and effective feedback mechanisms. Of concern was a lack of clear communication channels with aid recipients: Many people interviewed were unaware of the amounts and timing of aid entitlements and some had tried to complain about aid quality or corruption issues to no effect.

…Corrupt practices were reported both within local government agencies at the provincial and sub-provincial levels, as well as within the contracting chain with aid agencies (sometimes starting with the main recipient agency). The evidence suggests that food assistance, non-food item distribution and cash seem to be more prone to diversion through abuse of power, compared with activities in health and protection. Some agency representatives consulted in previous studies also believed that vouchers were slightly less susceptible to corruption and fraud than cash, but the evidence here remains under-developed.4 Similar to other contexts, mitigating corruption in larger scale operations was harder, compared with smaller ones. Both affected communities and aid organizations cited problems with inappropriate interference by local government officials, local elders and other community representatives who sought to inflate lists or divert aid resources for their own purposes.

… Part of the challenge in addressing corruption within humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan is that it is considered ‘negligible’ compared to that within development and security-related assistance and that it is somehow more manageable given that resources are not directly controlled by government officials. This perspective raises three concerns: First, the scarcity of humanitarian resources should create even greater incentives to ensure they are protected and they reach the intended recipients. Second, if opportunities for corruption are effectively mitigated elsewhere, opportunities for informal revenue raising and other forms of corruption are more likely to target areas such as the humanitarian sector if scrutiny is limited. Third, evidence suggests that state and non-state local authorities regularly attempt to manipulate humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, irrespective of the mechanisms that aid is channeled through.

One critical problem is that no meaningful effort has ever been made to estimate the cost and impact of this permeating corruption. The U.S., other donors, and NGOs have never attempted to
analyze the level of theft, however, and its overall impact on government spending and the use of aid. The political reasons are obvious, but – as is the case in all too many developing countries -- it leads to a fundamentally dishonest assessment of the impact of politics and governance on both civil society and the economy.

Figure Ten - Part One: Afghan Perceptions of Afghan Governance
Figure Ten - Part Two: Afghan Perceptions of Afghan Governance

OVERALL CONFIDENCE IN OFFICIALS, INSTITUTIONS, AND ORGANIZATIONS


**Table 5.2:** Q-51. I would like to ask you about some officials, institutions, and organizations. As I read out each, please tell me how much confidence you have in them to do their jobs. Do you have a lot, some, not much, or no confidence at all? (c) Independent Election Commission. (d) Community development councils. (e) Community shuras/jirgas. (f) Government ministers. (g) International NGOs. (h) Media such as newspapers, radio, TV. (i) National NGOs. (j) Parliament as a whole. (k) Provincial councils. (l) Religious leaders. (m) Your member of parliament. If you don’t know, it’s OK, just say you have no opinion. (Percent who respond “some” or “a lot of” confidence in each.)

![Perception of Corruption: Major Problem](image)

**Table 5.3:** Q-42. Please tell me whether you think corruption is a major problem, a minor problem, or no problem at all in the following areas. (a) In your daily life. (b) In Afghanistan as a whole. (Percent who report “major problem.”)

**Table 5.4:** Q-41. (If respondent gave a bribe) What was the amount, or the equivalent value in cash, of the favor or gift you most recently had to pay for this service? If it was a gift or favor, please give your best estimate of its value.

Failing to Measure Governance by Province and District

Furthermore, there are critical limits to some aspects of these Afghan metrics and polling data on governance and political perceptions of governance. No one now attempts to estimate or survey the effectiveness of the linkages between provincial and district governance and control by the central government in Kabul.

The role of warlords and power brokers is not assessed, popular attitudes towards the effectiveness and integrity of the central government are not assessed, and estimates that the government is in control of given districts – or the districts that are the subject of conflict – do not address whether the central government is really in control.
THE ECONOMY: JOBS, SURVIVAL, AND RISING POVERTY

As has been stressed throughout this analysis, Afghanistan has never lacked economic reform plans or statements of good intentions. President Ghani announced yet another set of reform plans in 2017 and seemed determined to try to implement them. At the same time, Afghanistan has well over a decade of experience with the fact that intentions are no substitute for actual implementation.

Ghani’s plans and intentions are not new (similar plans have failed in the past), and it would take several years for them to become broadly effective and have a major impact under the best of circumstances. Further, many of the reforms seem better suited to meeting Afghanistan’s need to comply with IMF requirements to maintain its economic and financial stability than address the needs and “hearts and minds” of its people.

The IMF makes this clear in its October 2017 Article IV report, along with some polite caveats about the speed and effectiveness of such reforms.31

The authorities’ reform program supported by the ECF sets out a structural reform agenda focused on institution building, fiscal and financial sector reforms, and measures to combat corruption. These measures will lay the foundation for scaled up private sector development, higher inclusive growth, and job creation. Staff found performance under the ECF to have been satisfactory with all end-June performance criteria and most of the structural benchmarks having been met.

The team commended the authorities for good implementation of the reform program, despite difficult circumstances, and discussed follow up actions that would help move the reform agenda forward. The staff team reached understandings with the Afghan authorities on the main objectives of the economic program for 2018.

The IMF will remain closely engaged with the Afghan authorities to support economic policy design and implementation of economic reforms. The support of the international community will remain vital in the years ahead as the country navigates the difficult path toward self-reliance.

The team would like to take this opportunity to thank the authorities for the candid and constructive discussions.

As the following data on the current real-world situation in Afghanistan show, the Asia Foundation survey, and economic analysis by the World Bank and IMF, indicate that Afghan perceptions of the economy are heavily driven by concerns over employment. The one caveat affecting employment as a key metric is that polling and analysis has a bias towards focusing on Afghans in populated areas, and does not attempt to analyze the agricultural sector in detail.

This is a serious limitation in a country where the CIA estimates that 22% of the economy is still driven by agriculture -- although insecurity has led to growing urbanization and the CIA estimates that another 22% of the economy is based on industry and 56% on services.32 Later sections of this analysis highlight the importance of this transition as well as the massive increases taking place in opium production and its role in the Afghan economy – a shift that has not been the subject of polling, or properly analyzed in either its political and economic impacts.

Afghan Perceptions of the Trends in the Economy

There are other limits to the extent to which the Asia Foundation survey provides a full picture of Afghan perceptions of the economic side of “hearts and minds.” It is not clear that the Asia Foundation survey reached a representative sample of the poor – a major problem in a country with so many isolated groups in rural areas, rapidly expanding urban slums, and large numbers who are being forcibly repatriated from Iraq and Pakistan.
The Survey does report limited Afghan optimism about the economy. At the same time, it shows that significant variations occurred in the results by region, and the summary trends in Figure Eleven warn that the government is doing too little to halt a slow decline in these aspects of the civil side of “hearts and minds”.

The Survey found that a total of 40% of the Afghans who were pessimistic cited the economy as a reason for pessimism and only 12% of the Afghans who were optimistic saw the economy as reason to be optimistic. Only 5% of those polled felt the availability of jobs was good at the local level, and 31% thought jobs were the most critical problem in the country versus 24% for security, 22% for electricity, and 18% for drinking water. In the case of Afghan youth, 71% saw unemployment as the greatest problem they faced versus 8% that cited security.

The Survey also reported that,

Economic concerns continue to color Afghan attitudes about the future of the country… Among the 61.2% of Afghans who say the country is moving in the wrong direction, unemployment (27.2%) is the second-most common reason cited (after security). Other reasons for overall pessimism include the poor economy (10.9%), lack of reconstruction (4.6%), and high prices (3.9%). When Afghans are asked to shift their frame of reference from national problems to local ones, economic issues become their primary concern. is pattern holds true in all previous years of the Survey. Afghans appear to want jobs for their community and security for the country. The most commonly cited local problem is unemployment (31.0%), followed by a lack of security and services. Some respondents do not mention unemployment but nevertheless express general economic concerns about, for example, the poor economy (6.5%), high prices (6.0%), and poverty (3.9%).

As in previous years, when asked about the biggest problems for youth, Afghans overwhelmingly cite unemployment (70.6%); and when asked about the problems facing women, unemployment is the second most commonly cited (22.7%). Afghans are not entirely pessimistic, however: among the 32.8% of respondents who say the country is moving in the right direction, the most common reason for optimism is reconstruction/rebuilding (34.4%).

Employment opportunities have decreased since last year at a higher rate (63.8%) than Afghans living in rural areas (56.2%). One explanation for the urban-rural gap is the rapid urbanization in Afghanistan (average annual growth rate of 4.5% between 2000 and 2010) which has outpaced the expansion of job markets and industries. Notably, the region least likely to report worsening employment opportunities is the South West (50.3%), where poppy production remains robust.

The Survey did not poll the impact of unemployment, attempt to measure the effects of disguised unemployment, test reactions to poverty percentages and malnutrition, detail with the attitudes towards the quality of education, or examine popular attitudes towards medical care. It did attempt to poll the size of income, but – as noted earlier – it is uncertain that the poll reached a representative sample of the urban and rural poor and it does not seem to test for the impact of inflation.

In any case, the 2017 Survey found that,

Respondents were asked to estimate their average monthly household income. is year, Afghans report an average monthly income of AFN 11,859 (USD 173), an increase from AFN 10,947 (USD 165) in 2016…The Survey reveals an association between where respondents live and their household income, with urban respondents earning an average of AFN 15,872 (USD 232) per month, and rural respondents earning an average of AFN 10,525 (USD 154) per month.

Self-reported household income varies by region. Respondents in the South West region report the highest monthly income, at AFN 17,290 (USD 252), while residents of Central/Hazarajat report the lowest, at AFN 4,840 (USD 71). Uruzgan stands out as the province with the highest average monthly household income, at AFN 32,662 (USD 477).
The Survey’s polling on Afghan awareness of development projects shows only limited Afghan awareness of such efforts, but it is not tied to any estimate of the trend in the number and size of such projects, or the impact of the major cuts in the scale of aid and the willingness to deploy aid teams that have taken place in many areas since security and spending dropped after 2012. 38
**Figure Eleven: Afghan Public Opinion on the Trends in the Economy**

Public Opinion of Negative Trend

![Graph showing economic indicators for various years](image)

**Source:** Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2017: A Survey of the Afghan People* p. 67

### Looking at Comparative Metrics

**Figure Twelve** provides a different way to estimate the seriousness of the economic side of the war. Polls can only show how Afghans judged their economy, not how their economy ranks in global terms. **Figure Twelve** draws on a comparative study of economic and population pressures on Middle Eastern, North African, and conflict states to show how serious Afghanistan's problems are relative to those of other "failed" or conflict states.

It shows that Afghanistan does not face the same dire level of challenges as the very worst conflict states, but still has one of the lowest GDPS per capita in the world, a brutally high level of multi-dimensional poverty, and a critically high level of youth direct unemployment (no estimate is made of disguised unemployment and the creation of jobs that are not really needed and have no added productive value).

As is discussed in more detail later, other studies show that the Afghan government is one of the worst in the world in reducing the barriers to doing business. They also show that child malnutrition is extremely high and so is child mortality in spite of claims of major progress. Schooling levels remain extremely low and count large numbers of students who have actually left
in spite of exaggerated claims of progress and relatively high levels of government spending for a poor developing state. The dependency ratio of children, and the elderly on those who are employed is very high, and the unemployed need to be added to such figures to provide a fully accurate picture.

**Figure Twelve** also shows more of the key reasons why employment is so critical an area of concern. Nearly four decades of war and crises have not limited population growth. Afghanistan's population is more than four times what it was in 1950, and the U.S. Census Bureau projects that it will grow by some 87% between 2017 and 2050. The end result is that more than 40% of Afghanistan’s population is now 14 years of age or younger versus 18.7% for a developed country like the U.S., increases in the labor force greatly exceed the number of jobs, and an extraordinarily high number of Afghans are dependent on those who do have jobs for their income.39
Figure Twelve: Key Metrics Affecting Afghan Economy

### Poor Economic Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CIA Per Capita Income (2016/PP) $US</th>
<th>UN Severe Multi-Dimension Poverty (%)</th>
<th>UN Youth Unemployment (%)</th>
<th>World Bank Ease of Doing Business (rank)</th>
<th>UN % Child Malnutrition: Severe 2010-2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5,100</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>(10.7)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>(11.7)</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Education, Medical, and Dependency Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean Years of Schooling</th>
<th>Government Spending on Education as % of GDP*</th>
<th>% with some secondary Education</th>
<th>Dependency Ratio**</th>
<th>Mortality Rate***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>(22.2)</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Massive Population Pressure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>X4.2</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>204.9</td>
<td>290.8</td>
<td>X5.1</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>X4.6</td>
<td>105%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>X-0.2</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>X4.8</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### One of the World’s Worst “Youth Bulges” Entering the Labor Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>0-14 Years Millions</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>15-19 Years Millions</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>20-24 Years Millions</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>38.67</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Trends in CIA, World Bank, and IMF Assessments

Outside assessments of the Afghan economy raise similar concerns. The CIA’s assessments sometimes seem more politically correct than objective, but a December 2017 report still noted that,40

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

The international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, pledging over $83 billion at ten donors’ conferences between 2003 and 2016. In October 2016, the donors at the Brussels conference pledged an additional $3.8 billion in development aid annually from 2017 to 2020. Despite this help, the Government of Afghanistan will need to overcome a number of challenges, including low revenue collection, weak government capacity, and poor public infrastructure.

In 2016 Afghanistan's growth rate was only marginally above that of 2014 and 2015. The drawdown of international security forces that started in 2012 has negatively affected economic growth, as a substantial portion of commerce, especially in the services sector, has catered to the ongoing international troop presence in the country. Afghan President Ashraf GHANI Ahmadzai is dedicated to instituting economic reforms to improve revenue collection and fighting corruption. However, the reforms will take time to implement and Afghanistan will remain dependent on international donor support over the next several years.

Work by the World Bank and IMF provide considerably more depth. A World Bank field team estimated in 2013 that Afghanistan has had rising poverty levels ever since 2008. This rise occurred in spite of major levels of outside aid and peaked between 2008 and 2013. A formal World Bank study, based largely on the work of the earlier field team, found in May 2016 that,41

Afghanistan is a deeply fragile and conflict affected state. It has been in almost constant conflict for over 35 years since the Soviet invasion of 1979. Today the country is at a crossroads in its development with economic growth down sharply and poverty incidence stubbornly high. Afghanistan faces tremendous development challenges. Gross domestic product (GDP) per-capita is among the lowest in the world, poverty is deep and widespread, and social indicators are still at very low levels.

…Despite good economic growth between 2007 and 2011, Afghanistan’s poverty rate continues to stagnate. With increased unequal growth distribution, the country experiences the effects of unemployment and natural disasters. For strong economic growth and stable job creation Afghanistan will need to secure adequate donor assistance and private sector involvement across all geographic regions in the country.

• … The poverty rate remained stagnant at 36 percent despite good economic growth between 2007 and 2011. The highest poverty incidence is found in the rural areas, where livelihoods are dependent on agriculture.

• Inequality increased with unequal distribution of growth. The SCD identified lagging regions in the Northeast, East, and West Central regions in the country that appear to have fallen behind due to remote access, climatic shocks, lower aid and fragility.

• Economic growth fell sharply to 1.5-2 percent in 2014 and 2015 as private sector confidence slumped and a fiscal crisis unfolded.

• International development aid contributed to growth and jobs in high-conflict areas, however it did not contribute to raising productivity.
• Unemployment, natural hazards, lack of access to services, and violence are the main factors behind the high rate of poverty in Afghanistan.
• Development challenges are further amplified by growing insecurity, uncertainty, and declining aid.

Critical constraints
• Fragility and conflict: the major constraint to development progress is the prevailing insurgency and civil conflict; weak state institutions and dysfunctional societal relations affect almost every aspect of development.
• Demography and geography: pressures of high population growth and a young population are exacerbated by large numbers of returning internally displaced persons or refugees; there are significant disparities in employment generation and access to services, including the widespread exclusion of women from economic participation.
• Declining aid: declining aid will require additional efforts to develop new sources of growth, expand effective service delivery, mobilize revenues and prioritize spending.

Key priorities
• Strong economic growth and job creation: to reduce poverty Afghanistan will require, strong, inclusive economic growth and stable job creation with private sector involvement across all geographic regions in the country.
• Improved prioritized service delivery: continued progress in expanding service delivery is key to addressing critical constraints, with a focus on identifying opportunities to improve effective service delivery, and strengthening capacity and accountability of the public sector.
• Support fiscal stability: significant action is essential to revenue mobilization, securing adequate donor assistance, and expenditure prioritization in order to restore fiscal stability and address the medium-term challenge of reducing dependence on external aid.

The World Bank’s Afghanistan Country Snapshot, issued in October 2016, reported that,

• During the pre-transition period, aid-led growth was not able to significantly accelerate poverty reduction in Afghanistan. In 2007-08, 36 percent of the population in Afghanistan was poor, that is more than one in every three Afghans was living on levels of expenditure insufficient to satisfy basic food and non-food needs. Four years later, in 2011-12, the poverty rate in Afghanistan remained substantially unchanged despite a massive increase in international spending, both on military and civilian assistance, and an overall strong growth and labor market performance.
• Inequality has also increased. The poorest 20 percent of the population saw a 2 percent decline in real per capita consumption, the bottom 40 percent little change, and the richest 20 percent a 9 percent increase. Had the country’s economic growth been distributed evenly across the population, poverty would have declined by 4.4 percentage points.
• A key factor behind stagnant poverty nationwide is regional disparities, with the highest poverty in the lagging Northeast, West Central, and East regions of the country. According to the 2011-2012 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), poverty rates ranged from 27.7 percent in the Southwest to 49.7 percent in the Northeast. Poverty trends either remained flat or declined in most regions. Without the Northeast, nationwide poverty incidence would have fallen by 3 percentage points. The lagging regions were not those which experienced the most conflict. The conflict has had the perverse effect of increasing economic integration and employment in the better off but more conflict-affected regions, while the more remote Northeast, dependent on agriculture and vulnerable to natural disasters, received relatively less attention from government and donors.
• Labor market dynamics induced by aid-led growth also contributed to widening inequalities between the poorest and the richest segments of the population. Between 2007-08 and 2011-12, labor market outcomes improved. The economy added approximately 490,000 new jobs for men in the 25 to 50 age group and
unemployment and underemployment were successfully reduced, together with the share of informal employment. However, the improvement in labor market opportunities did not benefit Afghan workers equally. Employment growth was mostly led by the service sector – where 80 percent of the new jobs were in informal day labor arrangements – followed by the public sector and employment in health and education-related services – where most of the jobs were highly skilled and formal. Lacking the human capital necessary to take advantage of better quality jobs, the only change in labor market opportunities available for the poor was to substitute vulnerable employment in agriculture with vulnerable employment in the service sector.

Still another World Bank study noted in October 2016 that, 43

- Until earlier in this decade Afghanistan experienced record economic growth, at an average rate of about 9 percent per year. Massive foreign inflows to fight the insurgency, ensure security, and finance development supported this remarkable performance. And yet poverty remained stubbornly high, with more than one third of the population having expenditures per capita below the poverty line. The poverty incidence nationwide was 35.8 percent in 2011, compared to 36.3 percent in 2007. The decline was not only small in absolute terms: it was also statistically insignificant. Furthermore, during this period, consumption per capita was stagnant for the bottom 40 percent of the population, and it even declined for the poorest population quintile.

- Living standards were lowest in the North, Northeast, and Central regions, where poverty rates ranged between 40 and 50 percent in 2011. About a third of Afghanistan’s poor reside in these more remote parts of the country. By contrast, poverty rates were below 30 percent in the South and Southwest regions. The gap between the poorest and least poor regions even widened over time. In the period from 2007 to 2011, poverty incidence increased in the North, Northeast, and Central regions, while it remained stable or decreased in the South and Southwest...There is a paradox in poverty rates being lower in the South and Southwest, because those are the regions where conflict has been more prevalent...There is ample consensus that conflict is especially damaging for the poor (Blattman and Miguel 2010, World Bank 2011, Justino 2012), but Afghanistan seems to defy it.

More recently, a World Bank overview of the Afghan economy reported in December 2017 that, 44

- Economic recovery is slow as continued insecurity curtails private investment and consumer demand...Poverty has increased since the start of the international troop withdrawal in 2011 and amid the resulting decline in economic growth...The security situation has worsened. Civilian casualties are at their highest since 2002, with an unprecedented level of conflict-induced displacement. In 2017 alone, more than 202,000 Afghans were internally displaced by conflict and 44,000 others were displaced by natural disasters. A surge in returnees from Iran and Pakistan (over 296,000 in 2017) has brought mounting pressure on humanitarian assistance.

- ...Insecurity is taking a heavy toll on private investment and consumer demand. Business sentiment shows no sign of recovery. Growth is projected at 2.6 percent in 2017, only slightly higher than the 2.2-percent achieved in 2016. Inflation rose slightly in the first half of 2017, edging up to 5.1 percent in July from 4.5 percent in December 2016, driven by higher food prices—particularly for fruit and vegetables. The annual trade deficit of around 33 percent of GDP is financed by foreign aid inflows. Gross foreign exchange reserves remain unchanged at around $7 billion—equivalent to nearly 10 months of imports.

- The fiscal position remained strong in the first half of 2017, with aid being disbursed as planned and domestic revenues maintained around the targeted levels. Revenue collection showed about a 10 percent increase from the same period last year. Expenditures remained close to the previous year’s level over the same period.

- Because of the sluggish economic growth and the deteriorating security situation since 2011, the poverty rate increased to 39.1 percent in 2013-14 (latest available survey data), up from 36 percent in 2011-12, meaning that 1.3 million people fell into poverty over this period. Rural areas, where most of the population lives, saw the biggest increase, from 38.3 to 43.6 percent. Labor demand in the off-farm sector declined. Most of the jobs created in the service sector during the pre-transition phase were lost.

- The most recent household survey (ALCS 2016-17) showed an increase of about 1 percentage point in the unemployment rate over the past two years. In 2013/14, the unemployment rate stood at 22.6 percent, with the female unemployment rate two and half times higher than the male rate. Unemployment is particularly severe amongst low-skilled, illiterate workers, who historically are at the greatest risk of falling into poverty.
The World Bank's October 2017 "Snapshot" was also negative.\textsuperscript{45} Economic recovery is slow as continued insecurity curtails private investment and consumer demand. Growth remains principally driven by agriculture. The fiscal position remained strong in the first half of 2017. Poverty has increased since the start of the international troop withdrawal in 2011 and amid the resulting decline in economic growth...Afghanistan faces numerous political challenges as it fights the insurgency. On August 21, the US announced its new strategy for Afghanistan, calling for a modest increase in troops and a stronger regional approach. Parliamentary and district council elections are scheduled for July 07, 2018.

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Growth is expected to increase from 2.6 percent in 2017 to 3.4 percent in 2018, assuming political stability and no further deterioration in security. However, with an average annual population growth rate of 3 percent and 400,000 Afghans entering the labor market each year, living conditions may further deteriorate.

Afghanistan’s fiscal position is improving. Domestic revenues are projected to increase marginally from 10.5 percent in 2016 to 10.8 percent of GDP by end-year. Over the medium-term, there will be growing fiscal challenges. Development spending needs and security costs are expected to increase, yet resources will remain tight. Any delay or shortfall in the disbursement of pledged aid would also strain fiscal positions.

Long-term, sustained economic growth requires a structural economic transformation and new sources of growth. Increased human capital investment and improved agriculture productivity could provide significant opportunities. Development of the extractives sector could help generate domestic revenues and foreign exchange earnings against a possible decline in future aid flows.

One positive note was that reform efforts were underway and that substantial aid was still pledged,...Afghanistan’s Government continued to pursue its ambitious reform agenda. In October 2016, the Government presented the new Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (BCA). At the conference, attended by representatives of around 70 countries and 30 international organizations, development aid of $3.8 billion per year was pledged for the next four years. In addition, at the NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016, security funding of $4.5 billion per year was pledged for the same period.

The IMF’s analyses have tracked closely with those of the World Bank and UN. For example, an IMF report in July 2016 stated that.\textsuperscript{46}
• Growth, having averaged 11.5 percent in 2007-12, collapsed to 1.5 percent in 2013–15 as the size of the International Security Assistance Force stationed in the country fell from 130,000 to 13,000. An estimated 500,000 jobs were lost in recent years following the troop withdrawal. Political uncertainty and rising insecurity compounded this drag on economic activity.

• ...Afghanistan is undergoing a challenging political, security, and economic transition. Continued insecurity, political uncertainty, weak institutions and corruption are salient factors preventing robust and inclusive economic growth.

• Against this background and following the sizable reduction of the International Security Assistance Force stationed in the country, real GDP growth declined from 11.5 percent in 2007-12 to 1.5 percent in 2013-15 and was 0.8 percent in 2015. While an uptick of growth to 2 percent is projected for 2016, it remains far below the level needed to ensure increased employment and improved living standards. Large fiscal and external deficits continue to be financed by donor aid. Risks, related to uncertain security conditions and potential shortfalls in external support, are tilted to the downside.

It is important to note, however, that the IMF’s Article Four report for October 2017 did indicate that Afghanistan might finally be making progress towards real reform after more than a decade of promises -- although such reforms had not yet had any major impact on the Afghan people.47

Afghanistan’s economic outlook, clouded by a challenging security environment, points towards continued subdued growth and modest inflation. Growth is expected to reach 2.5 percent in 2017, rising gradually thereafter, contingent on improvements in security and continued external assistance. Meanwhile, inflation should average around 5.5 percent this year. The overall fiscal balance, including donor grants, is forecast to remain broadly balanced over the medium term. Large trade deficits continue to be financed by substantial grants, allowing for international reserves to remain at comfortable levels.

The authorities’ reform program supported by the ECF sets out a structural reform agenda focused on institution building, fiscal and financial sector reforms, and measures to combat corruption. These measures will lay the foundation for scaled up private sector development, higher inclusive growth, and job creation. Staff found performance under the ECF to have been satisfactory with all end-June performance criteria and most of the structural benchmarks having been met.

The team commended the authorities for good implementation of the reform program, despite difficult circumstances, and discussed follow up actions that would help move the reform agenda forward. The staff team reached understandings with the Afghan authorities on the main objectives of the economic program for 2018.

The IMF will remain closely engaged with the Afghan authorities to support economic policy design and implementation of economic reforms. The support of the international community will remain vital in the years ahead as the country navigates the difficult path toward self-reliance.

**Population Pressure and the Lack of Security Help Lead to Declining Growth and Lower Living Standards**

As might be expected from the population growth data in Figure Twelve, outside studies have found a grim correlation between population growth and strains on the Afghan economy that will not alter if the fighting ends. Figure Thirteen provides some additional data on such trends from a World Bank analysis.

In addition, an October 2016 study by UNHCR and World Bank -- entitled *Fragility and Population Movement in Afghanistan* -- found that:48

• Fragility and conflict are Afghanistan’s first structural challenge. If peace and stability are pre-requisite for development to take place, Afghanistan is (still) missing both. According to the Global Peace Index, in 2016 the country ranks the fourth less peaceful after Syria, South Sudan and Iraq. Moreover, decades of conflict have had a destabilizing effect on the social cohesion of the country, exacerbating ethnic divisions and weakening government institutions and rule of law. Similarly, decades of conflict have depleted
Afghanistan’s physical and human capital which, despite the progress achieved since 2001, will constrain its growth prospects for decades to come.

- **Second among its structural challenges is Afghanistan’s demographic profile.** With a total fertility rate of about 5.3 children per woman in 2014,5 and a population growth rate of approximately 3 percent per year between 2010 and 2015, Afghanistan has the youngest population in South Asia: 48 percent of Afghans are below the age of 15. Equally, Afghanistan has the highest youth bulge of any country in the region, and the third highest youth bulge worldwide after Uganda and Chad: more than one fifth of the adult population in Afghanistan is aged between 15 and 24. A young and growing population can be both a challenge and an opportunity, depending on a country’s ability to invest in human capital and productively employ its growing labor force.

- **In the case of Afghanistan, a young and growing population poses tremendous challenges to its public finances, already stretched by limited revenues potential and massive security spending needs.** Fiscal analysis shows that, with the current population growth, Afghanistan will need to increase human capital investments by 12 percent every year just to maintain current (inadequate) education outcomes. Similarly, a growing labor force requires the labor market to absorb approximately 400 thousand new entrants per year. Labor demand strong enough to be able to accommodate this many workers requires sustained economic growth, which, at the moment, is beyond the country’s capacity given its fragility and security constraints.

- **Afghanistan is currently facing a deteriorating conflict and a severe economic crisis which further limits the fiscal space for development spending and targeted social assistance.** Violence increased to a post-2001 high of 18,414 incidents and 6,791 civilian casualties in 2015, while an increasing proportion of Afghanistan’s territory either fell under control of the anti-government elements or is currently affected by conflict. Decline in international spending due to the drawdown of international military forces, together with the deterioration of the security situation, led to severe contraction in growth. GDP growth rate was 1.3 percent in 2014 and 0.8 percent in 2015 compared to an average of 9.8 percent per year from 2003 to 2012.

- **A sharp increase in poverty has accompanied the slowdown in growth.** Lacking any safety net system able to help households manage the economic downturn, the poverty rate increased from 36 percent in 2011–12 to 39 percent in 2013–14. Similarly, labor market indicators deteriorated markedly, with a three-fold increase in the unemployment rate over the same period. In 2013–14, the national unemployment rate was 22.6 percent and youth unemployment was 28 percent, representing one-half million male youth unemployed, two-thirds of which were living in poor rural areas.

- **High male-youth unemployment is a concern because of its potential to increase poverty and conflict.** A growing body of literature recognizes the direct correlation between youth bulges, lack of socio-economic inclusion and conflict. An in-depth analysis of the effects of youth bulges on a variety of conflicts between 1950 and 2000 shows that youth bulges can cause conflict. Further, the risk of domestic armed conflict from a youth bulge becomes more severe when combined with economic stagnation and institutional fragility.
**Figure Thirteen: The "Youth Bulge" and Conflict: Key Indices of Instability**

Youth Dependency ratio and youth bulge in Central and South Asian Countries

![Graph showing youth dependency and bulge in various countries](image)

Sources: ALCS 2013-14 and UNDESA (2015)

**Evolution of conflict and real per capita GDP growth**

![Graph showing conflict incidence and GDP growth](image)

Source: Authors' calculation based on UNHCR and SIOCC-UNDSS data

**Youth unemployment**

![Graph showing youth unemployment rates](image)

Sources: Authors' calculation based on ALCS 2013-14

The Agricultural Sector, Urbanization, and Population Displacement

These population growth and security pressures interact with other pressures. The problems created by the fact that polling and economic analysis tends to focus on urban areas, and the services and industrial sectors, has been mentioned earlier. The agricultural sector, however, remains critical and faces major problems in terms of security, water, erratic rainfall, and lack of secure access to markets. It also faces special problems in dealing with population growth because modern agriculture is heavily dependent on capital investment to be competitive, but needs fewer and fewer actual farmers.

These problems, and the search for security, have led to sharp rises in urbanization and the creation of urban slums. These forces, in turn, have been compounded by Iranian and Pakistani forced expulsion or "displacement" of long resident Afghan refugees.

Some key trends are shown in Figure Fourteen, and the World Bank’s Afghanistan Country Snapshot, issued in October 2016, reported that,\(^{49}\)

- **Rural areas accommodate a large majority of the Afghan population and the highest concentration of poverty**: four out of every five poor Afghans live in rural areas. More than half of the poor population was represented by children below the age of 15. Moreover, 75.6 percent of the poor above the age of 15 are illiterate (against 63.4 percent of the non-poor), and only 7 percent have completed primary education. The human capital disadvantage of the poor is reflected in their weak labor market outcomes, i.e. in their higher risk of unemployment, underemployment and vulnerability in employment or employment in agriculture.

- **Agriculture still remains the main source of real GDP growth, employment and subsistence for the Afghan population.** Only 12 percent of Afghanistan’s 65 million hectares of land area is arable, and the actual cultivated area is substantially less, due to a lack of irrigation. Between 2003/04 and 2011/12, real agricultural growth ranged from -22 percent to 45 percent, reflecting the continuing importance of rain-fed agriculture. The sector is also dominated by smallholder production. Average farm size ranges from 0.4 to 1.0 hectare for small-scale producers and one to two hectares for large-scale producers. Similarly, the average size for livestock farming is 1.3 cows and 10 sheep and goats.

- **Three decades of conflict have destroyed much of the agricultural infrastructure, and eroded institutional capacity to provide technical services, such as regulations or the teaching of new techniques.** Before the conflicts, Afghanistan was a top international supplier of horticultural products, supplying about 20 percent of the raisins in the world market in the 1970s. That share has fallen to two percent. It also was self-sufficient in meat and milk and was a significant exporter of wool, carpets, and leather goods. Afghanistan was also self-sufficient in cereals and, at times, was a small exporter. However, rapid population growth coupled with the destruction of much of the country’s irrigation systems, storage facilities and rural roads network during the years of conflict, have turned Afghanistan into a net importer of wheat.

- **Over 40,000 km of rural roads and more than 5,000 km of highways have been rehabilitated or improved over the past 13 years.** But much remains to be done to improve regional integration, national connectivity and access to local markets. **Around 85 percent of roads are in poor shape and the majority are not all-season roads. Action to improve operation and maintenance is urgently needed**

- **Afghanistan’s urbanization rate is increasing faster than that of most South Asia region countries.** 27 percent of its population was living in urban areas in 2014. This is lower than the average in South Asia of 32.6 percent but in recent years the rate of change has been the highest in the region. Between 2000 and 2014, the urbanization rate has been 4.9 percent per annum, increasing from 1.2 percent per annum in the 1960s. 24 percent of Afghanistan’s population of about 32 million people was estimated to live in urban areas in 2012 – these estimates are likely to be an under-estimate.
Eighty-eight percent of Afghanistan’s urban population lived in unserved or underserved housing in 2005, and 98 percent in 2013, according to the 2013-2014 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA). The proportion of Afghanistan’s overall population living in such settlements (estimated to be 90 percent in 2015) is estimated to be astronomically higher than the poverty rate (estimated to be 30 percent in 2015), the biggest such gap in the SAR (see Table 2). One third of all housing units in urban areas already accommodate two or more families. In 2015 the overall housing deficit in Afghanistan was estimated to be 1.5 million units, with an additional incremental annual demand of 200,000 to 230,000 units. By 2030, the cumulative housing deficit could be up to 4.95 million units, with 70 percent of this deficit being urban based.

Employment growth was mostly led by the service sector – where 80 percent of the new jobs were in informal day labor arrangements – followed by the public sector and employment in health and education-related services – where most of the jobs were highly skilled and formal. Lacking the human capital necessary to take advantage of better quality jobs, the only change in labor market opportunities available for the poor was to substitute vulnerable employment in agriculture with vulnerable employment in the service sector.

Population displacement caused by conflict and poverty is a growing challenge. Historically, Afghanistan has had a long history of displacement, with many Afghans fleeing the country after the Soviet invasion in 1979 and during the civil wars of the 1990s. Currently there are an estimated 3.5 million Afghans living in Pakistan and Iran as registered and unregistered refugees. There has also been a recent upsurge in the number of Afghans fleeing to Europe. According to The Economist, nearly 200,000 Afghans applied for asylum in Europe in 2015, but only 69 percent of them were granted refugee status while the rest have been or are in the process of being repatriated. Internally as well, conflict is causing increasing numbers of Afghans to flee the countryside and move to urban areas, where they make up a large proportion of those who are poor. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is estimated in excess of 1 million. Increasingly, with potentially large numbers of returning refugees or internally displaced who have lost their livelihoods, government and host community resources are stretched to breaking point.

Another IMF report projected in January 2017 that the number of refugees forced to return by Pakistan and Iran would rise to some 3.2 million by the end of 2017. It estimated 23% unemployment at the end of 2016 and a GDP per capita of $615, and stated that.

Aid officials estimate that more than 700,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan in 2016. Afghans—the second largest refugee group after Syrians, according to the UN’s refugee agency—are primarily returning from Pakistan, often not voluntarily. There are also returnees from Iran and to a lesser extent from Europe. Analysts project that up to 2½ million will follow over the next 18 months, which will add nearly 10 percent to Afghanistan’s population (see infographic below). To put this in perspective, this would be akin to 50 million migrants entering the European Union over a two-year period.

Many of the Afghans who lived abroad for decades are returning to a country facing conflict, insecurity, and widespread poverty. Given the difficult economic climate, prospects for returnees are generally poor. While there are also wealthier returnees, a typical returning refugee has a high risk of falling into poverty—they are typically laborers and workers in the informal economy with limited savings, or small business owners who are forced to liquidate their assets at fire sale prices.

Moreover, the prospects for absorbing returning refugees are further complicated by the existence of more than one million internally displaced people, the number of which significantly increased in 2016 as the insurgency intensified. Together with the large number of people who already live in poverty in Afghanistan, these problems will severely stretch the country’s capacity to cope.
Figure Fourteen: The Impact of Urbanization in Afghanistan

Expansion of Afghan Cities: 2001-2012 (km²)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mazar-e-Sharif</td>
<td>207.3</td>
<td>855.0</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunduz</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>346.3</td>
<td>1297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pul-i-Khumri</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>279.2</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabul</td>
<td>429.9</td>
<td>2920.7</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalalabad</td>
<td>132.1</td>
<td>446.5</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>867.0</td>
<td>4847.7</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of urban Afghans living in slums that live below the poverty line

Source: WORLD BANK, AFGHANISTAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT, OCTOBER 2016, HTTP://DOCUMENTS.WORLD BANK.ORG/CURATED/EN/584381476781571691/AFGHANISTAN- COUNTRY-SNAPSHOT, PP. 10-13
Key Food Issues

The malnutrition data shown in Figure Twelve are only one aspect of what the UN reports are much broader problems. The World Food Organization (WFO) noted in December 2016 that, Afghanistan’s population of 30 million has been striving to re-establish political, economic and security frameworks conducive to development. A severe slowdown in economic growth between 2011 and 2014 contributed to the fact about 39 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line, with vast differences in living standards between city-dwellers and those in the countryside where two-thirds of the population resides. Unemployment increased to 22 percent between 2013 and 2014. Issues of gender-based violence, access to health care, education and food security persist.

About 33 percent of the total population – some 9.3 million people - are food insecure, according to the 2014 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS2014). Among them, an estimated 3.4 million (12 percent) are severely food insecure, and 5.9 million (21 percent) are moderately food insecure.

Physical insecurity is a major and growing concern. Insurgent activity and military operations have affected food security in some regions, especially in areas prone to natural disasters and high food insecurity. This has also undermined reconstruction efforts and restricted humanitarian interventions. Conflict, uncontrolled grazing, pastureland encroachment, illegal logging and the loss of forest and grass cover have worsened drought conditions and reduced agricultural productivity.

...Years of environmental degradation in the country combined with its natural landscape make Afghanistan highly vulnerable to intense and recurring natural hazards such as flooding, earthquakes, avalanches, landslides, and droughts. Disasters and climate shocks affect 250,000 Afghans annually. An estimated 235,000 people affected by natural disasters and nearly 750,000 conflict-affected people will require humanitarian food assistance in 2016.

Levels of food insecurity and undernutrition remain persistently high in Afghanistan. One of the ten countries in the world with the highest burden of undernourished children, it is affected by some of the highest infant, child and maternal mortality rates in the world. Many thousands of children die needlessly each year because they lack access to adequate food and nutrition. A 2013 National Nutrition Survey showed that 41 percent of the country’s children aged under five years are chronically malnourished (stunted), 10 percent are acutely malnourished (a condition known as wasting) and 25 percent are underweight. Micronutrient deficiencies are widespread: approximately 45 percent of children 6-59 months old and 40 percent of reproductive-aged women (15 to 49 years) are anemic. Average life expectancy at birth is 62 years; adult literacy stands at just 31.4 percent.

The WFO webpage on Afghanistan in December 2017 noted that 9.3 million out of 32.5 million Afghans were food insecure, and 41% of all children under five were stunted. It also noted that, Decades of war, civil unrest and natural disasters have taken a huge toll on Afghanistan. Despite recent progress, millions of Afghans still live in severe poverty, with a crumbling infrastructure and a landscape suffering from environmental damage.

Around 39 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line, with huge differences in living standards between those living in cities and those in rural areas. The country has some of the world’s highest infant, child and maternal mortality rates, and many thousands of children die needlessly each year because they lack access to adequate food and nutrition. Around 41 percent of Afghan children under the age of five are stunted, with low height for their age, while 10 percent are acutely malnourished.

Around 33 percent of Afghans are food insecure – around 9.3 million people – and some 3.4 million of them are severely food insecure. Unemployment is high and economic growth slow, with gender-based violence and access to healthcare and education adding further problems. What’s more, Afghanistan is prone to recurring natural disasters including flooding, earthquakes, avalanches, landslides and droughts, with such disasters affecting 250,000 people every year.

Physical security is a major concern, and insurgent activity and military operations continue to affect food security in some areas. Along with other issues such as illegal logging, uncontrolled grazing and
deforestation, this undermines humanitarian efforts. Nearly 750,000 conflict-affected people required humanitarian food assistance in 2016.

**Even Worse Rankings for Ease of Doing Business than for Corruption**

Similarly, the summary data in Figure Twelve on Afghanistan's barriers to the ease of doing business are reinforced by other Work Bank reporting. The World Bank's *Afghanistan Country Snapshot* reported in October 2016 that,53

- Afghanistan ranks 177 (out of 189 economies) in the 2016 Doing Business report with many of the indicators faring worse or having no change from the past year.1 The findings show Afghanistan particularly low on protecting investors (189); trading across borders (174); registering property (184); enforcing contracts (172); and dealing with construction permits (185). The 2014 Enterprise Survey said the biggest obstacles to firms in Afghanistan were political instability, lack of access to land, corruption, financing and electricity shortages.

In 2017, the World Bank reported that Afghanistan ranked a dismal 184th in the world in the ease of doing business - effectively making government a major barrier to development. Other statistics on child mortality and mean years of schooling remain low. The UN reports that levels of severe multi-dimensional poverty are 29.8%, severe child malnutrition from birth to age five is 40.9%, and direct youth unemployment is 19.9% in spite of promise after promise of economic reform.54
LIVING WITH A NARCO-ECONOMY

Finally, Afghanistan's civil sector presents a unique problem that adds to the impact of its corruption and status as a near kleptocracy. Few talk today about Afghanistan's potential in terms of its Ring Road; or its role in some new Silk Road, mineral resources, and pipelines. These are "might have beens" and "possible futures," but there is no indication that any will seriously have an impact on Afghanistan's economy and civil sector over the next few years, or until it is more secure.

What is all too clear is that Afghanistan's status as a drug producer has made narcotics its primary export, that it impacts heavily on its political structure and security, and that the problem will continue to grow as long as Afghanistan has no clear alternative source of income that is as easy to export and provides income at every level, from the farmer to the Taliban and the highest levels of the Afghan government.

Massive Increases in Cultivation

The situation has grown steadily worse in recent years. SIGAR reported in October 2016 that,\textsuperscript{55}…the United States has provided $8.5 billion for counter narcotics efforts in Afghanistan since 2002. Nonetheless, Afghanistan remains the world’s leading producer of opium, providing 80% of the world’s output over the past decade, according to the United Nations. The country also has a growing domestic addiction problem…UNODC’s latest survey showed that 201,000 hectares were cultivated in 2016 a 10% increase from 2015. The latest UN Secretary General’s report states that areas under cultivation and production have increased after this summer’s harvest…As noted in the UNODC’s World Drug Report 2016, Afghanistan accounts for nearly two-thirds of the world’s illicit opium cultivation

A United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) press release dated October 24, 2016 also noted that,\textsuperscript{56}

Afghan opium production has risen 43\% over last year’s levels, to an estimated 4,800 metric tons, according to new Afghanistan Opium Survey figures released October 23 by the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC)...The survey also said the area under opium-pappy cultivation had increased 10\% from last year, to 201,000 hectares (nearly half a million acres). The survey said the production increase reflected the larger area under cultivation, higher yields, and lower eradication results.

The full report of the UNDOC Opium Survey 2016 estimated that production increased from a range of 2,700-3,900 tons to 4,000-5,000 tons. It found that the number of poppy-free provinces had had a further decline from 14 to 13, and 21 other provinces now relied heavily on the crop. Eradication dropped by 91\% from an already small 3,760 ha to 335 ha, and average cultivated opium yield increased from 18.3 kg/ha to 23.8 kg/ha.\textsuperscript{57}

The situation in 2017 was far worse. The UNDOC Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Cultivation and Production was issued in November 2017. It found that a further massive increase took place in production, and eradication efforts were little more than useless.\textsuperscript{58}

Area under opium poppy cultivation increased by 63\% since 2016, reaching a new record high. The total area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan was estimated at 328,000 hectares in 2017, a 63\% increase or 127,000 hectares more compared to the previous year. This level of opium poppy cultivation is a new record high and exceeds the formerly highest value recorded in 2014 (224,000 hectares) by 104,000 hectares or 46\%.

Strong increases were observed in almost all major poppy cultivating provinces. In Hilmand province alone, cultivation increased by 63,700 hectares (+79\%) which accounted for about half of the total national increase. Strong increases were observed also in Balkh (+10,000 hectares or almost five times more than in 2016),
Opium poppy cultivation expanded to new regions and intensified where there was cultivation before. In 2017, the number of poppy-free provinces in Afghanistan decreased from 13 to 10. The number of provinces affected by opium poppy cultivation increased from 21 to 24. Ghazni, Samangan and Nuristan provinces lost their poppy-free status. Ghazni had been poppy-free for more than two decades (since 1995), Samangan and Nuristan for almost 10 years (since 2007).

Starting in 2014, the Northern region experienced a rapid expansion of opium poppy cultivation. In 2014, a total of 574 hectares was cultivated in three out of seven provinces (Baghlan, Faryab and Sari-Pul); in 2017, only one province remained poppy-free (Bamyan) and some 43,000 hectares were cultivated in the other six provinces. Cultivation in Balkh, which was poppy-free until 2014, expanded from 204 hectares in 2015 to 12,100 hectares in 2017. In Jawzjan, which was poppy-free between 2008 and 2015, cultivation increased from 409 hectares in 2016 to 3,200 hectares in 2017. In Sari-Pul (last time poppy-free in 2013), cultivation expanded from 195 hectares in 2014 to 3,600 hectares in 2017.

Opium poppy cultivation intensified in the main opium-poppy cultivating provinces by holding a more significant share of the available agricultural land. In Helmand, a third of the arable land was dedicated to opium poppy in 2017, whereas only 20% was under cultivation in 2016. Less drastically, but still significant increases in density could be observed in Uruzgan and Nangarhar where a fourth of the arable land was under opium poppy cultivation in 2017 compared to 19% in Uruzgan and 16% in Nangarhar in 2016.

One key effect was to sharply increase the area under cultivation in the south under Taliban control; whole production also increased strikingly throughout the country.59

Potential opium production was estimated at 9,000 tons in 2017, an increase of 87% from its 2016 level (4,800 tons). The increase in production is mainly a result of an increase in area under opium poppy cultivation, while an increase in opium yield per hectare also contributed.

In 2017, the average opium yield amounted to 27.3 kilograms per hectare, which was 15% higher than in 2016. Yields increased in the Southern region by 19% (from 22.0 kilograms per hectare in 2016 to 26.2 kilograms per hectare in 2017), in the North-eastern region by 14% (from 31.2 to 35.4 kilograms per hectare) and in the Eastern region by 8% (from 32.4 to 34.9 kilograms per hectare). In the Central and Northern regions, yields decreased by 5% and 6% respectively and remained stable in the Western region.

Accounting for 57% of national production, the Southern region continued to produce the vast majority of opium in Afghanistan. With 16% of national production, the Northern region was the second most important opium-producing region in 2017, followed by the Western region (13%) and Eastern region (9%).

... There is no single reason for the massive 2017 increase in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The multiple drivers are complex and geographically diverse, as many elements continue to influence farmers’ decisions regarding opium poppy cultivation.

Rule of law-related challenges, such as political instability, lack of government control and security, as well as corruption, have been found to be main drivers of illicit cultivation. Also, impact farmers’ decisions, for example scarce employment opportunities, lack of quality education and limited access to markets and financial services continue to contribute to the vulnerability of farmers towards opium poppy cultivation.

A combination of events may have exacerbated some of these elements and may have led to the large increase in 2017. The shift in strategy by the Afghan government - focusing its efforts against anti-government elements (AGE) in densely populated areas - may have made the rural population more vulnerable to the influence of AGE. This may have subsequently contributed to the strong increase in the area under opium poppy cultivation. Political instability and increased insecurity particularly affected the Northern region, where opium poppy cultivation expanded drastically in the last couple of years. Generally, the weaker
engagement of the international aid community may also have reduced the socio-economic development opportunities in rural areas.

In Helmand province, additional factors may have played a role. In 2017, reports from the field indicate that more cheap labor for harvesting might have become available. In combination with increasing yields in 2016, this could have motivated many farmers to take up or expand opium poppy cultivation. The opium harvest requires a large number of skilled laborers, who often come from other provinces of Afghanistan and even from neighboring countries. In past years, there have been reports of a lack of workers, caused by the ongoing fights within Helmand, which may have led farmers to restrict their investments in opium poppy cultivation to avoid the risk of unharvested fields.

The continuing advances in agriculture, including the use of solar panels for powering irrigation pumps and fertilizers and pesticides, may have made opium poppy cultivation increasingly profitable even under unfavorable natural conditions. Solar panels for irrigation seem to have replaced diesel pumps in many areas. These panels require a sizable initial investment, but have lower running costs than diesel-powered pumps and thus can turn desert areas into highly productive arable land at a relatively low cost. The nation-wide high opium farm-gate prices of 2016 might have facilitated some of these investments.

**Equal Increases in Production and Crop Value; Eradication has Little Impact**

Figure 15 shows the UNDOC estimate of the trends in production, the location of production, and a summary of the changes just between 2016 and 2017. UNDOC also reports that,

In response to the increased supply of opium, 2017 prices at harvest time decreased in all regions (between -7% in the Western region and -50% in the North-eastern region) of Afghanistan except in the Southern region where prices only dropped in the months after the harvest...Even so, almost US$ 1.4 billion (1.2 – 1.5 billion), equivalent to roughly 7% of Afghanistan’s estimated GDP, the farm-gate value of opium production increased by 55% in 2017 as compared to past year.60

The latest UN reporting also indicates that there is little that can be done to affect Afghan dependence on narcotics as long as the fighting continues and the economy continues to deteriorate. If anything, counter narcotics has been an area involved in massive waste and corruption.61

Total eradication of opium poppy increased by 395 hectares but remained very low. In 2017, 750 hectares of opium poppy were eradicated in 14 provinces (355 hectares in 7 provinces in 2016). During the 2017 eradication campaign, six lives were lost and eight persons were injured. In 2016, eight lives were lost and seven persons were injured.

There is nothing wrong with continued anti-narcotics efforts, provided these are not used to blackmail farmers and give one set of power brokers and drug lords special privileges, but reality is reality. There is something wrong about throwing good aid money after bad.

**What is the Real Value of the Crop? How Many Afghan Officials and Power brokers are Involved?**

UNDOC provided the following analysis of the probable trends and impact of opiate production.62

The 2017 record levels of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan create multiple challenges for the country, its neighbors and the many other countries that are transit for or destination of Afghan opiates. The significant levels of opium poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking of opiates will probably further fuel instability, insurgency and increase funding to terrorist groups in Afghanistan. More high quality, low cost heroin will reach consumer markets across the world, with increased consumption and related harms as a likely consequence.

Addressing the opiate problem in Afghanistan remains a shared responsibility. Only a small share of the revenues generated by the cultivation and trafficking of Afghan opiates reaches Afghan drug trafficking
groups. Many more billions of dollars are made from trafficking opiates into major consumer markets, mainly in Europe and Asia. Moreover, the transformation of opium into heroin is likely to bring increased trafficking of precursor substances. Tons of precursor chemicals will potentially be diverted from licit international markets and smuggled into Afghanistan to supply manufacturers of heroin.

In Afghanistan, one of the least-developed countries worldwide, the impact of the illicit drug cultivation and production on economic, environmental and social development, continues to be multifaceted. The large increase in opium production will reinforce the negative consequences of the already existing large-scale production of opiates. The expanding illicit economy, which in many provinces has permeated rural societies and made many communities dependent on the income from opium poppy, will further constrain the development of the licit economy and potentially further fuel corruption. The increased levels of opium poppy cultivation also have the potential to exacerbate existing environmental damage caused by overexploitation of the land for opium. The increased availability of opium and heroin in the country might further raise the social and economic costs associated with the consumption of opiates for drug users, their families, and for society in general.

Some experts question UNDOC's conclusion that, "Only a small share of the revenues generated by the cultivation and trafficking of Afghan opiates reaches Afghan drug trafficking groups." They feel that Afghanistan is already processing large amounts of opiates into higher value products both to increase income and ease export smuggling. Most experts also agree that Afghan addiction is sharply increasing -- something that tends to institutionalize opium production to meet both domestic and foreign demand.

These issues have been partly disguised by a fundamental dishonesty in the way that the Afghan government, the U.S. government and the UN and various other international organizations and NGOs have addressed narcotics and corruption. They have focused on Taliban production, but not on the obvious fact that many officials, power brokers, and warlords play a role in drug production and exports, and they have focused on estimating the value of the crop in terms of farm gate prices and not the value added in processing smuggling product. They also have focused on the Taliban's role in drug production, but not that of other elements of the Afghan power structure.

This has absurdly understated the damage drug trafficking does to Afghan governance and rule of law. A few analysts also feel the estimate of $1.4 billion value for 2016 may well be much lower than the real value.63 This is a critical issue in a country with only some $619.2 billion in other exports in 2016, and with a massive trade deficit compared to $6.16 billion in imports in 2016.64

The good news is that UNDOC is examining the issue of the true value of the crop and its 2017 report states that, 65

Scarce data is available for the purity of heroin exported from Afghanistan. In 2016, the average of typical purity of wholesale heroin quality reported by Turkey in the previous three years has been used for estimating purity of export quality. Turkey is an important transit country for opiates trafficked from Afghanistan to Europe and reports purities on a regular basis. However, the percentage is only a single data point and can therefore only give a rough indication for the actual average purity of heroin trafficked out of Afghanistan. Recent reports indicate a much higher average purity of heroin of export quality manufactured in Afghanistan – this report uses therefore two different purity assumptions (50% and 70%). A detailed discussion around all elements of heroin production within Afghanistan will be presented in the upcoming report “Afghanistan opium survey report 2017 – socio-economic analysis”.

UNDOC indicates this report is scheduled to be completed in February 2018. Hopefully, this will address the issue of just how critical drugs are to the Afghan economy. Whether official reporting will address the role of Afghan officials and power brokers is far more uncertain. So is honesty about the value and nature of the counter narcotics effort, and the impact of addiction on Afghan society and perceptions.
Figure Fifteen - Part One: The Drug Trade in Afghanistan

[Map showing opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan by province, 2017]

[Map showing regional opium poppy cultivation and opium production change in Afghanistan, 2016-2017]

Notes:
The data presented herein is based on the best available information provided by the United Nations. The data does not include data from certain regions where opium cultivation is not officially reported.

Legend:
- Grey: No data available
- Light blue: Less than 1,000 ha
- Light green: 1,001 - 10,000 ha
- Green: 10,001 - 20,000 ha
- Yellow: 20,001 - 50,000 ha
- Orange: More than 50,000 ha

Production (kg) 2016
- Red: 1,442 kg
- Orange: 8,511 kg
- Yellow: 23,865 kg
- Green: 42,999 kg
- Light green: 54,367 kg
- Grey: 187,227 kg

Production (kg) 2017
- Red: 2,418 kg
- Orange: 6,210 kg
- Yellow: 14,563 kg
- Green: 25,688 kg
- Light green: 36,546 kg
- Grey: 187,227 kg

Note: The data for 2017 includes additional regions where opium cultivation is not officially reported.
Figure Fifteen - Part Two: The Drug Trade in Afghanistan

Potential Opium Production in Metric Tons:

Changes: 2016 vs. 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Change from 2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net opium poppy cultivation (after eradication)</strong></td>
<td>201,000 ha</td>
<td>+63%</td>
<td>328,000 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(181,000 - 221,000)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(301,000 - 355,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of poppy-free provinces</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of provinces affected by opium poppy cultivation</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eradication</strong></td>
<td>355 ha</td>
<td>+111%</td>
<td>750 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average opium yield (weighted by cultivation)</strong></td>
<td>23.8 kg/ha</td>
<td>+15%</td>
<td>27.3 kg/ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Potential production of opium</strong></td>
<td>4,800 mt</td>
<td>+87%</td>
<td>9,000 mt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4,000 - 5,600)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(8,000 - 10,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average farm-gate price (weighted by production) of fresh opium at harvest time</strong></td>
<td>US$ 152/kg</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>US$ 131/kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average farm-gate price (weighted by production) of dry opium at harvest time</strong></td>
<td>US$ 187/kg</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td>US$ 155/kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total farm gate value of opium production</strong></td>
<td>US$ 0.90 billion</td>
<td>+53%</td>
<td>US$ 1.4 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ESTIMATING THE IMPACT OF THE CIVIL DIMENSION

There is no clear way to estimate how the problems and issues raised in this analysis will impact the war. It is obvious that the Afghan people recognize that there are many serious civil problems in Afghan politics, security efforts, governance, and economics, and many factors that can limit the support they may give to the Afghan government.

At the same time, key threats like the Taliban remain highly unpopular. Most Afghans do not see an alternative to the current system and most have had no personal exposure to states with higher levels of security, governance, development, and income. The people of one of the world's poorest and worst governed states do not set the same standards as those who group up in more developed, secure, and better governed states.

It is hard to believe, however, that Afghanistan can sustain a war of attrition with movements like the Taliban, or reach a stable peace, unless the Afghan government makes more progress in each of the areas highlighted in this study and offers its people more reason to hope for a better future. There is no way to know how much is enough, but the data in this analysis indicate that there is good reason to believe that today’s levels of security, governance, and income are too little.

There seems equal reason to believe that promises of reform are not enough, particularly if reform is designed more to deal with balance of payments issues, debt, and the status of the Afghan currency than material benefits that the Afghan people can actually enjoy. The rising levels of poverty, employment problems, and declining real per capita income projected by the IMF and World Bank – coupled with rising violence, poor governance, and endemic corruption – have to have an impact on public support for the government and the willingness to support a war that has steadily grown in terms of its civil impact since 2003.

This does not mean that Afghanistan needs instant success, or that it necessarily requires massive aid. Past failures to use aid effectively are a warning of how quickly Afghanistan can “transform” and the dangers of poorly managed spending that does more to corrupt than develop. Steady but limited Afghan progress, maintaining clear reasons for hope, and showing serious concern for popular needs should be enough, and the real priority is credible levels of Afghan reform rather than more money.

At the same time, the U.S. and other outside donors do need to develop clear priorities for credible levels of Afghan civil reform, keep up pressure on the Afghan government and make aid conditional on real progress, and pay as much attention to the civil dimensions of the war as to the military ones.
See *Afghanistan in 2017: A Survey of the Afghan People* as the Asia Foundation reports, the *Survey* has gathered the views of more than 97,000 Afghans since 2004, and provides a longitudinal portrait of evolving public perceptions of security, the economy, governance and government services, elections, media, women’s issues, and migration. Since 2006, the *Survey* has always begun by asking Afghans whether the country is moving in the right direction, an indication of optimism, or in the wrong direction, an indication of pessimism. This is year, the downward trajectory in national mood which began in 2013 has reversed, and optimism has risen marginally, from 29.3% in 2016 to 32.8% in 2017. This year’s slight increase in optimism is difficult to explain. On the surface, it would appear to be just a continuation of the status quo. However, regional and provincial changes are significant and paint a complex picture.

This year’s *Survey* polled 10,012 Afghan respondents 18 years and older, 50.1% of them male and 49.9% female, representing all major and most minor ethnic groups from all 34 provinces in the country. Face-to-face interviews were conducted from July 5 to July 23 by a team of 929 trained Afghan enumerators, matched with respondents by gender—men interviewed men and women interviewed women. All enumerators are recruited from the provinces where they conducted interviews. *Survey* results have been weighted to be gender balanced and nationally representative using the most recent population data (2016–2017) released by the Afghan Central Statistics Organization. The total sample consisted of 20.2% urban households and 79.8% rural households, and this year’s margin of error is ±1.4%, based on a design effect of 2.06 and a confidence interval of 95%.

The Asia Foundation’s longstanding research partner, the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research, conducted all survey fieldwork and logistics, while its parent company, D3 Systems, Inc., provided analytical and methodological support. As in the 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 surveys, Sayara Research conducted third-party validation of fieldwork, a best practice for survey research in challenging environments. Together with its partners, the Foundation is committed to quality-control processes guided by principles of validity and reliability. The survey data is available for further analysis at www.asiafoundation.org.

This year’s *Survey* includes several new questions proposed by key users of the report’s findings. New questions explore Afghans’ views on prisons and incarceration, disciplining of individuals who cannot repay debt, and disciplining community members who harass females. We also ask respondents about the value of any bribes they have given to various organizations or in certain situations. Questions on why respondents think the Taliban are fighting against the Afghan government, and whether reconciliation between the two is possible, have also been added, along with the same questions regarding ISIS/Daesh. We also gauge Afghans’ level of sympathy for both opposition groups. Following up on last year’s questions about migration, we ask participants who prefer to stay in Afghanistan to offer two reasons why. We ask respondents if they know of any returnees to Afghanistan, how they were treated abroad, the reasons for their return, and whether they faced any difficulty upon their return to Afghanistan.

An in-depth discussion of the *Survey* methodology is provided in Appendix 1.

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1 *See Afghanistan in 2017: A Survey of the Afghan People* is as the Asia Foundation reports, the Survey has gathered the views of more than 97,000 Afghans since 2004, and provides a longitudinal portrait of evolving public perceptions of security, the economy, governance and government services, elections, media, women’s issues, and migration. Since 2006, the Survey has always begun by asking Afghans whether the country is moving in the right direction, an indication of optimism, or in the wrong direction, an indication of pessimism. This is year, the downward trajectory in national mood which began in 2013 has reversed, and optimism has risen marginally, from 29.3% in 2016 to 32.8% in 2017. This year’s slight increase in optimism is difficult to explain. On the surface, it would appear to be just a continuation of the status quo. However, regional and provincial changes are significant and paint a complex picture.

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An in-depth discussion of the Survey methodology is provided in Appendix 1.


The UNAMA statistics of war, January to June 2017
How many killed and injured

1,662 Afghan civilians have been documented as killed and 3,581 more as injured in the first six months of 2017 in UNAMA’s latest mid-year report on protection of civilian causalities in Afghanistan. The report released on Monday 17 July 2017 shows that the total number of civilian casualties decreased slightly, by 24 persons in total (or 0.5 per
The 11,418 civilians killed or injured in 2016 set a grisly new record – it is the highest number recorded by UNAMA in any year since it started systematic documentation in 2009 (see AAN’s previous report here). The same went for the 5,166 civilian casualties in that year’s first half. The new 2017 figures bring the total number of casualties registered by the UN since 2009 to more than 26,500 dead and just under 49,000 injured. (1)

As before, the authors of the UNAMA report point out that they use “at least three different and independent types of sources [to verify numbers], i.e. victim, witness, medical practitioner, local authorities, confirmation by party to the conflict, community leader or other sources” for each casualty included in the report. Given the stringent verification standard, this also means there may be many more casualties than UNAMA is able to confirm.

The new UNAMA report’s figures also do not include yet the victims of the fighting in Kunduz province in early July, i.e. after the reporting period (AAN reported on that incident here).

Women and Children

The decrease in women casualties UNAMA documented in 2016 reversed course during the first six months of 2017. A total of 174 adult women were confirmed killed and 462 more injured, an overall rise of 23 per cent over the same period last year. Child casualties increased by a further one per cent, with 436 deaths and 1,141 injuries recorded. Children accounted for 30 per cent of all civilian casualties. (2) Both among women and children, the number of those killed rose more steeply than those injured (by 33 and nine per cent, respectively).

Children, particularly boys, continued to comprise the majority – 81 per cent (81 deaths and 215 injured) – of all civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war. (In total, there were 192 such documented incidents with 365 civilian casualties – 93 deaths and 272 injured – an increase of six per cent compared to the same period in 2016.) In addition to those killed, explosive remnants of war caused life-changing injuries to children alongside severe emotional and psychological trauma where children witnessed the deaths of siblings or friends. In the first six months of 2017, UNAMA continued to record cases in which children lost eyesight and/or limbs, particularly legs.

UNAMA also noted that the use of pressure-plate improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and aerial operations in civilian-populated areas contributed substantially to the increases in both women and child casualties.

How they were killed and injured – key trends in conflict

Key trends UNAMA observed include a 15 per cent increase in civilian casualties from IEDs and a ten per cent decrease in the number of causalities caused by ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces. The report noted:

_The indiscriminate and unlawful use of IED tactics (IEDs, suicide and complex attacks) by Anti-Government Elements in civilian-populated areas – particularly suicide bombs and pressure-plate devices caused 2,079 civilian casualties (596 deaths and 1,483 injured), accounting for 40 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first six months of 2017._

Within this figure, suicide and complex attacks caused 1,151 civilian casualties (259 deaths and 892 injured), a 15 per cent increase compared to the first six months of 2016. In the first half of 2017, more civilian deaths and injury from suicide and complex attacks were documented by UNAMA than any previous six-month period since the mission began systematic documentation (in 2009).

The UN mission in Afghanistan underlined that many of those casualties occurred in a single attack in Kabul city on 31 May, when a truck bomb killed at least 92 civilians and injured nearly 500, the deadliest incident documented by UNAMA since 2001. (See also AAN reporting about the 31 May suicide attack here and here.)

The decrease in the number of civilians killed in ground engagements is attributed to a reduction in casualties caused by indirect fire and/or explosive weapons (mostly mortars) by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Despite the decrease, ground engagements remained the second-leading cause of civilian casualties, with a total of 1,809 documented (434 deaths and 1,375 injured).

Furthermore, UNAMA noted a 43 per cent rise in civilian casualties as a result of aerial operations (95 deaths and 137 injuries). Roughly two-thirds of those were caused by international and one-third by the Afghan air force.

The report also notes that the number of civilian killed and injured by the Afghan Local Police (ALP) more than doubled, to 15 and 49, respectively, despite “increased efforts by the Afghan Local Police Directorate [of the Ministry
Of Interior (MoI) in the area of accountability throughout 2016” (see AAN analysis of planned ALP reform here). It noted cases in northern, eastern and southern Afghanistan (in land and personal disputes in Kunduz and Takhar, in ground fighting in Laghman and Nangrah as well as in retaliation in Zabul provinces). At the same time, the casualty numbers attributed to pro-government armed groups (“militias” and “uprising forces”) fell by 60 per cent. Most of their 2017 victims, so far, were caused in Faryab province, “as in 2016,” this points to forces loyal to Vice-President Abdul Rashid Dostum (AAN on these operations, here).

Who is responsible?

All anti-government elements (this includes mainly the Taliban, but also Islamic State Khorasan Province [ISKP], the local franchise of what is known as Daesh among Afghans, and other Afghan and foreign insurgent groups) caused more than two-thirds of all registered civilian casualties in the first six months of 2017. This totals 1,141 people killed and 2,348 injured, a 12 per cent increase in comparison to the first six months of last year. The larger share was attributed to the Taliban (43%), compared to five per cent for ISKP – roughly a ratio of 9:1.

In 19 per cent of casualties caused by anti-government elements, UNAMA was not able to identify the perpetrators. This was especially stark in the case with the 31 May 2017 tanker bomb attack in Kabul (see AAN reporting here: https://www.afghanistan-analytics.org/a-black-week-in-kabul-terror-and-protests/). For UNAMA, an attribution requires a public acknowledgement of responsibility, which did not happen thereafter, from any group (see AAN analysis of the case here).

ISKP in particular continued to target Afghanistan’s Shia minority in the first half of 2017. UNAMA attributed four such attacks to ISKP or ISKP-linked groups in three provinces (two in Herat and one each in Kabul and Sar-e-Pul). In January, unidentified armed anti-government elements killed eight coal miners, most of whom Hazara, in the Tala wa Barfak district of Baghlan and further injured three others. Apart from the above-mentioned Kabul attack, the group claimed three other suicide attacks and one complex attack in the capital that did not have an explicitly sectarian bent.

UNAMA attributed a total of 327 civilian deaths and 618 injuries (18 per cent) to pro-government forces, a 21 per cent decrease compared with the same period last year. The greatest proportion (15 per cent) was caused by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), which includes the army and air force, the Afghan National and the Afghan Local Police. The international military forces were responsible for two per cent and irregular pro-government armed groups for one per cent.

Unattributed crossfire between anti-government elements and pro-government forces caused ten per cent of civilian casualties, and five per cent came from the detonation of unattributed explosive remnants of war. Crossborder shelling by Pakistan Military Forces caused the remaining one per cent.

What are the deadliest places in Afghanistan?

The highest number of casualties among the civilian population (19 per cent of the total dead and injured) occurred in Kabul province, mainly as a result of suicide and complex attacks. A total of 219 deaths and 829 injured were recorded there (1,048 in total), a 26 per cent increase from last year, almost all of them in the city. (3)

High-profile incidents in the capital overshadowed similarly grave developments in the provinces. In Helmand, the province with the second-highest number of casualties, the number of deaths and injuries combined almost doubled. In another 13 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces in all seven regions of the country – Kapisa, Daikundi, Laghman, Nuristan, Faryab, Khost, Paktya, Jawzjan, Badghis, Farah, Herat and Zabul – civilian casualties also increased, mainly due to increased attacks by anti-government forces. This geographical spread indicates the country-wide character of the war. It also corresponds with latest UN figures on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) that reveal at least 163,000 people were newly displaced by 16 July 2017 in 31 provinces (for more details, see here).

Highest numbers of civilian casualties, after Kabul and Helmand, occurred in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Ururzgan, Faryab, Herat, Laghman, Kunduz and Farah provinces.

UNAMA recommendations and conclusions

The UNAMA report stresses that violence continues to kill and maim civilians in nearly every conceivable setting of day-to-day life. “Civilians lost their lives, limbs, sight or suffered harm while inside of their own homes, travelling on public roads, attending classes, praying in mosques, purchasing food, playing outside, working in offices, laboring in agricultural fields, visiting the bank, and lying in hospital beds,” the report stated. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and UNAMA head, used the term “ugly war.” He condemned the use of
explosive devices, including improvised ones, as “indiscriminate, disproportionate and illegal” according to international law, and – given the high children casualty figures caused by them – “particularly appalling.”

The harm caused to civilians in such attacks also contradicts repeated orders and instructions from the Taliban leadership to its commanders and fighters, repeated just recently in their leader’s “Instructions to the Mujahedin” (AAN analysis here). UNAMA also demands that these directives be enforced.

UNAMA does not spare the government and its international allies from criticism. It demands the end of mortar and rocket shelling that “have a devastating impact in civilian populated areas.” Furthermore, it urges the government (and indirectly its Western sponsors) to disband “illegal armed groups, militias and ‘national uprising movements’,” recognizing their long-term destabilizing affect despite any temporary decline in harm done to civilians by some of those groups.

UNAMA also demands improved “operational practice and accountability, as well as to ensure[e] operations are carried out in line with obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law” from US troops, the only international air force in Afghanistan still conducting drone and air strikes. Air strikes (counted in the first half of every year) have reached 2011 levels again, the penultimate year of the US troop surge under President Obama. By 2014, civilian casualties caused by all air strikes, Afghan and international, had declined year by year to one-sixth of the 2011 level. That figure has continuously increased under the new mission, Resolute Support.

UNAMA also reiterated its suggestion that the Taliban and the Afghan government engage in “good-faith systematic tracking of civilian harm” caused by their war. In a situation where peace talks seem to be further away than in any years since 2008 when the outgoing Bush administration dropped its resistance to negotiating an end to the conflict, such concrete measures could at least contribute to minimizing harm to civilians while helping build confidence between parties to the conflict.


11 Institute for the Study of War, ISW’s March 2017 #Afghanistan threat assessment and map, @caityforrest: http://bit.ly/2mMz4TQ


The Survey asked: “I’m going to read some statements to you about the Afghan National Police (ANP). ANP officers are the ones who wear solid blue-grey colored uniforms. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each statement. Would you say strongly or somewhat? (a) The ANP is honest and fair with the Afghan people. (b) The ANP helps improve security in Afghanistan. (c) The ANP is efficient at arresting those who have committed crimes. Q-14. I’m going to read some statements to you about the Afghan National Army (ANA). Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each statement. Would you say strongly or somewhat? (a) The ANA is honest and fair with the Afghan people. (b) The ANA helps improve security in Afghanistan. (c) The ANA protects civilians. (Average of respondents who agree “strongly” or “somewhat” to the three sub questions.). Asia Foundation, Afghanistan in 2017: A Survey of the Afghan People, p. 53.”


57 UNDOC, Afghan Government, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016, October 2016, http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/AfghanistanOpiumSurvey2016_ExSum.pdf#yuiHis=1%7Cuploads%7Cdocuments%7C/crop-monitoring%7C/cropmonitoring/Afghanistan%7C/cropmonitoring/Afghanistan/AfghanistanOpiumSurvey2016_ExSum.pdf, p. 4

The UNDOC methodology is explained in page 60-64 of its 2017 report and seems sound.