

AFGHANISTAN

Human Rights, Armed Actors, and the Changing Landscape

Research Unit

USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

February 2022



22 CV 5312

US 2261

Presentation Roadmap

- Context & Humanitarian Crisis
- Tribal/Ethnic Groups
- History of Conflict
- Prior Afghan Forces and Taliban Insurgency
- Transition & Security
- Islamic State - Khorasan and other armed groups
- Hazaras
- Challenges for Women and Girls
- Land Disputes and Family Conflict
- Other Risk Profiles
- Afghans Outside of Afghanistan
- Naming Conventions
- Resources

Southern Asia



22 CV 5312

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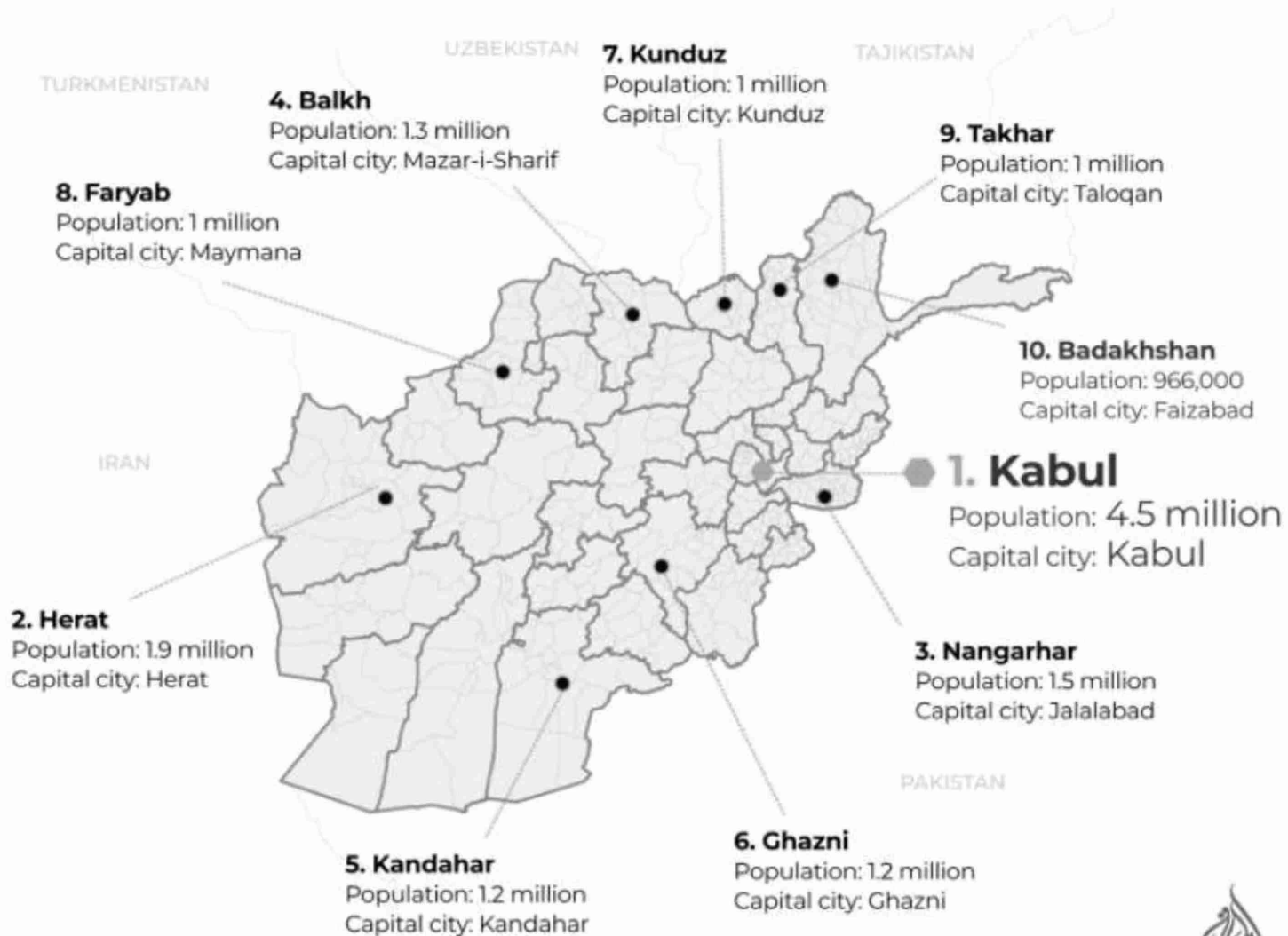
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AFGHANISTAN

34 provinces - 421 districts

Afghanistan has a **population of 38 million**, the 10 largest provinces and their capital cities are listed below.



AFGHANISTAN

A country of mountains and deserts

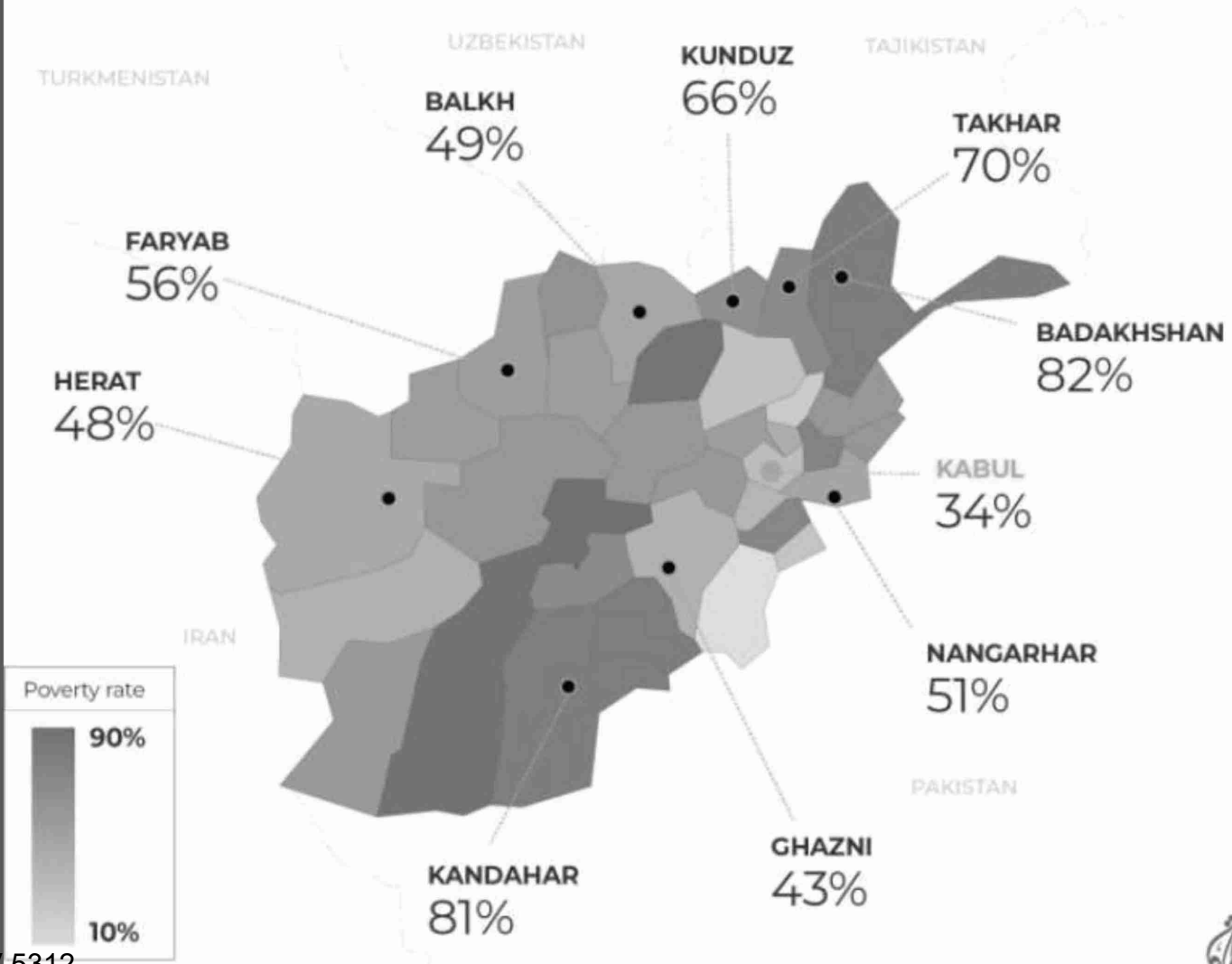
The landlocked country is the **eighth most mountainous country** in the world making many parts difficult to access.



AFGHANISTAN

Most Afghans live in poverty

Before the coronavirus pandemic, at least 54.5 percent of the country lived below the poverty line with **current estimates reaching up to 72 percent.**



Humanitarian Crisis



Humanitarian Crisis

- Foreign grants frozen due to sanctions:
 - ~8.5 billion dollars/year
 - 43 % of Afghanistan's GDP
 - 75 % of public expenditures
 - 50 % of the budget
 - 90 % of expenditures in the security sphere
- Afghanistan's currency reserves also frozen
- UNAMA: financial sanctions were the primary cause for 'the dire humanitarian situation' in the country'.

Humanitarian Crisis

- Economy projected to contract by 30% = Job Losses, Lack of Cash/Liquidity, Soaring Prices
- Ban of Use of Foreign Currency
- Drought
- Winter

Humanitarian Crisis

Over half of the country's population lives below the poverty line.

22.8 million people are identified as acutely food insecure, including hundreds of thousands who have been displaced by conflict since the beginning of the year.

Undernutrition rates are now increasing. A million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition (starvation), and 2 million more are at risk of moderate acute malnutrition.

For the first time, urban residents are suffering from food insecurity at similar rates to rural communities

Medical Care

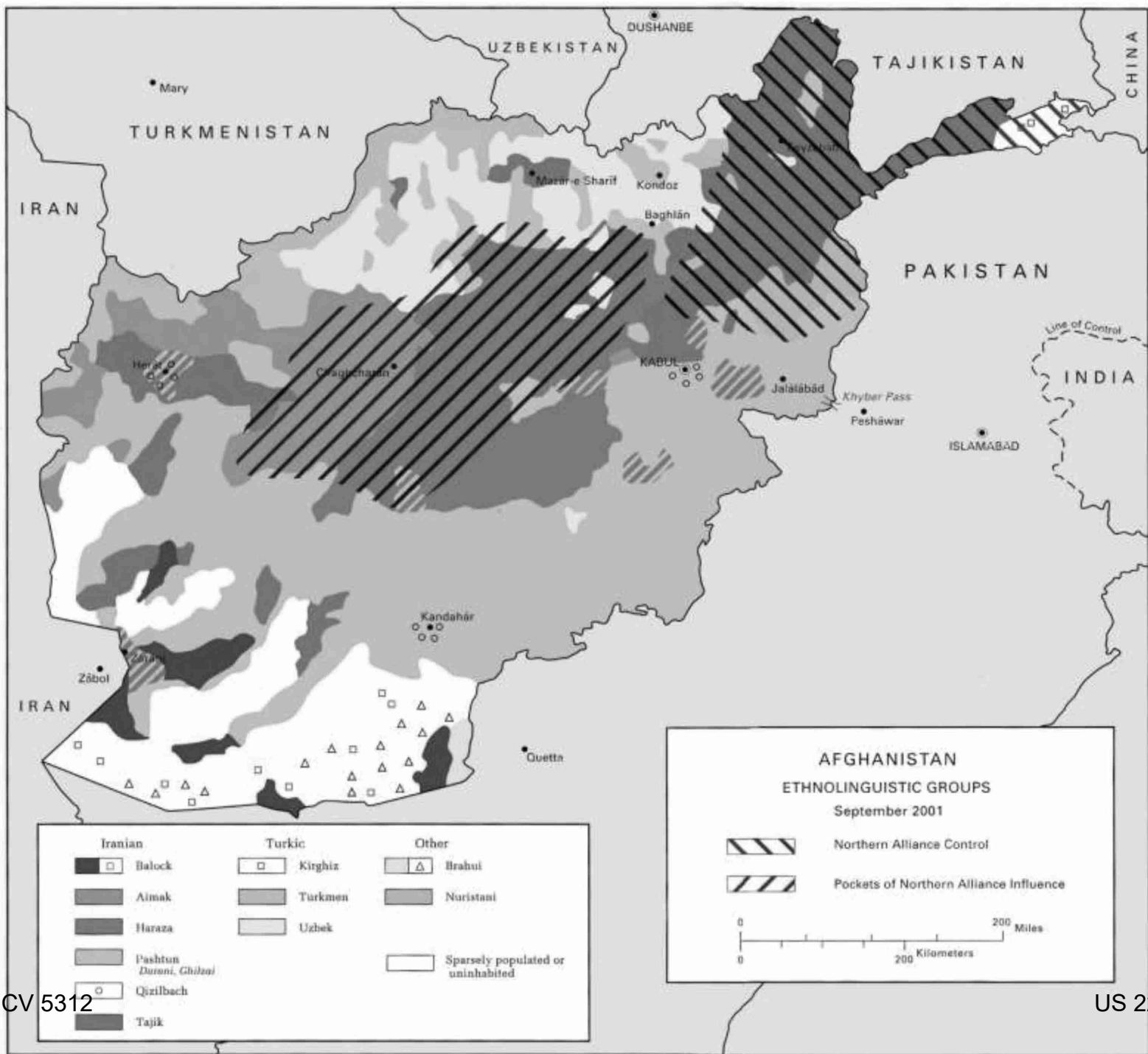
- Pre-Taliban: 4.6 doctors, nurses, and midwives per 10,000 people (WHO defines critical shortage threshold as 23/10,000); half are women
- \$600 million in health care aid frozen by the World Bank and other IOs
- Lack of financial support has left thousands of facilities unable to buy medical supplies and pay salaries; more than 2,000 facilities shut down and staffing/supply levels continue to plummet
- Almost 10% of people cannot reach a health facility within 2 hours and 43% must travel more than half an hour
- Corruption at all levels threatens the delivery and accessibility of health services and demands for bribes drive people away from seeking care
- COVID-19 - vaccination rates decreased, hospitals closed, and a spike among displaced populations may further burden healthcare system.

Medical Care

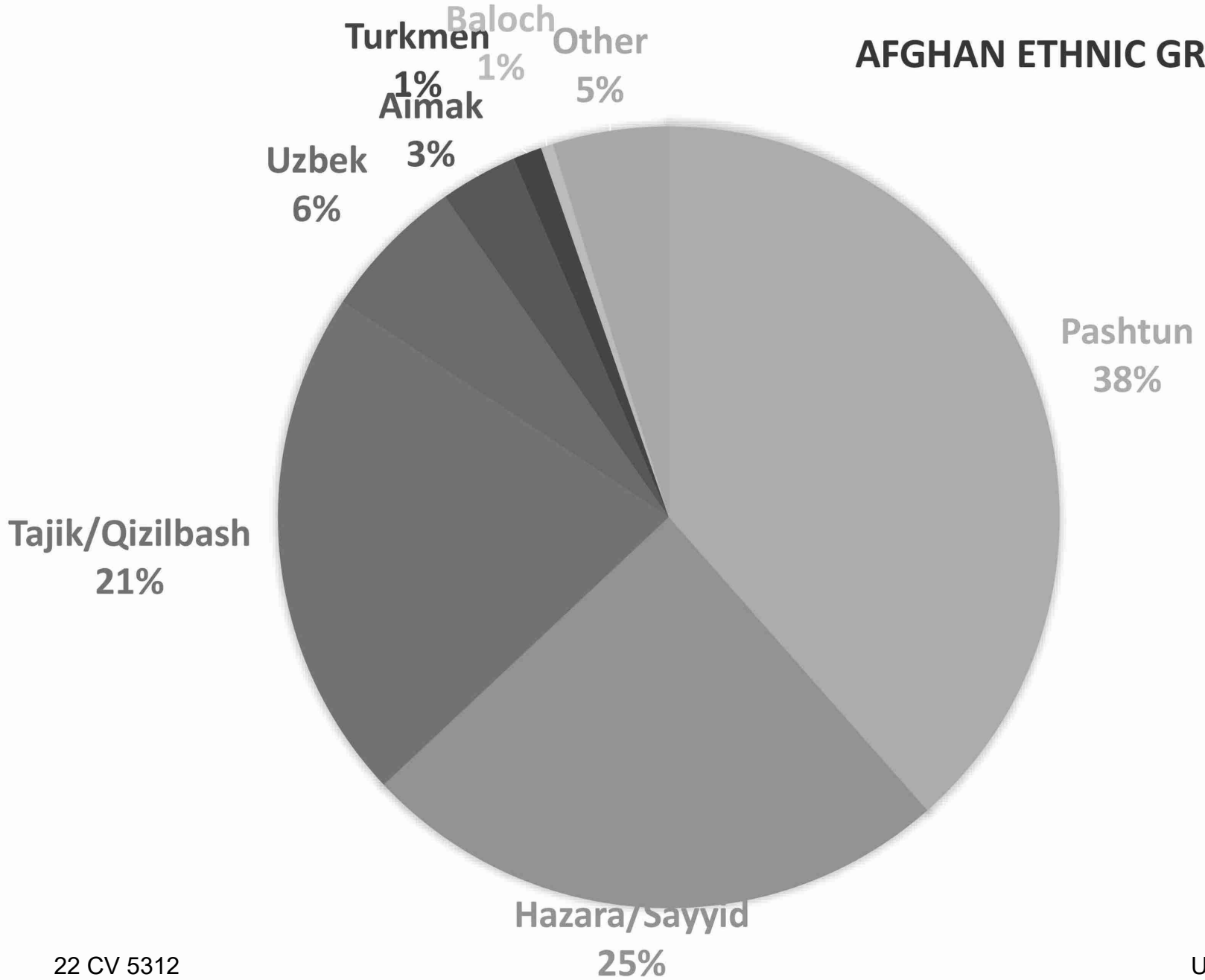
- Women often struggle to access care due to costs, including for transportation to a health facility, and for medications and supplies for which patients are obliged to pay
- Prenatal and postnatal care is often unavailable
- Specialty care, such as modern cancer and fertility treatment, is largely nonexistent; routine preventative care such as pap smears and mammograms are almost unheard of
- Large proportion of births are still unattended by a professional
- Famine conditions impacting newborns and small children.

Challenges for Individuals with Disabilities

- At least one in five Afghan households includes an adult or child with a serious physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disability
- Persons with intellectual or mental disabilities encounter severe discrimination, stigmatization, and social exclusion
- Households have extremely poor access to adequate food
- Lack of full control over any owned land
- Lack of appropriate infrastructure and specialist care



AFGHAN ETHNIC GROUPS



History of Conflict

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- 1974** Failed Islamist counter-coup attempt, Islamists fled to Peshawar, Pakistan (Peshawar Seven formed – alliance of Mujahideen factions)
- 1978-1979** April 1978 coup by People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), then December 1979 Soviet invasion and occupation with severe human rights abuses
- Mujahideen attacked Soviets from Peshawar

History of Conflict

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- U.S./NATO-backed government took power, and Taliban resumed insurgency

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July 5, 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Bagram base; Taliban rapidly taking territory including regional urban centers

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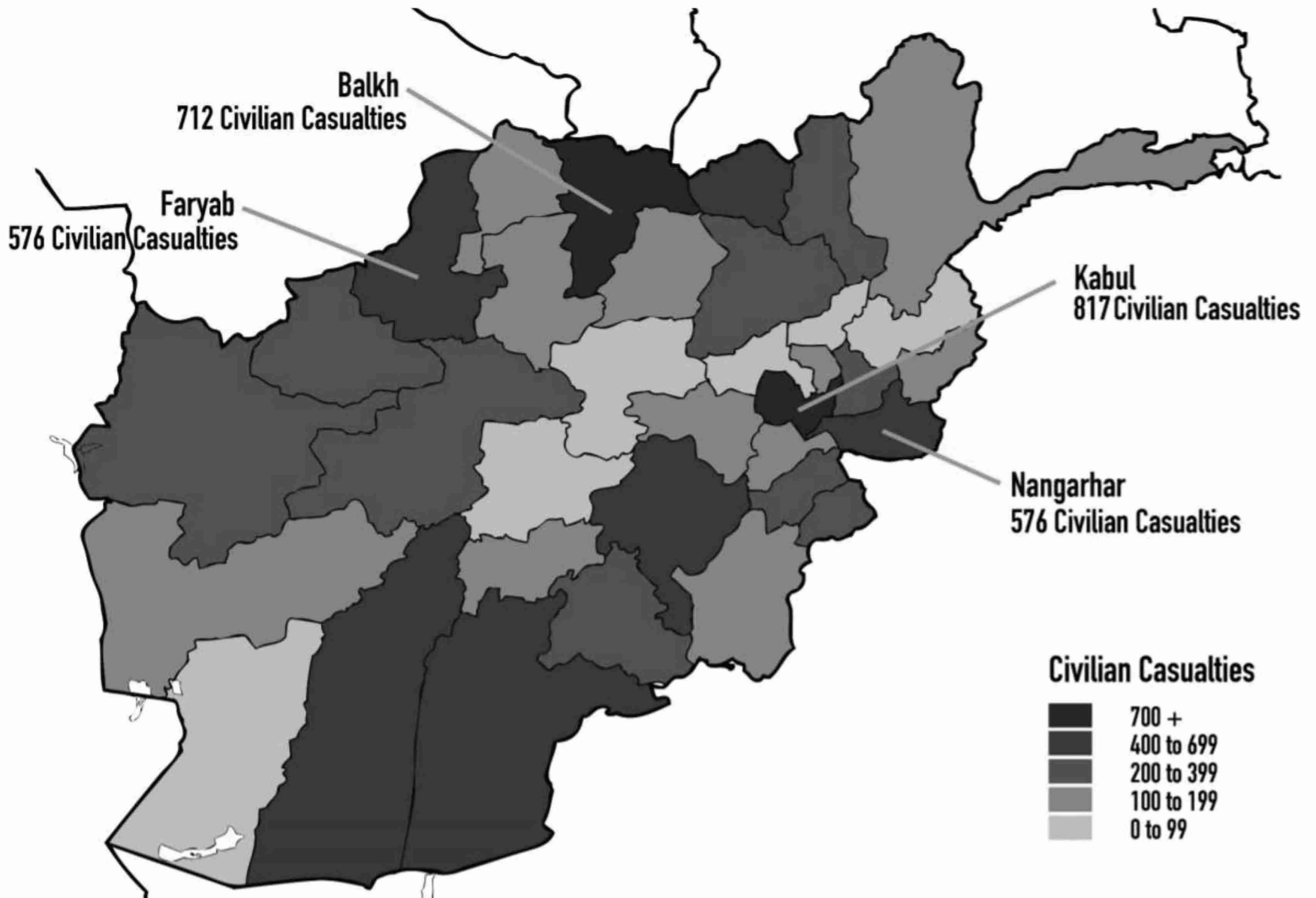
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August 15, 2021 Taliban takes Kabul

August 30, 2021 last U.S. troops depart; Taliban in control



Control of Afghanistan districts heavily contested by the Taliban



Applicants in Afghan Military

Older male applicants will occasionally describe past military service (Afghan forces with and against Soviets, Mujahideen groups, etc.)

Good resource for quick understanding of history:

Afghanistan: A Country Study, Library of Congress, 2001 (scroll down to Government and Politics section)

EASO: Report on Security Situation by Province p.26-30 (June 2021) – Good summary of history of the conflict

EASO: Afghanistan Security Situation Update (Sept. 9, 2021)

Mujahideen

Pashtun-dominated:

- Hezb-i Islami (Hekmatyar)
- Hezb-i Islami (Khaless)
- Harakat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami (Nabi)
- Ittehad-e Islami (Sayyaf)
- Jebh-e-Nejat-i-Melli Afghanistan (Mojadeddi)
- Mahaz-e-Melli (Gailani)

Tajik-dominated:

- Jamiat-i-Islami (Rabbani)
- Shura-e Nazar (Massoud)

Uzbek-dominated:

- Jombesh-e Nazar (Dostum)

Hazara-dominated:

- Hezb-e Wahdat (Akbari): Many Shia factions joined in 1989

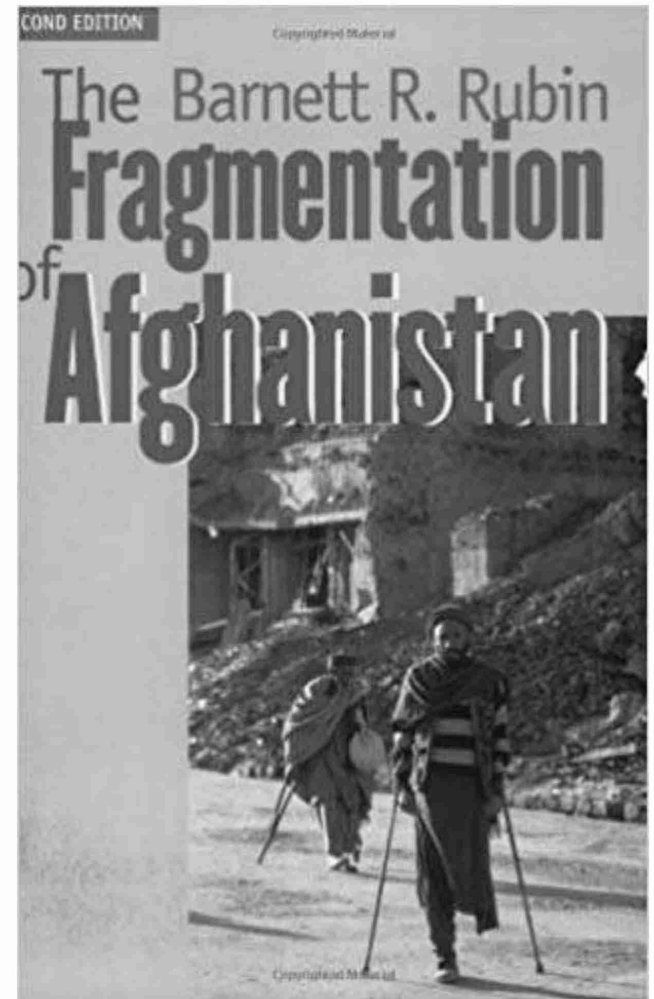
References for Main Political Groups

- Background Paper Afghanistan: Political Parties and Insurgent Groups 1978-2001, Australian Refugee Review Tribunal, March 2013
- Background Paper Afghanistan: Political Parties and Insurgent Groups 2001-2013, Australian Refugee Review Tribunal, March 2013

Print Reference - Armed/Political Groups

Barnett R. Rubin,
The Fragmentation of
Afghanistan: State Formation
and Collapse in the
International System, 2d Ed.(2002)

Covers 1978-1992



Former Afghan Forces



Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

- **National Directorate of Security (NDS)** – includes special forces; human rights violations, especially the torture of detainees
- Afghan Armed Forces
 - Afghan National Army (ANA)
 - Afghan Air Force
- Afghan Border Force
- Afghan National Police (ANP)
- Afghan Territorial Force (2018)

Afghan Local Police (ALP)

- Many communities reported that the ALP was largest threat to their safety, especially where the Afghan National Army (ANA) or other Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were not present.
- Anecdotal evidence of the ALP forcibly recruiting boys and men into the police, contributing to UAMs
- Disbanded Sept. 30, 2020; 1/3 to be disarmed and retired, 1/3 to be transferred to the Afghan National Police (ANP), 1/3 to the Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF)



Pro-Government Armed Groups

- **Khost Protection Force** (mainly Southeast region since ~2007: Khost, Paktya, Paktika and Ghazni provinces)
- **“Shaheen Forces”** (emerged in Paktia Province 2019)

No legal basis, often supported by international forces and/or NDS, sometimes with international air support.

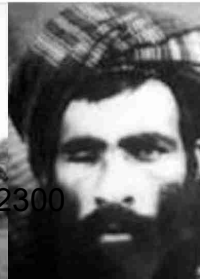
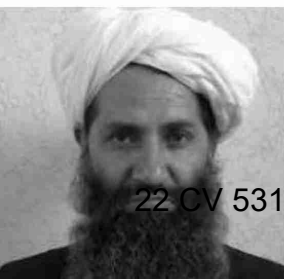
Operate with impunity, conducting search operations, deliberately killing civilians, including over their own personal disputes, and engaging in armed clashes with AGEs and other armed groups.

Taliban

- Has been largest insurgent group
- Up to 85,000 full-time fighters
- Strict Sharia Law; removal of foreigners and cooperators
- Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, but some fragmentation
- Al Qaeda connections but opposed to Islamic State
- Factions have received support from various actors (Pakistan, China, Russia, Afghan government)
- Tier I as of December 26, 2007

Note: Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a separate organization

Taliban in Afghanistan: Backgrounder, Council on Foreign Relations (2021)



Taliban: Targeted Classes

- Afghan security forces, police, and pro-government militias
- Government officials or accused government spies
- **Those working for foreign military troops (interpreters, drivers)**
- Civilians perceived as supportive of the government or national or international security forces (farmers, **shopkeepers** and students)
- Education sector personnel
- Religious scholars (expressed pro-Government views or condemned civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements)
- Humanitarian workers
- Tribal elders (pro-government)
- Enemies of the Taliban (Jamiat-i Islami; Hezb-e Islami)
- Journalists, media workers, and human rights defenders
- **Hazara and Shia minorities**

Taliban

Shadow government?

- Coopts state schools (enforce teacher attendance)
- Sharia courts are often more effective (prove ability to govern)
- Taxation system more effective than Afghan government (checkpoints, wheat, import of perfume/cigarettes)
- Opium trade
- Beneficiary of infrastructure – needs aid to continue (65-75% of GDP)

How insurgents
come to power
dictates what
kind of
government
they'll form.

- Barnett Rubin

Senior Fellow and Director
Center on Int'l Cooperation
New York University



Transition and Security Overview



Transition & Security

- Taliban has taken control of all territory (Northern Resistance Front (NRF) in Panjshir Valley fled to Tajikistan; IS-K not holding territory)
- Taliban formed government (not recognized) of core members including five members of the Haqqani family designated as terrorists; All male and almost exclusively Pashtun, failing to uphold pledge of inclusivity (coup?)
- Ethnic and social exclusion driving insurgency recruitment and instability (IS-K attacks in Tajik-dominated areas in north, recruiting Tajiks who have little representation like Sunnis in Iraq)
- Taliban seen as selling out Uyghurs to gain China's support/investment; IS-K has used Uyghur suicide bombers to attack Shia mosques (global Jihad?)

Transition & Security

- Many Taliban were children during last regime (>65% of Afghans born after 9-11), but optimism for a changed rule is fading
- Reports of Taliban beatings, executions, restrictions on women, targeting of adversaries (old risk profiles remain)
- Ministry for the “propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice” reconstituted in the building that housed the Women’s Affairs Ministry (perpetrated abuses from 1996-2001, particularly against women and girls.)

Afghanistan: Taliban ‘Vice’ Handbook Abusive, Human Rights Watch, Oct. 29, 2021

Taliban Response to Crisis?

- Taliban calling for unfreezing of assets/allowing some humanitarian aid schemes.
- Food crisis a “legacy of the previous government”
- Taliban government risks opposition due to lack of ability to provide basic services and stability without aid (78% of electricity imported from Iran/Uzbekistan and can't pay)
- Some short-term initiatives (“wheat-for-work”) and discussions of directly paying public sector workers
- December 2021 – Release of \$280 million in aid to UNICEF + WFP

Islamic State – Khorasan Province



Islamic State – Khorasan Province



Islamic State – Khorasan Province

- Islamic State in Khorasan (IS-K), the Afghan affiliate of IS (*Daesh*)
- Primarily Kabul and Nangarhar Province
- Significantly reduced (1,000-2,500 fighters down from 5,000); concern for resurgence as “post-peace” Jihadists; growing
- Sectarian-motivated attacks (sowing discord like in Iraq)
- Pattern of targeting Hazaras (Shias), former Government, Taliban, foreign forces, schools
- Large share of civilian deaths in Nangarhar and Kabul, primarily through IED attacks
- Taliban “special forces” have hunted IS-K; enemies
- Appointing shadow governors, district and province

Other Insurgents

- Al Qaeda: Has a minimal presence in Afghanistan (250-400 fighters) mostly in provinces of eastern Afghanistan such as Kunar; older leaders have close ties to some veteran Taliban and reinforcing relationships
- Haqqani Network: Southeast Afghanistan, based in Waziristan Pakistan, considered part of Taliban; 300 to 10,000 fighters; members joining Taliban government (director of Kabul security)
- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU): Fractured, reportedly mostly acting as part of Taliban now, some pledged allegiance to IS March 2015; active in Faryab, Takhar, Balkh, Kunduz, and east

Targeting of Hazaras/Shias?



Targeting of Hazaras/Shias?

- Risk pattern for Hazaras/Shias being targeted, merely for their ethnicity or sect, includes attacks on Mosques, gatherings, religious commemorations, and demonstrations in cities (IS-K)
- Attacks have included disappearances, abductions, and targeted killings, including on roads
- Fear of Taliban return to power (mass killings of Hazaras in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 and in central Bamian Province in 2000 and 2001; more recent Taliban offensives in the provinces of Ghazni and Uruzgan)

Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men – new investigation (Amnesty International, Aug. 19, 2021)

Hazaras: Complexity

- Some Hazara communities and Taliban assisted each other in fight against Islamic State
- Two Taliban shadow governors or provincial-level military leaders are Hazara
- Several hundred Hazara fighters in the Taliban ranks (local militias from the southern fringes of Hazarajat joining the Taliban for local infighting)
- Hazara cooperation to achieve security and autonomy (control local communities under Taliban name)
- Hazara commander fighting alongside the Taliban in Kunduz
- See Hezb-e Wahdat TRIG Report

Challenges for Women



Challenges for Women

- Discriminatory denial of education, movement, health care, employment, privacy, and political participation
- Over 83% illiteracy
- Pashtunwali: Dignity, honor, shame are central
- 87.2% have experienced physical, sexual, psychological violence or forced marriage

Marriage Issues

- 60 to 80 percent of Afghan marriages are forced
- Child marriage, includes selling young girls
- *Baad* (settlement of disputes by giving away girls)
- *Badal* (exchange marriages)
- Forced marriages of widows

Domestic and Sexual Violence

- Honor killing, forced marriage with rapist, rejection by families
- Domestic violence; lack of court support
- Reports of soldiers and police abducting and raping women and girls with impunity
- *Zina*
- Lack of Reporting

Change under Taliban?

- “Women’s rights will be permitted within the limits of Islamic Sharia”
- Changing attire (black, covered)
- Women ordered to stay home because “fighters not yet trained”
- Reports of beating women on street (Women protested in first days of Taliban, men stayed home)

Education of Girls

- Cities under Afghan government control had rise in education of girls, but declined starting 2014 (funding, insecurity, discrimination, corruption)
- Taliban stated policy to allow, but great variation in practice up to prohibition
- Kabul (September 2021): Both boys and girls in grades 1-6 have been attending schools, with students segregated by gender in the higher three grades
- The acting Minister of Higher Education said that women could continue to study in universities and graduate programs, as long they were in gender-segregated classrooms, Islamic attire

Blood Feuds

- Part of Pashtunwali - focus on restoring honor
- Pashtuns higher tendency to practice - all groups can be involved in violent feuds
- Tajik and Hazara: private revenge is widespread
- 'Blood feud' is not a term that is used locally

Land Disputes

- Three decades of displacement and multiple deeding systems
- Lack of coherent land policy and legislation
- 28 to 36 percent of local level conflicts related to land
- Millions of former refugees have returned in last decade causing increased competition and conflict
- Governments giving preference to friends, allies, bribery



Kuchi-Hazara Conflict



Kuchi-Hazara Conflict

- Land dispute
- Kuchis – nomadic ethnic Pashtuns – attempt to migrate northward in the Summer into area settled by Hazaras for 130 years
- Seasonal violence in the Kajab valley west of Kabul (Wardak Province)
- Kuchi nomads have ransacked villages, burned hundreds of buildings, killed some Hazaras
- **Resistance Front**: In 2015 Hazara commander Abdul Ghani Alipur formed a “public uprising force”; supporters claim protecting Hazaras but attacks on police and security, extortion and harassment of Pashtuns, civilians killed in crossfire

Other Risk Profiles

- LGBTIQ+
- Apostates (most often converts to Christianity)
- Those seen as “Westernized”
- Musicians, Artists, those in Salon & Fashion industry

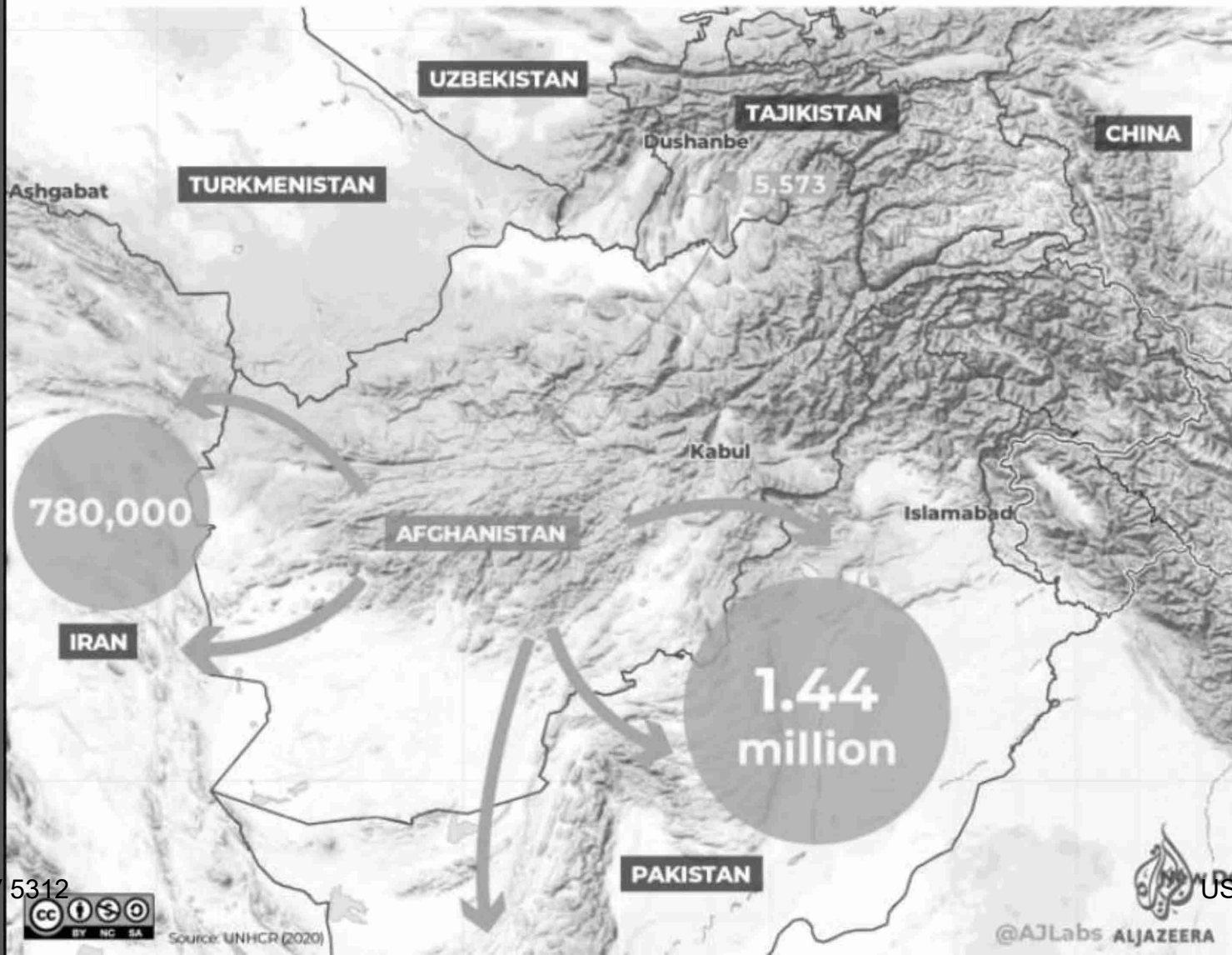
EASO: Country Guidance: Afghanistan (December 2020) – excellent content on risk profiles (PSGs)

EASO: Afghanistan Country Focus (January 2022)

AFGHANISTAN

2.6 million refugees worldwide

86 percent of registered refugees live in three neighbouring countries with an additional 12 percent living in Europe.



Afghans in Iran

- Afghans paid to fight in Syria on behalf of Iran/Assad (Fatemiyoun)
- Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) recruiting (Tier I)
- Shia connection - Hazaras
- Drug trafficking
- [RAIO RU - Afghans Fighting in Syria on behalf of Iran 3-2017.pdf](#)

Naming Conventions

- Typically only first names given at birth
- Male names are usually compound like *Ahmad Zubair* (comparable to Mary Ellen); less frequent component is the “proper” name
- Female names are typically one word, usually Pashto or Persian
- Father’s or an ancestral name may or may not be included
- Many Afghans who interact with Western world adopt last names, usually representing tribal affiliation (like *Hamid Karzai*)
- Honorific titles can be added, like Religious (*Mullah*), Military (*Amir*), or Nobility (*Malik*)
- Altering a first name requires a government application, but an adopted last name can be changed at will
- No standard orthography, so names are written as they are pronounced, which can vary by region/dialect: *Mohammad*, *Mohamed*, *Muhammad*, or *Mohamad*

RESOURCE: [The Structure of Afghan Names](#), The MITRE Corporation, Nov. 2009

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

Breshna or Brekhna?

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

Breshna or Brekhna?

Western Pashto Dialect
(Kandahar Province)

Eastern Pashto Dialect
(Kabul/Nangarhar)

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

Tazkera: Breshna

Teacher's I.D.: Brekhna Karzai

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

Tazkera: Breshna

Single name when in province

Teacher's I.D.: Brekhna Karzai

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

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Single name when in province

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Chose last name when took urban job that represents origin
(Village of *Karz* plus -ai = Karzai)

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

Family has introduced her as Boboye
Gholam?

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA's name (female):

Family has introduced her as Boboye
Gholam?

“Mother of Gholam” (son)

Family may use less-descript name in public for privacy

Afghan Naming Conventions

HU's name:

Tazkera: Abdul Qadir

NATO Paperwork: Abdol Kadir Samim

Afghan Naming Conventions

HU's name:

Tazkera: Abdul Qadir

Compound first name when in province

NATO Paperwork: Abdol Kadir Samim

Afghan Naming Conventions

HU's name:

Tazkera: Abdul Qadir

Compound first name when in province

NATO Paperwork: Abdol Kadir Samim

Chose last name when took job with foreigners in Kabul

(*Samim* means "very friendly" or "well-decided")

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA and HU have different last names?

Brekhna Karzai

Abdol Kadir Samim

Afghan Naming Conventions

PA and HU have different last names?

Brekhna Karzai

Abdol Kadir Samim

Women commonly don't take their husband's last names upon marrying if they already have one.

Resources

- [RAIO Research Unit Afghanistan Country Page](#)
- [COI Bank](#) document on Afghanistan (hosted on Teams)

Resources

- [EASO: Afghanistan Country Focus](#) (January 2022)
- [EASO: Afghanistan Security Situation Update](#) (Sept. 2021)
- [EASO: Report on Security Situation by Province](#) (June 2021)
- [EASO: Country Guidance: Afghanistan](#) (December 2020) – excellent content on risk profiles (PSGs)

- [EASO: Situation of Hazaras and Shias \(2018-2020\)](#) – Query Response July 2020
- [Tazkera, passports and other ID documents](#), LandInfo (2019)

- [PiX Today](#) (Can create account with .gov email) – Afghanistan section with conflict tracker
- [UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan \(UNAMA\)](#) - Quarterly and Annual Reports
- [Afghanistan Analysts Network](#)

Resources

- [10 Maps to Understand Afghanistan](#) (Aljazeera, Aug. 12, 2021)
- [Afghanistan](#), Cultural Atlas (Australia) 2016 (Cultural overview and sensitivity guide when encountering Afghans)

Contact Information

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