



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism
اسلام کے تقابلیاتی اور کٹاوتیوریہ مازم

Human Security, Economic Vulnerability and Terrorism in Afghanistan

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THE TERRORISM STRUCTURE

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Introduction

Afghanistan is known as the graveyard of empires, and like a Shakespearean tragedy, tells the story of contending political and ideological groups whose internal goals time and again serve only to destroy the innocent people around them. American interventions have stressed the destruction of terrorists' footholds while supporting symbolic touchstones of burgeoning democracy and diminishing drug industries. The core oft stated goal for the U.S. is to ensure that the terrorist groups lack the security and power to launch attacks on it, yet the tools employed by the US have failed to adequately address the dispersed power structure in Afghanistan. As result, American efforts have not taken root in a long-term sustainable way. Unending internal divisions, lack of physical security, and a dearth of economic opportunities all serve to promote an environment throughout Afghanistan in which disparate terrorist groups rather than a unified western-style democracy thrive. This paper aims to demonstrate how the psychological and economic impact of the two primary terrorist groups have taken root in Afghanistan and must be taken into account in order to create a plan to successfully diminish their power. Looking closely at one province in the country will exemplify those issues. By understanding the foothold of both groups more clearly, strategies to weaken either or both and simultaneously improve human security might be possible.

The popular narrative through which the U.S. views the conflict in Afghanistan has led to fundamental miscalculations. Sociologist Jim Kuypers clarified the idea of framing analysis in the social sciences, clarifying that “Frames are so powerful because they induce us to filter our perceptions of the world in particular ways... They operate by making some information more *salient* than other information; therefore, they ‘highlight some features of reality while omitting others.’”¹ The War on Terror in Afghanistan, as framed by the U.S. and other Western powers has often focused on the lack of democratic civil society touchstones, while in reality the splintered governance and historical persistence of that dispersed power structure, combined with the lack of economic opportunity and physical security, are the most crucial elements to address in any successful plan to weaken the terrorists networks. Rather than focus on solely on democratic structures such as free elections, any plan with a chance of success

needs to be created with a deep understanding of the “on the ground” environment that has allowed various militant groups to thrive.

In Afghanistan in particular, we need to look at the two primary terrorist networks, the Taliban, a longstanding national group, and the Islamic State¹, a more recent and more violent addition with aims for global jihad. Both the Taliban and the Islamic State use violence and the fear produced by that violence as a primary means of control. Seventy- nine percent of respondents to a December 2018 Asia Foundation survey found that the Taliban is the biggest threat to security in the North West, and 57 percent in the East consider the largest threat to be Daesh. Understanding that on the ground environment in Afghanistan means understanding the economic and psychological relationship between these two groups the civilians living in local territories that result from that violence.

The academic journal *Perspectives on Terrorism* presents up to date work from the experts in the field of security studies. In August 2018 the editors created a new list of the un- and under-researched topics in terrorism studies. One area is broadly defined as “Terrorism and the Public/Public Opinion,” with the subcategories:

1. Impact of terrorism on public behavior at election times: comparative case studies.
2. Does public opinion influence terrorists? If so, how?
3. The impact of terrorism on various segments of the population.
4. Determinants of popular support for terrorist organizations.
5. Educating the public about terrorism: national experiences.
6. Psychological and economic consequences of terrorism for various actors other than direct victims.ⁱⁱ

This paper will primarily focus on the last category – examining the psychological and economic aspects of the two primary terrorist groups currently operating in Afghanistan and in particular, in Nangarhar province.² This is an area in which government control is present in urban areas, and terrorist control is present elsewhere. I will briefly explain the context in Afghanistan generally, and then focus on this province in particular. To do so, I will examine current and past news articles, scholarly work, official

¹The group is known broadly as the Islamic State in English, and Daesh in Arabic. Specific contingents have place-specific names, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of the Khorasan Province (ISKP). When I refer to Daesh, I am referring to the international organization, while ISKP refers to the local branch. When quoting a source that refers to the group as IS, I will not modify their language, so note that this is also an acronym for Islamic State.

² This paper will discuss the country of Afghanistan, but will primarily focus on the province of Nangarhar as a focal point. Additionally, there are numerous other terror groups present in Afghanistan, but, again, the focus of this paper is solely on Daesh and the Taliban.

statements, and interviews conducted with individuals (who will remain anonymous) currently or recently living in Afghanistan and others who are state officials. I will then look at the international players and connections to the groups I am examining, and note key deficits in the current approach to a “peace” plan.

Background

Multidimensional Governing Structure

Local governance in Afghanistan is typically a patriarchal tribal system, one in which communities are insular, loyal to their own tribe and ethnic group, and governed by male elders. During the communist revolution in 1978, for example, local resistance was organized along community and tribal lines. The unstable and shifting political situation was a factor in the increase in tribalism and jihadism in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the 20th century was rife with attempts at democratization followed by periods of oppression. That tumultuous see-saw still impacts current attitudes towards the formal national government. Even after the ousting of the Taliban government, elections in 2004, 2005, 2009, and 2010 experienced endemic corruption. As a result, local warlords with political and/or military clout were often mobilized as political leaders in place of the official government. In 2018, Transparency International surveyed experts and business people throughout the country to determine the public perception of corruption, and found that on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) Afghanistan was perceived as 16/100.ⁱⁱⁱ This is a not surprising statistic—both Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah ran on anti-corruption platforms in 2014—but it is one that indicates the perception of the government in the eyes of civilians. Civilian faith in the government is at a ten-year low, and there are continued allegations of corruption and embezzlement in the government and military.^{iv} Additionally, 45 percent of citizens feel unsafe criticizing their government.^v As a result, power is dispensed as it has been for generations, through familial and tribal lines.

Rise of the Taliban

Afghanistan is a diverse country, comprised of 34 provinces and 407 districts. Its population of approximately 35 million people is majority Sunni, at 85-90 percent and minority Shia at 10-15 percent. Hindus, Sikhs, Bahais, and Christians comprise around .3 percent of the total population.^{vi} As of October

2018, the Taliban controls 11 out of 34 provinces. More specifically, out of 407 districts, 59 are under Taliban control (15 percent) and 119 (30 percent) are neither controlled by the government nor the Taliban.^{3vii} This means that even before the presence of Daesh in Afghanistan, the peoples' loyalty was divided among their own familial/tribal group, their village, the Taliban (in itself an extremely diverse group), and the official government.

It is critical in understanding the complex landscape of Afghanistan to remember that the country have lived with conflict for forty years, and have a power structure that is fundamentally different from that in the U.S. There has been instability and war since the USSR aided Noor Taraki and his Khalqi fighters in a communist coup in 1978, leading to years of civil wars.^{viii} In 1994 the Taliban, made up largely of former mujahideen fighters who had trained in Pakistan during Afghanistan's civil wars, emerged and took control of Kabul. These fighters were largely drawn from the mujahideen who had been fighting the Soviets for the prior ten years, supported covertly by the United States. Once the Soviets withdrew, the U.S. followed suit, and the country plunged into chaos. Claiming that they fought solely for Islam, the Taliban took control of 90 percent of Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001.^{4ix} The internal fighting and apparent hypocrisy of the mujahideen in relation to their own edicts made the populace more open to the Taliban initially. However, as their power solidified, the Taliban's extreme interpretation of *sharia* law, forcing women to stay at home, closing down girl's schools, and banning most kinds of entertainment led to less public support.^x The Northern Alliance, who worked with a U.S. coalition, removed the Taliban from power in 2001.^{xi} Since then, the national government has been gradually losing control to the Taliban, though the area controlled by each side is in flux, but the struggle has resulted in a people divided by socio-religious grounds and an unstable economy.⁵ Since 2015, Taliban control has risen from 7 percent of the country to 12.5 percent, with 1/3 of the country considered

³ See Appendix A.

⁴ There is no one set and clearly defined metric of "taking control," but throughout this paper I am using the phrase the way it is primarily used in news media and scholarly articles: that the group in questions has a sizeable presence, government facilities are frequently attacked by said group within the territory, and the civilians living there mostly have to follow the set of rules enforced by that group. It sometimes includes the complicity of a village chief.

⁵ U.S. reports specifically indicate that control is which side runs an area, and influence is which side has the upper hand. Not all reports have this specificity, but typically this is what is meant by control and influence. ("Taliban control of Afghanistan on the rise, US inspector says")

“contested.”^{xiii} In many rural parts of the country, civilians rely more on the Taliban to distribute justice than on the elected government.^{xiii}

Daesh is an outside group and while not trusted by the majority of Afghans, the lack of trust and cooperation has not diminished its strength.^{xiv} The current conditions of Afghanistan, including poverty, government instability, and the growing role of the Taliban has made it possible for ISKP to take hold in a way that is stronger, faster, and more prevalent than most other countries, including the U.S., have publicly acknowledged.^{xv} Unless the U.S. understands and incorporates knowledge about the new methods of recruitment and current state of ISKP, both as it relates to civilians and to the Taliban, the problem of terrorists in Afghanistan is likely to only grow.

Rise of the Islamic State

The Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISKP) emerged in 2015, shortly after a group of ex-Taliban members located in Pakistan declared allegiance to Daesh.^{xvi} While their territorial control has waxed and waned, Daesh is a growing movement with a united vision (a global caliphate under al-Baghdadi).^{xvii} Though its numbers were greatly diminished in 2016 as it was pushed out of strongholds in Iraq and Syria, according to reports from the UN and the U.S. military, in addition to their newer regimes in places like Afghanistan and Libya, there are approximately 30,000 ISIS fighters again in Iraq and Syria--nearly as many as when it was at its territorial peak.^{xviii} The lack of western media coverage about the so-called Khorasan Province (parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan)⁷ compared to that of Daesh in Syria and Iraq is striking. One report bemoaning the lack of information on civilians in Nangarhar province, for instance, stated: “only few sources specifically focus on the situation of the civilian population. With the exception of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA)⁸,

⁶ Despite rumors of al-Baghdadi’s death stemming back several years, he made a statement on August 22, 2018, which confirmed that he is alive. {“ISIS Isn’t Dead Yet”}

⁷ “Khorasan is a historical term for areas populated by peoples speaking Iranian languages in northeastern Iran, the Transoxania part of Central Asia (Mawr-un-Nahr) and Afghanistan, mainly north of the Hindu Kush Mountains. In IS propaganda, it now comprises all of Afghanistan, most of Pakistan as well as Central Asia. Its reaches are felt as north as Kazakhstan and in eastern Turkistan.” (“The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan’: How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar”)

⁸ UNAMA established a presence in 2002 at the request of the government, supporting the government in security, governance, and development. It aims to support peace and reconciliation and protect civilians in armed conflict. (“Frequently Asked Questions,” UNAMA, 2019 [<https://unama.unmissions.org/frequently-asked-questions>].)



there are no reliable sources that systematically report on the security situation for Afghan civilians.”^{xix} Multiple Western media sources as well as Western leaders have, after the fall of Mosul and Raqqa, begun to promote the narrative that Daesh is on the decline, and is no longer as grave a threat as it was when it held more territory in Iraq and Syria. While Daesh’s hold on territory has declined, other indicators demonstrate its staying power.⁹ Daesh’s social media output has increased (a primary recruiting tool). The loss of territorial control has not equaled a loss of human. For instance, in January 2018 *Lawfare* announced that Daesh media had undergone “a full-fledged collapse” yet only a few days later *BBC* revealed that Daesh content production had increased by nearly 50 percent in the past month.^{xx} Daesh has produced content in English and other languages, accessible by both devout and recently converted Muslims, but it is a mistake to presume that these more easily accessible sources reflect the only content produced by Daesh. While open access Germanic and Romantic language content may have declined, clandestine networks have expanded. These communications require knowledge of Arabic, religious code words, or access to channels on Telegram.^{10xxi} That the apparent content production has decreased actually reveals the difficulties in fully accessing the information provided by Daesh.¹¹

As reporter Paul Lushenko has found that:

Surprisingly, ISKP continues to resolve and evolve. Even after the death of its third leader and capture of its capital in Nangarhar, the group executed a series of heinous attacks in September 2018 against schools in eastern Afghanistan including Kabul. The group exercises an expansionist strategy that capitalizes on weak governance, under-addressed grievances, and poor security to establish redoubts across not only Afghanistan, but the region. It has exacerbated territorial and ethnic flashpoints in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Tajikistan to indigenize its agenda among marginalized Muslims and secular populations. It also capitalizes on social media and secure messaging applications to inspire, enable, and direct attacks abroad. In October 2017, for example, the U.S. Justice Department arrested three ISKP operatives who were in the final throes of executing attacks in New York.^{xxii}

The U.S.’ past actions in Afghanistan was one factor that helped support the rise of Daesh intervention. Despite funding Taliban efforts during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan during the Cold War, the U.S.

⁹ As of March 2019, unlike when I began this research in mid-2018, news sources are beginning to once again look at the ISKP branch as a threat.

¹⁰ Telegram is a communication interface tied directly to a users phone number, with an additional web service, telegram.me, which allows users to open a chat directly with another user by following a URL such as telegram.me/username. Jihadis can share and promote URLs for Telegram channels on Twitter and elsewhere, and provide notifications for new content. Telegram is a cloud-based app, meaning that the content across one user’s devices is synchronized. For more information on the use of Telegram, see Appendix B.

¹¹ See Appendix C for data on IS media output.

later accused the Taliban of harboring Al Qaeda members and invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to remove the Taliban from power. One stage of the fight against the Taliban included arming local militias. One tribe that was provided ammunition, food, and training in late 2009 was in Achin.^{xxiii} This group, the Sepai of the Shinwar, used their newfound power to not only fight the Taliban, but also in an intra-tribal conflict to force land concessions from a rival sub-tribe, the Alisherkhel. This conflict in the Shinwar tribe caused the Alisherkhel to ask Pakistani militant groups for aid. The intra-tribal violence greatly weakened the Shinwari tribe.^{xxiv} When Daesh began making inroads in 2014, there was no organized resistance, but rather more than 13 different armed groups operating in the area, some of whom pledged allegiance to Daesh.^{xxv}

The geography of Afghanistan has further aided ISKP in their recruitment of individuals linked to other jihadi groups. It has been seen since the arrival of ISKP that:

The small foreign and Afghan groups, often lacking fixed loyalties, as well as units belonging to larger networks such as the TTP – which started to disintegrate following the death of its then leader Hakimullah Mehsud in November 2013 – provided a potentially fertile recruitment ground for ISKP. Members of smaller and loosely structured groups are far more accepting of a new, incoming brand than fighters belonging to a powerful and dominant network.^{xxvi}

ISKP is recruiting from not only Afghanistan, but rather, as their very name suggests, from throughout the Khorasan Province. Pakistani militants, for instance, are able to join the group by crossing through the Waziristan region. Additionally, the Pachir wa Agam district in Nangarhar borders the Tora Bora mountains and caves (a historic terrorist hideout), and provides access to the east, west, and north.^{xxvii} It also borders Kurram Agency, which has been a location for Pakistani military installations and training camps.^{xxviii}

While ISKP has footholds in 30 districts, they are strongest in Nangarhar province, in the central-east.^{xxix} Nangarhar is almost entirely Pashtun, making it a natural rendezvous for members of Pashtun-dominated Pakistani militant groups who have pledged allegiance to Daesh, including the Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban, (TTP) and Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT).^{xxx} Further support of terrorist groups in Afghanistan is only partly due to ideological reasons, and is often due to power and material gains. More broadly, if a group can provide any positive attributes for the community, particularly economic incentives, that will also increase their support. In Afghanistan, this is largely the case.

Before the arrival of ISKP, Nangarhar was already in disarray.¹² As reporter Borhan Osman

found:

The political and security situation in Nangarhar has been in consistent decline since late 2011. Political elites have been busy jockeying among themselves for power, leaving the rural population at the mercy of insurgents. Inevitably dragged into power politics, officials in the local administration seems to have been largely paralysed by the never-ceasing competition among the ruling families. The political infighting absorbed the will and energy needed for combating the expanding insurgency.^{xxxii}

While this has been happening, government territorial control has been shrinking since 2013 and the ANSF have been largely on the defensive in districts now controlled by insurgent groups, including Jalalabad, Farah, Kot, Bati Kot, Achin, and Charparhar since 2015.^{13xxxiii} Locals complained about the Daesh fighters, especially as they were much more engaged in criminal activities in cities in Nangarhar than in other provinces (including assassinations, kidnappings, and random murder), but were unable to find who was in control to stem the violence.^{xxxiv} Much like the political reality of the Syrian civil war, the chaos and violence of multiple insurgent groups meant that neither the government nor the Taliban could create a system of control.^{xxxv} Unlike most of Afghanistan, which is controlled by either the government or the Taliban, Nangarhar was a territory in which governance was highly contested and frequently changing hands.¹⁴

Persistence of Terror Groups

Foreign ISKP Fighters

In order to survive, terrorist groups need to fill their ranks and obtain constituent support.^{xxxvi} In Iraq and Syria, Daesh was able to largely rely on foreign fighters who had been radicalized to join their ranks. While some of that same immigration occurs in Afghanistan, Daesh has had to adapt to identify and attract more recruits in their Khorasan Province. While attracting westerners was done largely over

¹² Due to the presence of Daesh and the strategic location of Nangarhar as the main pathway between Afghanistan and Pakistan there is more information available on this province than is typically the case of Afghan provinces.

¹³ Near Nangarhar, these are the districts to the south and east of Jalalabad and along the Spin Ghar mountain range.

¹⁴ See appendix D for more on the Pakistani geographic influence.



social media, by fighters who were mobilized and trained online, recruiting in Afghanistan proved to be more personal.

A sizeable contingent of ISKP fighters are from Central Asia.^{xxxvii} ISKP proudly reports the varied nationalities of its fighters as proof that it is unbound by modern borders.^{xxxviii} They highlight this presence in propaganda films that feature these fighters overseeing executions, reports on their radio in Herati, Badakhshani, or Tajikistani accents and in Urdu, Pashto, Pashai, and Nuristani. They also post pictures on social media of members from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Myanmar, and Gilgit-Baltistan (northern Pakistan).^{xxxix} Uzbek members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have also flocked to ISKP in defiance of the Taliban's nationalism agenda:

The foreign jihadists, although proportionally small in numbers, are a dangerous contribution to the ISKP phenomenon. They are the fighters who have lived in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past decade and a half, and who seem to have gone through an evolution of ideologies and objectives, moving from a struggle to 'liberate' their countries of origin from their 'infidel' governments to a transnational jihad, as manifested by their recent publications. Now, when faced with the stark reality of being unable to 'liberate' anywhere, let alone establish a transnational caliphate in the near future, the aim for many of them has become more reckless and deadly: martyrdom in hijra (away from home), making them potential suicide bombers.^{xl}

The breakdown of traditional power structures and disintegrations of community resilience allows these more extreme trends to withstand smaller numbers if they can reach a critical mass of committed followers.^{xli} Nangarhar was largely abandoned by government security forces by 2014 (allowing ISKP to gain their foothold), and local Taliban were particularly fractured as different individuals fought for power. Civilians reported that violence was increasing while Taliban shadow governors competed for control. As ISKP power grew, some of their number remained within the Taliban to act as spies.^{xlii}

Daesh also aims to bring larger affiliates into its sphere of influence. With its presence in Afghanistan, it has gained fighters and a pledge of allegiance from a faction of the IMU, traditionally an al Qaeda supporter.^{xliii} The son of the founder of IMU moved with hundreds of fighters and their families to Jowzjan in February 2017 to somewhat successfully force the Taliban out.^{xliv} The foreign groups whose members were drawn to ISKP include:

- Al Qaeda (located in Khyber Agency, FATA, and Kunar)
- Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistani
- Lashkar-e Islam (based in Khyber Agency)

- Jamaat ul-Ahrar (Mohman Agency-based militants who broke away from TTP)
- Junund-e Khorasan (another TTP breakaway sect)
- Amr bil ma'ruf Wa Nahi An Al-Munkar (Salafi group in FATA)
- Ansar u-Islam (pro-Pakistani government group)^{xlv}

A 2014 operation by the Pakistani army to remove militants from Khyber chased many into Nangarhar, where others had already been growing their networks.^{xlvi}

Additionally, Pakistani militants crossed the border into Afghanistan, and rather than be concerned, the Afghan government began working with the fighters, hoping to use them against the Pakistani government (according to tribal elders who were asked to shelter these individuals).^{xlvii} These militants made up the majority of the initial ISKP soldiers. Weapons caches were transported throughout the province, and Daesh flags were flown across villages by May 2015. The militants made Mamand the initial ISKP command center, later making it mobile. At first, locals thought this would bring about positive change, as ISKP soldiers didn't require food or shelter from the locals. This changed when ISKP and the Taliban began clashing throughout the province, resulting in attacks that are still ongoing.^{xlviii}

ISKP Gaining Ground: Resentment, Fear, and Economic Incentives

While the Taliban has a localized focus, Daesh aims for a global caliphate. That goal does not, however, make them unaware of local grievances that they can exploit to enhance recruiting. They have been able to recruit Taliban members who felt their organization wasn't extreme or powerful enough, as well as civilians, ex-military, and members of other regional militant groups. Reasons for joining varied amongst the newer recruits, with the primary ones being power (economic and physical) and ideology. This indiscriminate violence on the part of previous Taliban commanders is also, according to conflict scholar Neamat Nojumi, an attempt to return to the less limited targeting practices of the Taliban in the immediate post-American invasion period.^{xlix} Daesh provided Taliban commanders "who either do not want to subordinate themselves to the stricter discipline of the Taliban movement or want to keep their local fiefdoms free of too much outside interference."¹ Appealing to the extremists in Afghanistan did not involve only propaganda that promoted ISKP, but also propaganda criticizing existing extremist groups (the Taliban). Unlike in Iraq or Syria, ISKP had an organized competitor for their recruits, and they had to sow dissent and discord among the Taliban. The Taliban control of eleven districts at the end of 2017

was partially shifted to Daesh control over some of these districts, including some in Nangarhar and Jowzjan.^{li} Yet some recruitment methods from Iraq and Syria (primarily forced conscription) remained constant. One resident of Chaparhar district said that many villagers joined ISKP, either because they were poor and jobless, or because ISKP had managed to deceive them into believing in their version of violent jihad.^{lii} Current Afghan government estimates of total ISKP numbers range from 3,000 to 5,000.^{liii}

ISKP recruitment needs to be seen in light of the demographics of Afghanistan. Nearly half the population is under the age of 15 and over half the population lives below the poverty line.^{liv} As of late 2017, 40 percent of Afghans were unemployed.^{lv} Even of those who are employed, 80 percent are in jobs considered “vulnerable employment” (job insecurity and poor working conditions).^{lvi} The majority of employment is in the agricultural sector, but land size has been decreasing, harming livelihoods.^{lvii} An increasing population has led to increased land fragmentation, so that the average farm size has decreased from 6.7 to 4.9 hectares over the past 10 years.^{lviii} Nangarhar, upon ISKP’s arrival, was a political vacuum: the Taliban and the government forces were at odds, and political elite were too preoccupied with internal power struggles to continually pay attention to the countryside and the growing insurgency there.^{lix}¹⁵ The fraught history between Salafis¹⁶ in Afghanistan and the Taliban meant that once Daesh arrived in Nangarhar, many Salafis quickly pledged their allegiance (which will be discussed further on).

One of ISKP’s messages in Afghanistan has been an attempt to discredit the Taliban as too nationalist, given that their focus is solely Afghanistan and not global.^{lx} The Taliban aims to create an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, which does limit their appeal for other jihadi groups, such as the IMU and TTP. Members of IMU who joined ISKP noted that they found “the Taliban’s statements of non-interference in neighbouring countries as deeply disturbing... For these foreign jihadists, their distant

¹⁵ Without US support, Afghan defense forces became reluctant to leave their own bases, the political alliances between local elite and the governor diminished, and urban calls to end opium cultivation set the urban elite at odds with the rural farmers. (David Mansfield, “The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s Continued Decline into Insurgency, Violence and Widespread Drug Production,” *AREU*, Feb 2016 [<https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/1602E-The-Devil-is-in-the-Details-Nangarhar-continued-decline-into-insurgency.pdf>] 1, 4)

Between 2011-2014, Nangarhar consistently was the district with the most violent crimes, uncertainty amongst its populace about leadership, and a corresponding decrease in government security forces. (“Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?”)

¹⁶ Practitioners of Islam can overall be divided into Shia and Sunni, due to a disagreement a millennia ago over who was meant to be Mohammad’s successor. Salafism is a very conservative branch of Sunni Islam. Within Salafism, only a minority of practitioners are jihadists. They view all those who do not conform to their specific brand of Islam as heretics and infidels, and thus enemies who must be defeated to create their caliphate.



future probably looks more promising with an ally that promises to break down borders, than one they fear may abandon them after victory or a political settlement (ie the Afghan Taliban).^{lxix} ISKP also notes Taliban “alliances” (sometimes simply a lack of violence) towards groups it has branded as *kafir*, particularly Shia.^{lxx} The first governor of the then newly established Khorasan Province, Shaykh Hafidh Said Khan, claimed that the Taliban followed tribal conditions and the wishes of the locals rather than *sharia*. Additionally, he claimed that Taliban members attacked IMU members after they swore allegiance to Daesh.^{lxxi} They were welcomed by the Afghans who follow Ahl al-Hadith, a traditionalist sect of Islam, according to one resident.^{lxxii}

And so ISKP found Afghan nationals who have willingly joined. “ISKP has also released films of uniformed, apparently Afghan teenagers conducting military training, carrying ISKP flags and talking about bringing down the infidel rulers of the world. These youths then call on their cohorts, in Pashto and Dari, to join the global cause. ISKP’s romanticization of living as one of its fighters is unparalleled in the jihadist media in Afghanistan.”^{lxxiii} There has been evidence of educated young people who were drawn in by ISKP media, giving up their studies to join.^{lxxiv} Even one policeman in Jalalabad was interviewed saying that ISKP sermons made him question working for the government rather than them.^{lxxv}

The Afghan groups that joined ISKP include:

- Taliban members (including those under the Quetta Shura, the supreme council of the Taliban who operate the media branch)
- Tora Bora Jihadi Front (officially dismantled and largely incorporated into the Taliban October 2015)
- Salafi groups outside the Taliban
- Siahpushan units (mysterious groups; no one knows if they’re connected to the Taliban, a Salafi network, or are independent)^{lxxvi}

A long history of Salafism in Nangarhar contributed to the locals who joined ISKP, who had long had contentious relations with the local Taliban. It was the defection of many Afghan Taliban members that particularly helped ISKP to gain a foothold by incorporating locals rather than its initial makeup of largely Pakistani militants.^{lxxvii}

While the Salafis, who have influence in the communities in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, have historically worked with the Taliban, this was partly due to a lack of options and simple pragmatism: the Taliban was the insurgent group with the most numbers and the greatest chance of

making a difference. However, the Taliban follows the Hanafi school of jurisprudence.^{17lxx} This is one element in why the relationship between Salafi communities and the Taliban in the southern parts of Nangarhar in particular has remained fraught. Even the non-violent Salafi scholars largely supported ISKP, giving Daesh a local base.^{lxxi18} While local communities are typically hostile to foreign groups, Nangarhar was an area in which there had been multiple local uprisings against the harsh policies of the Taliban.^{lxxii} Of course, once Daesh had control of various districts in Nangarhar as well as elsewhere in Afghanistan, they forced civilians to leave their houses and murdered dozens. As discussed above, the disorganization of this area left it vulnerable to actively recruiting groups like Daesh.^{lxxiii19}

But not all recruitment is ideological. One tribal elder explained: “Poverty is the main reason for young men joining the insurgency, there are no alternatives, their families need to eat,” and others also “indicated that fear and coercion have played an important role in recruitment.”^{lxxiv} Nangarhar, after all, has the lowest per capita availability of land, making even subsistence farming difficult. Where public institutions still exist, they are mired in corruption, further reducing the limited benefits they might provide.^{lxxv}

Thus some join Daesh primarily because of the material rewards: currently, up to \$1000/month and a motorcycle.^{lxxvi} Much of the populace in Nangarhar and other provinces are jobless, a fact which Daesh takes advantage of by broadcasting messages about what Daesh can provide in exchange for loyalty over the radio in Pashto and Dari.^{lxxvii} Not to mention, fighters are often promised a wife.

Many of the Afghan recruits in Nangarhar were originally from Kunar province, where ISKP had set up several recruiting stations. It was again mostly young men who joined, often because of salaries paid in U.S. dollars.^{lxxviii} When some of these men were captured and interviewed, it was found that they could not say even one verse from the Quran. There seemed to be a split between the Pakistani nationals

¹⁷ There are four schools of law in Sunni tradition, and Hanafi is the oldest and most liberal. “Among the Hudud crimes, those crimes against God, blasphemy is not listed by the Hanafis. Hanafis concluded that blasphemy could not be punished by the state. The state should not be involved in deciding God-human relationships. Rather, the state should be concerned only with the violation of human rights within the jurisdiction of the human affairs and human relationships.” (“Hanafi Islam,” *Global Security*, May 2017 [<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-hanafi.htm>].)

¹⁸ “By mid-June 2015, altogether eleven out of the 14 Taleban delgeys (a unit of 20-30 fighters) only from Chaparhar had defected to ISKP... In Bati Kot and Achin districts, more than half of the Taleban groups with a known Salafi ideology defected to ISKP.” (“Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?”)

¹⁹ This occurred primarily in the Shinwari districts, Achin, Deh Bala, and Nazian, and later, to a lesser degree, the Mohmand districts Kot and Bati Kot.



in ISKP who were focused on the mission and its supposedly Islamic origins, while some of the Afghan fighters had been brainwashed into believing ISKP propaganda²⁰ without understanding its Islamic origins.^{lxxix}

Lastly, Daesh also trains dozens of Afghan child soldiers who have been forcefully taken from their homes.^{lxxx} There are also foreign Daesh members whose role is to convince Afghan teenage boys to join their ranks.^{lxxxi} Between the abductions and successful recruiting, there are now over 300 minors being trained by Daesh in Darzab district alone.^{lxxxii,lxxxiii}

The Taliban's Developing Narrative: A "Moderate Force"

In comparison to the dramatic, bloody, and violent messages put out by the Islamic State, groups like al Qaeda and the Taliban have been able to rebrand themselves, to an extent, as "moderate" extremists. Taliban promotional material, often inaccurate or false, has been geared towards improving its image to the West. The Taliban is less prone to extraordinary violence, such as beheading journalists, forcing community elders to sit atop bombs for their execution²¹, or kidnap women for marriages and slavery, but they continue to engage in terror attacks. Women are threatened if they leave the house alone or do not dress in what the Taliban considers "appropriate garb" (completely covered).²² Women may not be taught by male teachers or treated by male doctors. And the Taliban continues to "tax" the communities in which they have power and use those taxes to arm their own soldiers.^{lxxxiv}

There are two positive things to be said about life under the Taliban: first that they now allow international humanitarian workers into territory they control; second, that their justice is swift and is seen as fair compared to the Afghan government. One resident in Nangarhar said that simply to get a case

²⁰ Propaganda in Afghanistan began as early as 2015 with ISKP's initial appearance, distributing leaflets that praised the neighboring groups who (they claimed) had already offered them allegiance, and promising fighters' victory. These types of leaflets quickly began including the brutal acts ISKP committed on Afghan soil. (Sarah Ashraf, *ISIS Khorasan: Presence and Potential in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region*, *Center for Response to Radicalization and Terrorism*, 2017 [<http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HJS-ISIS-Khorasan-Report.pdf>] 5, 7)

²¹ One instance in which this occurred was in a village in Nangarhar. The elders (60-70 years old) had gone to the governor's office to discuss village related matters, and when they returned ISKP officials demanded to know why they had not gone to the IS office. They were sent to an IS court for this infraction, and ultimately forced to go outside and sit atop bombs while they were detonated. (Subject 1)

²² A 2018 Reuters poll found Afghanistan is the second most dangerous country in which to be a woman, topped only by India. It is worth noting that the United States is ranked 10 on that list. ("Afghanistan: Country Summary," *Reuters*, 2018 [<http://poll2018.trust.org/country/?id=Afghanistan>]).



seen by the official judicial system someone must be bribed, and in order to win a case, the bribe must be even greater. Facts are therefore not determinative of success in court. This source alleges that people living in contested areas prefer to settle disagreements through the Taliban rather than official channels.^{lxxxv} Various outlets have reported that the Taliban is increasing service provision in the areas they govern.^{lxxxvi} One report from which much of this information stems from was released in June 2018. It is not clear how accurate that report is, versus how much is simply created to appeal to western audiences.

By autumn 2018, NATO and BBC reports suggested that the Taliban had influence or control over nearly half the districts in the country. The withdrawal of U.S. troops and the U.S. recommendations that the Afghan National Army (ANA) focus on urban areas led to both the U.S. and ANA largely abandoning rural areas, and the Taliban stepping in and increasing service provision in those same areas.^{23lxxxvii} Interviews with over 160 Taliban fighters, officials, and some civilians, found that:

Taliban governance is more coherent than ever before; high-level commissions govern sectors such as finance, health, education, justice and taxation, with clear chains of command and policies from the leadership based in Pakistan down to villages in Afghanistan. Where the government and aid agencies provide public goods and services, the Taliban coopt and control them. Health and education in Taliban areas are a hybrid of NGO and state-provided services, operating according to Taliban rules. The Taliban also regulate utilities and communications, collecting on the bills of the state electricity company in at least eight of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and controlling around a quarter of the country's mobile phone coverage. Justice provision has also become increasingly far-reaching. Taliban taxes either coopt Islamic finance concepts or mimic official state systems.^{lxxxviii}

Recently, instead of burning down schools as they did previously, the Taliban have begun to operate schools, maintaining strict control over the type of educational information allowed, often using Taliban ideology as the basis for learning.^{lxxxix} They now monitor hospitals and schools requiring that doctors and teachers arrive and perform their duties.^{xc} Additionally, they have begun to allow ethnic minorities to play a larger role in their organization.^{xcii}

²³ NATO estimates put Taliban control at 14 percent, while the BBC says they are "openly active" in 70 percent of the country. (Ashley Jackson, "The Taliban's Fight for Hearts and Minds")



These moves are a new direction for the Taliban. By illustrating their ability to effectively govern and their willingness to minimize brutality, there is a greater chance that Western countries like the U.S. will be willing to include them in negotiations over future peace deals.

In fact, the Taliban may be learning more from the West than it at first appears: these claims of a new direction may be overstated and simply western-oriented propaganda.

Despite claiming to support education for all, girls who have reached puberty are strongly pressured by Taliban edicts to end their education. The Taliban mandate that girls and boys be educated separately, and girls be educated by women. As of June 2018 there was not a single official girl's school functioning.^{xcii} One report says that "Taliban officials are eager to emphasize the degree to which they work with the Ministry of Education."^{xciii} Perhaps Taliban officials are eager to emphasize it, but a source in Nangarhar described having traveled to nearly all provinces in the country for his work and reported that the Taliban are not working to provide education in any areas they govern.^{xciv} No one seems to disagree that women are not allowed in these schools. The report qualifies this by saying that the Taliban suggest they support education for all, but have additional rules for women to be educated:

Any girls' school must have a separate building, a perimeter wall, female teachers and a means of transporting the girls to and from school. Additional measures may also apply, such as requirements that girls must not wear school uniform and must wear a burka or chador to school, not carry cell phones or be educated in the mosque or madrassa instead of an official school. This research could not identify a single girls' secondary school open in an area of heavy Taliban influence or control.^{xcv}

Further, one Nangarhar resident illustrated further reason to doubt the Taliban's promise of education for all. During one monitoring trip, the Taliban threatened the women who wanted education at a specifically female center, and negotiations to reopen the center had to go from the community leaders all the way to the Taliban's headquarters in Quetta, Pakistan. The following day one of the delegation members' car was blown up.^{xcvi}

The same source confirmed that women are not allowed outside the home without a male guardian, and have no employment opportunities. Additionally, while claiming to allow international NGOs who can provide education services into their areas, the Taliban restricts the educational support to boys and men and does not provide additional funds. They also do not provide the health services they claim to—the only "social service" they fulfill is justice in disputes.^{xcvii} This source commented: "the

only people happy under the Taliban are the warlords, criminals, mafias, and those who benefit from drugs and minerals, they're the only ones who support the Taliban."^{xcviii}

A Key Economic Incentive of the Taliban

While the Taliban is not the official governing body, as mentioned above, it holds control over vast swathes of the country. Its power comes from, in part, its willingness to permit poppy farming.

Poppy farming, prevalent and popular, is also officially illegal according to the government. The Taliban tolerates it. Those villages that primarily farm poppy increasingly feel that the government does not have control over their village, and that they are more unsafe than those villages which do experience government control. One 2017 study was done on farming in an opium-dominated sector in Afghanistan by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.²⁴ The study surveyed all provinces and a total of 1417 villages in a nationally representative sample by population and location. It was found that of the heads of villages, 37 percent said their village was not under government control, and 24 percent said their village was not safe.^{xcix} When we look at the data regarding villages that use poppy farming as a primary way of making enough to survive right now in rural areas, those numbers increase to 67 percent and 44 percent respectively.^c

It is worth noting that Afghans are still most confident in their religious leaders (67.3 percent), followed by the media (65.7 percent) and community shuras/jirgas (65.7 percent), and lastly the National Unity Government municipal government (56.2 percent).^{ci} That said, 61.3 percent believe the country is going in the wrong direction, a percentage that has been increasing, and 81.5 percent think corruption is still a major problem.²⁵ For some, the Taliban fulfill the role of religious leaders—but that is the rural minority. Nonetheless, the trust in local government and distrust of outside forces exemplifies how difficult it will be to create a single successfully national plan.

²⁴ For an explanation of the history and importance of opium farming in Afghanistan, see Appendix E.

²⁵ See Appendix F.



Treatment of Afghan Civilians

ISKP sow's terror and uncertainty wherever it spreads its reach, and decreases the ability of those within its territory to make money through poppy farming and, due to increased fear of travel (i.e., to markets in which one might sell other goods), other crops as well. While there are Afghans who willingly joined the group, the majority do not appreciate their presence. Compared to the Taliban, the primary impact of Daesh presence is that civilians are less safe from violence. For instance, the Taliban and the Afghan government agreed to a temporary ceasefire at the end of Ramadan in 2018. During the following days of celebration, Eid, Daesh executed a suicide attack at a gathering between the two groups celebrating the ceasefire in which 25 people were killed and an additional 54 were wounded.^{cii} In a fight between three different groups, most civilians cannot necessarily make choices based on their ideals, but rather must choose their path based on which will protect them and their families, physically and economically.

The violence as well as ISKP's anti-nationalist message have turned much of the local population against them. Anyone connected to the government or the Taliban, as previously discussed, would be summarily executed in Daesh controlled areas. Thus, as ISKP territory grew in 2015 and 2016, thousands of IDPs fled to Jalalabad, leaving behind houses burned to the ground.^{ciii} One story I was told exemplifies the random violence that was seen throughout Iraq and Syria as well: a man had five daughters before his wife gave birth to a boy. They celebrated the birth, which drew the attention of Daesh fighters. The fighters asked what was happening, and upon being told, asked the man to bring the newborn baby out for the leaders to see. There they cut the child into pieces in front of his father.^{civ} These stories of horrifying violence spread and create deep fear.

Daesh quickly began going from house to house to find young women and girls whom they can force into marriage, sometimes using threats of violence against other family members as an added push factor.^{cv} Families in Dih Bala and Kot, for instance, were told after their village was taken by ISKP to

²⁶ See Appendix G.



raise a white flag over their house for each daughter, and a red flag for each widow.^{27cvi} These women were now to be the wives of Daesh fighters.

It is also worth noting that unlike the Taliban, who focus their attacks primarily on government officials (particularly as they try to work through the peace process), ISKP attacks civilians who don't conform to their beliefs.^{cvi} They are, as discussed, willing to kidnap and rape women as wives for their soldiers, and are willing to kill the elderly and children. Locals with any connection to the Taliban or the government can leave their homes or die, and other civilians can either flee or live under the repressive and harsh system through which Daesh metes out violence.

Attempting to Sow Sectarian Violence

One of the reasons the Taliban has been seen as preferable by many Afghans to ISKP is that it is comprised of Afghans, with a focus on the country of Afghanistan. Many Afghans are suspicious of outsiders and of international players generally. The Taliban is not focused on international fighting, but is focused entirely within Afghanistan's borders.

One of the Islamic State's tenets is sectarianism: they kill or enslave all those who do not follow their very narrow interpretation of Islam. But this sectarianism has not been as present in Afghanistan as it has in other countries Daesh has fought in. As in many Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries, there have historically been tensions between the Sunni and Shiite populations. The Shia have been discriminated against by the government in the past (particularly the 1970s). But the fighting of the 1990s saw Shiite and Sunni groups often working together to fight other groups.^{cvi} This coexistence is a far cry from the path ISKP has been taking, concentrating on bombing and attacking Shia gatherings and individuals. While these attacks are continuing, there does not yet appear to be evidence of the Sunni majority escalating the sectarian violence. Both the Afghan security forces and the Taliban have previously spoken out against sectarianism, and religious leaders have also emphasized the importance of

²⁷ According to a source in Nangarhar, the flags for houses with single women were green. It is possible this depends on the district. (Source 2)

coexistence as part of social cohesion.^{cxix} It would be a challenge for ISKP to reverse the narrative and promote extensive sectarian violence.

In short, unlike the Taliban, ISKP shows no interest in negotiating a more moderate version of their positions to be “at the table” in the ongoing peace talks.

Electoral Violence ²⁸

Daesh has declared war on “the religion of democracy.” In a recent edition of their newsletter, *Al-Naba*, they stated that they:

will continue to prevent the elections by any means, as it has always done. It will target: the temples of the religion of democracy, in which its followers recognize their enslavement to the *tawaghit* [illegitimate rulers] who legislate without God; the places where *tawaghit* are election; the places of *al-tashri* [legislation] without God; and the places of *al-hukm* [governance, administration] other than by what God has revealed.^{cx}

It should be unsurprising, then, that Daesh has been consistently attacking election facilities and workers. These particular attacks began in early 2018.^{cxii} They were responsible for some of the largest attacks on voting centers, including one in April 2018 that killed over 60 and injured over 130 in Kabul, as well as attacks on centers in Nangarhar and Badghis.^{cxiii} The Taliban was also conducting attacks on election facilities in early 2018, after “vowing to do everything in its power to block the vote, which the group called an ‘American conspiracy to further justify the foreign occupation.’”^{cxiiii} Both group’s attacks on election facilities impeded the democratic process and sowed fear amongst the populace.

The 2018 elections were postponed multiple times, and finally took place in October. The process of democratization has been a difficult one in Afghanistan, and one that is yet not successful. 43 percent of election centers used in the 2018 elections were considered to be under medium to high security threats.^{cxiv} “The numerous delays [of parliamentary elections], deteriorating security situation, and rapidly worsening state of governance caused by the disagreements between the two leaders and the rampant corruption intensified the decline of the public faith in the government.”^{cxv} It is against this backdrop, with a country effectively divided between the government and the Taliban, that the 2018 parliamentary elections occurred. Through continued attacks and messages meant to frighten people out of voting,

²⁸ See Appendix H.

Daesh may have helped minimize the number of people who were able to go to the polls. Their attacks tended to be more deadly and less discriminate than those of the Taliban.

Daesh attacks on voting registration centers, ID distribution centers, and similar locations have killed several hundred civilians and security personnel.^{cxvi} Daesh has also been targeting in particular centers in Hazara and Shia neighborhoods, trying to emphasize the link between ethnic violence and political process.^{cxvii} Between Daesh and the Taliban, at least ten candidates were killed before the elections, one third of voting centers were closed due to fear of violence, and 54,000 security personnel had to be deployed.^{29cxviii} The violence surrounding the elections made civilians less likely to vote, particularly if they had to travel far and through dangerous spaces to reach a voting center. Such reticence is particularly troubling in Afghanistan, in which the limited support for and belief in the official government can already provide obstacles to voter turnout.³⁰

Psychological and Economic Consequences

Additional Psychological Impact of ISKP ³¹

At the same time as attacking election facilities, Daesh was also targeting their local opposition. They have been killing tribal elders and leaders since 2016.^{cxix} Illustrative of their tactics since inception, Daesh does not discriminate in killings or intimidation tactics, unlike the Taliban, who began limiting who they targeted in recent years, excluding some teachers, healthcare workers, and journalists.^{cxx} Understanding the critical role that elders play in a tribal society, particularly in the rural parts of Afghanistan, Daesh fighters slaughter them in dramatically horrific ways, as well as using beheadings and stonings. ISKP has not been seeking support from community elders to gain legitimacy, believing in their superiority and ability to intimidate civilians into compliance, this use of violence has been used to

²⁹ The one third of polling centers being closed has increased from a previous maximum of 10 percent.

³⁰ This is in no way meant to minimize the importance of the reported 45% voter turnout for the parliamentary elections, even if there are some discrepancies in the precise amount. (Shadi Kahn Saif, "Voting for landmark Afghan parliament polls concludes," Oct 21 2018 [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/voting-for-landmark-afghan-parliament-polls-concludes/1288710>]).

³¹ Much of the psychological impact has already been discussed; here I am simply presenting additional examples.



intimidate whole communities.^{cxix} In one attack in the Achin district in Nangarhar, similar to an attack described above in Chaparhar, community elders were blindfolded and led to sit above holes filled with explosives that were then detonated while other civilians were forced to watch.^{cxxii} Additionally, ISKP fighters view any communication with Afghan police or government as a sign of collaboration with an illegitimate governing body, which, for them, has been enough to warrant death. Again, these practices serve to terrify entire communities. In Jalalabad, one man called a friend of his on personal business, but the friend worked for the police. The man who made the call was publicly executed to show the punishment for associating with police and government.^{cxxiii}

Economic Consequences of ISKP and the Taliban

The impact of ISKP and the Taliban is more complex than terrifying communities for fear of their physical safety: the conflict has had an economic impact as well. There is a drought throughout parts of Afghanistan, including Nangarhar.^{cxxiv} The fighting has only made the impact of this drought worse, and has made it harder both for farmers to reach markets and for international efforts to deliver aid.^{cxxv} Farmers, in response, are prioritizing poppies over food goods, as the buyers of poppies are willing to travel to purchase them, lessening the farmers' time spent on dangerous roads.^{cxxvi} This in turn makes the farmers increasingly dependent on farming poppies, while food shortages rise—and only the Taliban allow for poppy farming.

Locals in Nangarhar, though most are quite opposed to Daesh presence in their province, are also concerned about what will happen if and when they are eradicated. The fight in this province is led in part by local powerbrokers who have received state support in the form of weapons to create militias.^{cxxvii} These militias have proved more successful than ANSF units in recapturing territory. Years of militia forces in Afghanistan (often with foreign, specifically U.S., backing) has led to trepidation about their accountability, local 'buy-in' or lack thereof, impact on local tribal balance of power, how it impacts the powerbrokers who started it, and what the long term negative consequences are.^{cxxviii} Disagreements are already forming about which tribes are contributing men to the militias and which aren't. The people here have already seen unstable tribal relations allow Daesh to enter; they know what can happen.

There is also the issue of Daesh and poppy farming. Unlike the Taliban, who actively profit from these ventures and protect the right of farmers to grow opium, Daesh is strictly against drug trafficking. The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit has found that in the parts of Nangarhar in which poppy farming is most prolific, Daesh is not only not utilizing it for funding, but also is eradicating the existing fields and closed a major drug bazaar.^{cxxxix} They have captured territory in Nangarhar and other provinces that are important stops on the ancient trade route the Silk Road. But rather than profiting from opium as the Taliban does, Daesh “has prohibited opium poppy cultivation both on grounds of ideological purity the strategic goal of ensuring that the only employment available to local men is as IS [Islamic State] foot soldiers.”^{cxxx} Daesh considers opium to be *haram* (prohibited under Islam), and have been telling farmers to find other cash crops as they destroy poppy fields.^{cxxxi} But poppy is the fastest and most popular cash crop, and options like wheat or barley do not yield the same near immediate result.

The lack of employment opportunities is not only a reason that young men join ISKP, but a reason that they join the Taliban as well (though it is less well paid).^{cxxxii} Simply put, the Taliban allows opium farming. The government does not allow opium farming and has extensive laws regarding mine usage.^{cxxxiii} The Taliban has much looser laws than ISKP regarding mines and precious minerals found within them. Certainly, there are those who join because they want to live in a place of “pure Islam,” unlike the cities which they view as infested with foreign nationals and various *haram* practices, but it would be a mistake to say that this is the only reason.

International Impact

International Response: Russia and Pakistan

Instability in Afghanistan has always had implications for Pakistan. TTP and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) both use money earned from the drug trade based in Nangarhar.³² Now that ISKP controls much of the rural parts of the territory, they needed to establish a working relationship.^{cxxxiv}

³² TTP is the Taliban movement in Pakistan. Like the Afghan Taliban they are primarily Pashtun, but have a volatile relationship with the Afghan Taliban. The ISI is the main intelligence agency in Pakistan, which has long been associated with supporting regional terrorist groups.

Former Daesh fighters have reported that they were given weapons by Pakistanis who encouraged them to fight the Afghan government.^{cxxxv} The German special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Bernd Mutzelburg, suggested there is some truth to the rumors that Pakistani militants have been crossing the Durand line to join up with ISKP and further destabilize Afghanistan.^{cxxxvi} As he puts it:

Due to the inability of the Pakistani state to provide even an elementary education to each and every child, you have had over the last years this emergence of a Saudi—and therefore Wahhabi—financed madrasas all over Pakistan. Some people are saying that with Saudi money, more than 40,000 madrasas, had been established many of them are following the very traditional Salafist interpretation of Islam. If you assume that only 1/10th or so of these 40,000 of madrasas is training future terrorists, you know, then you can imagine the dimension of the threat. This is also, I think, part of the nurturing source for the IS in Pakistan, which is then also directed towards Afghanistan.^{cxxxvii}

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is more fraught than ever. The police chief of Nangarhar claimed that the ISI has been leading Daesh in that province, and that 90 percent of the Daesh fighters are Pakistani.^{cxxxviii} The Afghan Minister of Interior added that Pakistan is providing Daesh the same safe havens they afford to al Qaeda and the Taliban.^{cxxxix} Former President Hamid Karzai has also stated that if Daesh rises in Afghanistan, it will be due to a foreign-backed force who wants to destabilize the region, likely China, Russia, or another country in Central Asia.^{cxl} Whether or not this is true, this claim indicates the fear with which Daesh has infected a country with already limited allies.

At the same time, off the record Afghan government officials have stated that Pakistani militants in TTP have been allowed free movement and treatment in government hospitals in reaction to Pakistan's support of the Afghan Taliban.^{cxli} These militants increasingly ignored the commands of central TTP, and many of them became fighters for ISKP by summer of 2015.^{cxlii}

Public fear of ISKP in Afghanistan allows Russia room to maneuver politically. For several years, Russia has been positioning itself as a mediator in Afghanistan. In December 2016 Moscow hosted conferences about diplomatic talks between the Taliban and the ANG, and has offered to host negotiations several times in 2018.^{cxliii} The U.S. has failed to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan for nearly two decades, and now Russia is attempting to accomplish what the U.S. could not, from their role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table to taking an active function as the protector for Central Asia against Daesh. Either accomplishment would give President Putin leverage over future negotiations.^{cxliv} Russia faces its own threat of growing jihadism along its borders and its Central Asian

sphere of influence, including in Tajikistan. But the public fear of terrorism is not only used to inspire counterterrorist action but also to back political decisions.³³

Russia's interest in ISKP is a stepping stone to greater influence in the region.

Russia's frequent exaggerations of the Islamic State's presence in Afghanistan are closely intertwined with Russian President Vladimir Putin's broader internal consolidation and foreign policy objectives. Russian policymakers have emphasized the ISIS threat to unite anti-Western nationalists around Russia's expanded diplomatic involvement in Afghanistan, strengthen Moscow's alliances with Central Asian countries, and establish common ground with Pakistan on the resolution of Afghanistan's political crisis.^{cxlv}

Russian officials claim that the lack of U.S. action against Daesh in Afghanistan since the "Mother of all bombs" in April 2017 is a sign of American complacency. Central Asian countries view Daesh presence in Afghanistan as a serious threat against which to rally public support, and part of Russia's campaign is to increase its ties with these countries in their fight.^{cxlvi}

Since ISKP and the Taliban began struggling, shortly after the appearance of the Khorasan branch of Daesh the Taliban and Russia have grown closer. Russia has grown increasingly wary of the presence of jihadists in the Caucasus. In 2016, the then special envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, stated: "Taliban interests objectively coincide with ours."^{cxlvii} Yet Russia and other concerned regional parties (China and Pakistan) have not worked with the national Afghan government on this issue. Rather, it was only Russia, China, and Pakistan that began meeting in Moscow in 2016 to discuss the ISKP threat and how to respond.^{cxlviii} Russia has provided material aid and intelligence, and we are now facing a situation in which the Taliban may become a legitimate political party in Afghanistan. Though Russia and the Taliban have a fraught history, closer relations between the Kremlin and the Taliban could provide Russia with an ally about to gain extensive power within Afghanistan.

³³ Russia has notably been partnering with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. Russia frames itself as "a benevolent protector of Central Asian countries against terrorism rather than as a hegemonic actor. As many Central Asian governments continue to view the securitization of Islamic extremism as a useful tool for regime consolidation, Moscow is likely to be able to use its anti-ISIS efforts in Afghanistan to bolster the effectiveness of its regional alliances." Russia is positioning itself as the answer to increasing jihadism with countries that have a historically tense relationship with the U.S., creating stronger alliances that shift the global political calculus. (Samuel Ramani, "Why Russia Exaggerates the Islamic State Presence in Afghanistan")

International Response: the U.S.

The U.S. under President Trump declared a “fight and win” strategy. This increase in kinetic strategies combined with a declaration to end any nation building efforts has thus far only led to less transparency, as the U.S. military stopped publishing reports about the insurgent control of territory, Afghan troop strength, and casualty numbers.^{cxlix} Trump ordered additional troops to Afghanistan and increased airstrikes to their highest level since 2010. To date the strategies have resulted in continued security incidents, loss of territorial control, and heightened Afghan force casualties.^{cl}

The U.S. is working with both the Afghan government and local militias to fight Daesh.^{cli} Historically, U.S. involvement in areas of Afghanistan has led to strengthening the Taliban and the creation of ISKP, as well as the erosion of intra-tribal solidarity.^{clii} Afghanistan began requesting help from Russia in 2015, showing an increased reliance on that country.^{cliii} Neighboring Tajikistan has expressed the desire for Russian servicemen to remain and prevent the spread of Daesh.^{cliv}

The U.S. statements have been contradictory. Early this year: “Gen. Votel expressed his satisfaction with the security situation in Nangarhar and hailed the governor’s efforts in prevention of land grabbing and corruption.”^{clv} That quote is from January 20, 2019. It took only one month for his opinion to change, as he admitted in February 2019 that “They [ISKP] represent a very sophisticated and dangerous threat that we have to stay focused on.”^{clvi} That U.S. officials are now willing to acknowledge the group’s potential is a sign of how serious their presence is. One official has been quoted as saying, “They are closest to having the capacity to attack the homeland from Afghanistan.”^{clvii} And yet the public narrative is still that the U.S. and the Taliban have made enormous progress in both their negotiations and in their combined forces attacking ISKP. According to a UN report, the Taliban has caused the most civilian casualties in 2018, with ISKP at a close second with 2,181 casualties (118 percent increase from the previous year).^{clviii}

Despite the clear, continuing instability on the ground, the U.S. is publically discussing making the Taliban part of the peace plan and considering their potential withdrawal a “win.” Understanding the complex situation between the Taliban, ISKP, and the national government as political forces within the provinces, it is not clear what kind of structures could be employed to improve local security. As one journalist noted: “The United States never deployed an effective counterinsurgency strategy because it

didn't have one. Knowing how to kill people is far from sufficient to defeat insurgencies... The Taliban can still be defeated after the peace agreement is reached and U.S. forces have withdrawn, but the United States now seems too exhausted—and still too dumb—to get the job done.”^{clix} Without an effective counterinsurgency strategy and billions of dollars spent, it is not clear how any plan will protect the Afghan civilians.

Additionally, withdrawing and declaring the situation satisfactory ignores the additional problems the national government has raised. President Ghani has reported that 21 international terrorist groups operate within Afghanistan.^{clx} The Taliban has pledged to remove these from the country, while the government has been unable to do so. ISKP in particular has defeated both Taliban and government forces in districts in Nangarhar and elsewhere. Why would this necessarily change when the Taliban is considered a political party? There is no indication that years of animosity between their soldiers and the ANA would decrease enough to allow them to successfully work together.

Furthermore, for any intelligent plan there must be an understanding of how these groups are holding power in various provinces across the country. It is not out of the realm of possibility that the Taliban could become an official governing body; terrorist groups have transformed in this way multiple times throughout the 20th century. Even if some core Taliban branch becomes more moderate and develops into what we consider a traditional political party, we will still need to understand how to weaken other terrorist groups in the area. We don't know which direction the Taliban will take, but if it is steps towards legitimacy, they and other international forces will need to understand how to eliminate other terror groups. Such understanding is impossible without really examining local politics, ideology, economics, and security.

Long Term: Controlling a Growing Threat

One aspect of the U.S.' longstanding involvement in Afghanistan has been repeated attempts to create a western-style democracy. While some of the structures are in place (i.e., a nominal government and constitution), there is no hope for an American style democratic government while the power systems in place are so fractured. With the a citizenry split into such minute but definite groups based on ethnicity and location, the president who might be chosen by those living in Kabul or Jalalabad is not necessarily

one who would be respected by or ready to represent those living near FATA or in the far west.³⁴ What seems more essential is creating an environment and civil society structures that lessen violence and protect human rights.

The Taliban ascendancy to a legitimate negotiating party remains problematic. The agreements the Taliban are negotiating in the deal with the U.S. are not easily enforceable. They unrealistically claim that they will not allow terrorists to have safe haven on Afghan soil. As reporter Mujib Mashal put it: “The details of enforcing the Taliban’s pledge to prevent international terrorists such as Al Qaeda from using Afghan soil as a launching pad for attacks again also remained unclear.”^{clxi} Meanwhile, the Taliban connection with and support from Russia, as demonstrated by attending peace talks without the ANG in Moscow, indicates the deep Russian influence over Afghanistan and Central Asia.^{clxii}

At the same time, the Islamic State is far from defeated. Losing territory means they have changed their tactics, not that their goals or their fighters have retired. As one reporter described it: “a) ISIS is not only adapting to its new situation but also transforming into a hydra-like organization, reinforcing its transnational configuration; b) ISIS, al-Qaeda and sister Salafi-jihadi organizations are cooperating on attacking the West.”^{clxiii}

And the Taliban and ISKP are not the only options for young radicals. Hizb ut-Tahrir, like Daesh, aims for a global caliphate; Jamiat-e Eslah was inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e Islami in Pakistan and aims to “Islamize” all aspects of modern life; Hezb-e Islami signed a peace deal with the Afghan government; and there are more generally an increased number of Salafis turning to Wahhabism.^{clxiv} There are additionally Sunni groups include Tablighi Jamaat, Anjuman-e Dini Farhang-e Imam Ghazali, and Majma’a-e Ihyay-e Sunnat which are spread throughout mosques and educational centers.^{clxv}

I began by exploring further some of the questions that terrorism experts have noted are under researched, including the impact of terrorism on the economics and psychology of local populations. The preliminary results I have found suggest that groups like the Taliban and ISKP can gain control through a

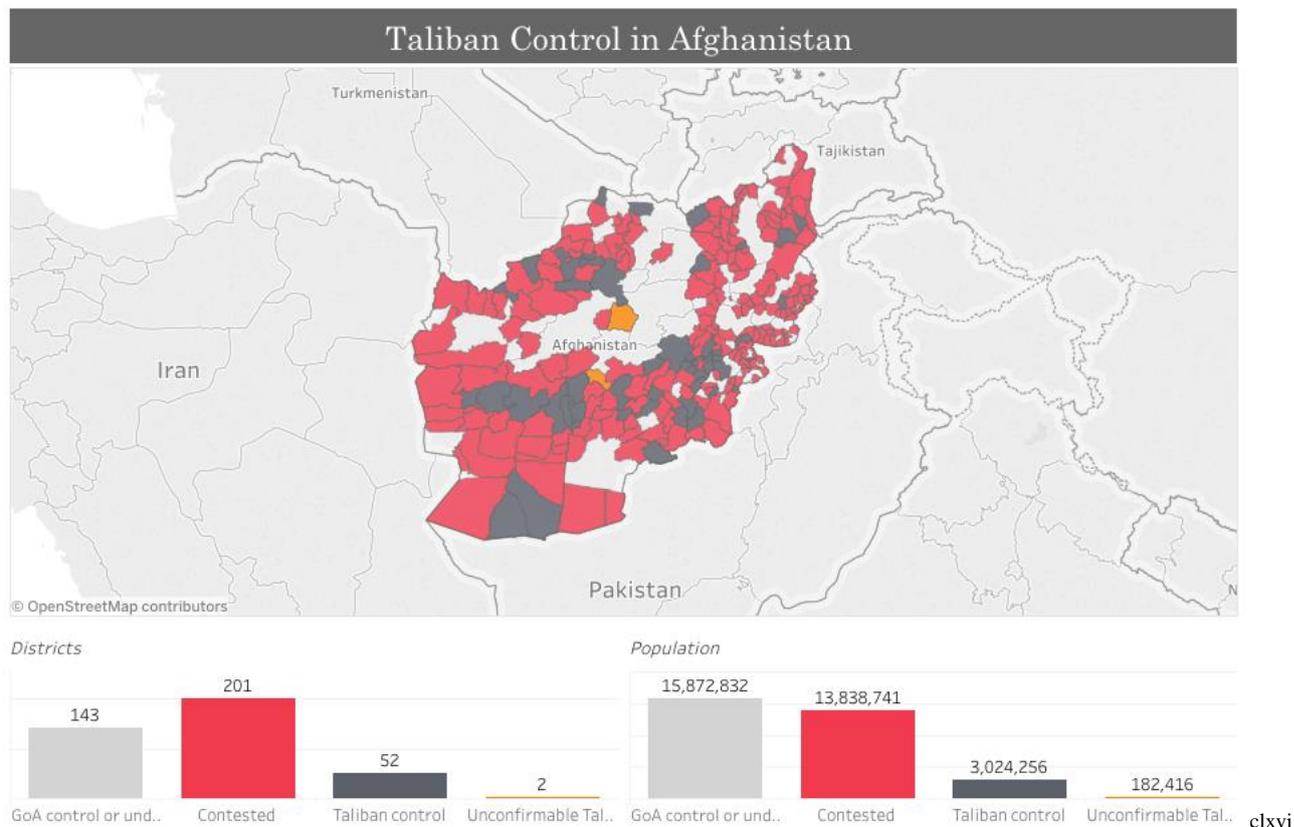
³⁴ One Jalalabad resident spoke highly of the government improvements in the major cities, but seemed unwilling to discuss the issues of Taliban or IS control beyond the urban centers, except to compare it negatively to the official governance. (Subject 1)

combination of misleading messaging, economic incentives, and fear of violence, then maintain power bases through the same tactics. Dangerously, the extremely violent groups like ISKP serve to make the Taliban appear more moderate, and reframe a terrorist group into a political party.

The United States is holding peace talks with the Taliban, who are offering unenforceable promises. If the U.S. wants to address the Taliban as a fellow political body, then it needs to hold it to the standards of a governing party. Downplaying the ongoing violence in order to exit an apparently unwinnable war and comparing one organization to another whose brutality seems currently unmatched are not the basis for sound policy decisions. The complexity of the social governing structures and the multiple players involved, including international interests, mean that creating a successful "peace" plan will also require ongoing monitoring and assessment with real time adjustments and modifications. If the parties lack the ongoing on the ground intelligence from multiple sources around the country, the very necessary monitoring and adjustment of any plan will be nearly impossible - and no plan will be successful in the long run without being able to accommodate on the ground development and changes. The evidence I have found indicates that a more thorough understanding of how these groups became ingrained, why the populace is still responding to them, and how are they are learning and adapting would all be better uses of time, money, and human resources than a simple and unchanging kinetic response. The states must understand how real peoples lives are being impacted by the Taliban and ISKP, particularly in terms of the ability to earn a living or exist free from constant fear. The evidence discussed above demonstrates the kinds of circumstances players must understand and account for in any future potential plan.

Appendices

A: map of insurgent vs government control, December 2018



clxvi

B: Telegram

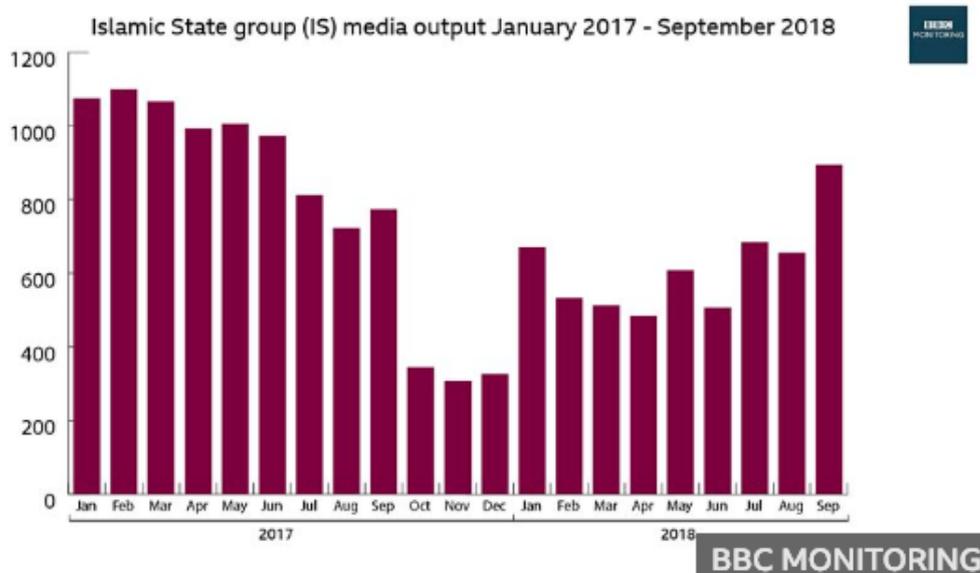
Telegram in particular has been critical for Daesh:

The relative anonymity makes it harder to identify and track followers of a certain channel for a number of reasons: First, on a social network such as Twitter, following and follower lists are public, and therefore pro-ISIS accounts can be cross-referenced by checking the accounts that they follow and those that follow them. Second, Telegram users can forward content they find on the channel to other Telegram users, thus heightening the sharing and dissemination of jihadi content. Third, messages on the channels are transmitted in a single direction, and no reverse interaction from channel subscribers to the broadcaster is possible. This eliminates the possibility of counter-messaging and the disruption of a content's feed, both of which are used on Twitter as a strategy to counter extremist propaganda. Finally, Telegram provides client-server/server-client encryption as a default option, which, in theory, adds security to the entire interaction.^{clxvii}

Telegram also offers "Secret Chat," which uses end-to-end encryption, and offers features like message self-destruct.^{clxviii} Additionally, Telegram "has been much slower than other companies to develop and implement ToS that target jihadi exploitation of file-sharing services. Telegram is generally reluctant to regulate extremist content on its platform, citing concerns about free speech and claiming that

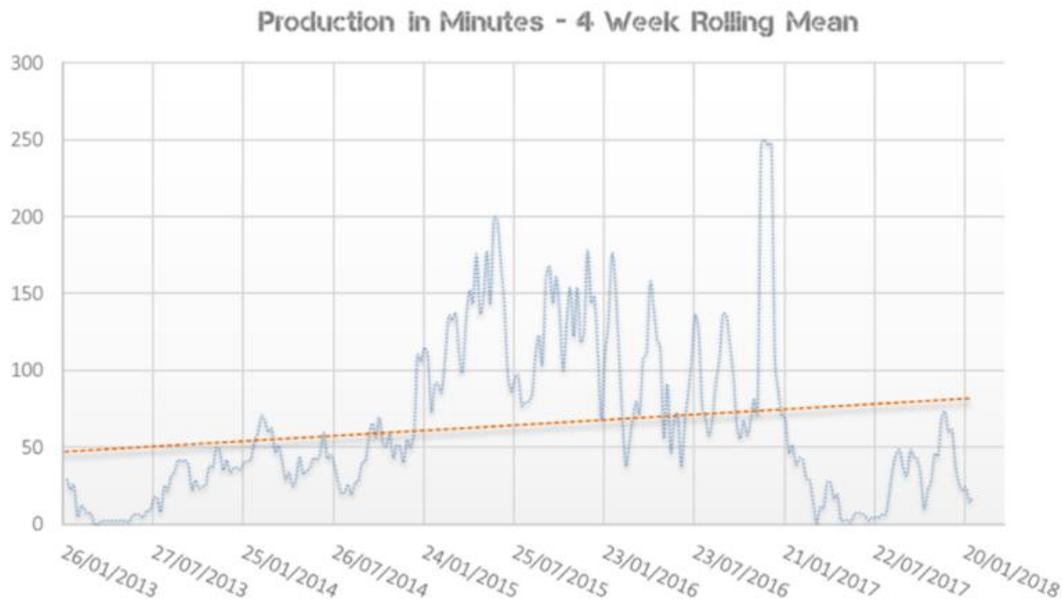
governments are inflating the threat of online extremist content.”^{clxix} The 2015 Paris, 2016 Brussels, 2016 Berlin, and 2017 Istanbul attacks were all organized over Telegram.^{clxx} It is worth noting that part of the discrepancy in the apparent messaging Daesh produces in English and the full amount of content they release is due to different focuses. The English material is no longer focused solely on foreign fighter recruitment, but instead on attacks in one’s homeland. Thus the instructions provided are more limited and focus on low-tech attacks (ie, stabbings, vehicular assaults, etc).^{clxxi} Researchers went through 98 channels in 2017 that produced instructional material in English, but this was only 16.2 percent of the channels that the Program on Extremism discovered, illustrating the proportion of English language material.^{clxxii}

C: Daesh media output



IS media output dropped following loss of Raqqa in Oct 2017 but recovered in later months

clxxiii



If you take a view of ISIS from 2013 to present the trend in production is up, not sharp decline.

clxxiv

D: Nangarhar as an ideal base for expansion

The oft contested Durand Line, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, runs along the one edge of Nangarhar province. The territory along the Durand line is host to lengthy disagreements between the two countries over the territory. The line was initially been drawn up when India was British territory, and after independence, the tribal areas technically became independent once again.^{clxxv} Pakistan made agreements with these tribes to control the territory but let them exist as semi-sovereign independent territories.^{clxxvi} Nevertheless, Afghanistan had hoped to reclaim these territories, and thus began a series of skirmishes, import/export delays, calls for Pashtun independence, and so on. But it remains an area that is easy to cross without documentation or government attention, and the lack of governance has been taken advantage of by militants.^{clxxvii} Additionally, “the province borders the militancy-ripe tribal areas of Pakistani and military operations by the Pakistani army which pushed militants from FATA into Nangarhar. There are a number of unofficial crossing points, not controlled by either government, many of them open year-round, which makes Nangarhar an easily accessible refuge for Pakistani militants.”^{clxxviii} Members of the TTP who fled military operations were able to cross the Durand line, posing as refugees, and join Daesh in Afghanistan.^{clxxix} There are not current estimates of additional Pakistani members, but Afghan government sources estimated their number to be over 2,000 in 2015.^{clxxx}

The diversity of unaffiliated armed groups who could benefit from the recognition and resources of a group like Daesh provided easy recruits.

The Pashtun tribes who live in the mountains along the Durand line are historically poverty stricken yet resilient, and proud of their independence.^{clxxxix} They also have their own rule of law (*Pushtunwali*) with two critical concepts: *melmastia*, and its extension, *nanawati*. *Melmastia* requires all people to provide hospitality and protection to travelers, while *nanawati* goes further to require all people to provide hospitality and protection to fugitives as well, even if they are one's bitter enemies.^{clxxxii} Additionally, many of the tribes have vendettas against each other that are quite long-lasting, which keeps them from being unified.^{clxxxiii} This is in addition to their diversity as a people; individuals typically identify themselves by where they are born or their tribe or clan, not by their ethnicity.^{clxxxiv}

This is not to mention that over 2500 Central Asians were previously recruited as foreign fighters for Iraq and Syria—and Daesh is now telling its followers to travel to the Khorasan.^{clxxxv} This is now one of their bases, and since at least March 2018 they have been inviting foreign recruits to join them. These foreign recruits are a group that includes fighters from Iraq and Syria, as well as France, Germany, and Algeria.^{clxxxvi} Jowzjan borders are on or near Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, which had 400, over 1500, and 1300 foreign fighters join Daesh respectively as of early 2018.^{clxxxvii} The UN Counterterrorism Committee has found that the largest percentage of Daesh foreign fighters are currently in Afghanistan.^{clxxxviii} The Islamic State headquarters are said to provide up to several hundred thousand dollars to the network in the Khorasan.^{clxxxix}

E: Afghanistan and the Opium Economy

In the midst of conflict and insecurity, the country's economy has been in a deep slump since 2013 when the United States and NATO radically drew down their troop presence, around which much of Afghan economy was built after 2002. The economy has been in decline in recent years. The percent of the population in poverty rose from 38 percent in 2011-2012 to 55 percent in 2016-2017. In the same time frame, food insecurity has risen from 30.1 percent to 40.6 percent.^{cx} 40 percent are unemployed.^{cxci} The population is growing at a rate of 2.5-3 percent, according to the IMF, and half of the population is

under fifteen, while drought is threatening the livelihood of farmers: there simply are not enough opportunities in the economy.^{cxcii}

The most prolific and lucrative crop is poppy, used for opium, heroin, and morphine, though marijuana is sold as well. Opium poppies are a particularly good crop for unstable regions, as they have a short production cycle and high value, allowing farmers to profit quickly and frequently. The shorter production cycle provides farmers the option of movement rather than be tied permanently to an area of land, as they can move to a different area without losing everything they have (though such a move is still difficult).^{cxci} Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the global supply of opium, and over 80 percent of heroin and morphine.^{cxciiv} The majority of the profits from these crops, however, do not go to the farmers growing the poppies but to traffickers and their political connections.^{cxciiv} Large swathes of the country are not under the central rule of law, and provincial governors often have to make deals with warlords and drug lords for their own protection.^{cxciiv} The limited power of governors means they are still subject to the same threats as the rest of their populace.³⁵ They also did not have the power to adequately deter any actors (including groups like the Taliban) who were profiting more than the farming population from these activities, regardless of if any governor was free enough of corruption to wish to do so.^{cxciiv}

Many of the civilians not living in cities make their living through poppy farming. As of the end of 2017, poppy cultivation occurred in more than 1/3 of western and northern villages, more than half of eastern villages, and almost 85 percent of southern villages-- the equivalent of more than 350,000 full time jobs for farmers and local and migrant workers.^{cxciiv} Government officials have become increasingly involved in the production and sale of opium.^{cxciix} 2017 marked a record high production of opium.^{cc} Though President Ghani promised that reducing opium production would be one of his goals, satellite imagery showed the opium fields still growing as he took office.^{cci}

³⁵ “The Afghan government’s 2010 subnational policy acknowledged the absence of a “clear articulation of the duties and responsibilities of Governors” in its predecessor Law on Local Administration and the degree to which this had generated “significant ambiguity” with respect to the position” ... “Absent clearly defined terms of reference or a predictable rhythm of appointments and dismissals, the Afghan provincial governorship manifested in a wide range of forms during Karzai’s time in office. Some governors were among the country’s most formidable strongmen. Others were beacons of technocratic potential for foreign donors to support. A few shaped their provincial political economies in lasting ways, but many left less of a mark, operating in the shadows of more powerful patrons or competitors, sometimes for only a few months at a time.” (Dipali Mukhopadhyay, “Provincial Governors in Afghan Politics,” *USIP*, Jan 2016 [<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR-385-Provincial-Governors-in-Afghan-Politics.pdf>] p3-4).



Yet this drug trade is also unstable. Before 2016, Nangarhar province’s production increased dramatically.^{ccii} The villages that grow poppies are also seen as much less secure than those that don’t by the people living in them. Throughout the country, 37 percent of the heads of villages indicated that their village wasn’t under government control, but if looking only at the villages that cultivate opium, that number rises to 67 percent. Nationally, 24 percent felt their village was insecure, which doubles when restricted to the opium cultivating villages. While opium cultivation is not a cause for insecurity, it reflects a link between economic insecurity and poppy farming. When civilians have the options of farming staple crops or poppies, which provide higher revenue and often will be collected from the farmer’s home rather than the farmer having to travel dangerous roads to markets, many turn to poppies. Yet opium cultivation can drastically improve quality of life: “Farmers who have resumed poppy production have reported an increase in their standard of living, that they are able to eat meat several times per week, send their children to school, and access medical care which they were not able to do without producing opium.”^{cciii} This environment, in which farming drugs may be the best way to benefit, is critical to understanding the environment of the villages where Daesh is attempting to take control, the details of which will be provided in the following sections. Their occupants already feel unsafe and don’t count on government protection.

F: National Mood: Direction of the Country

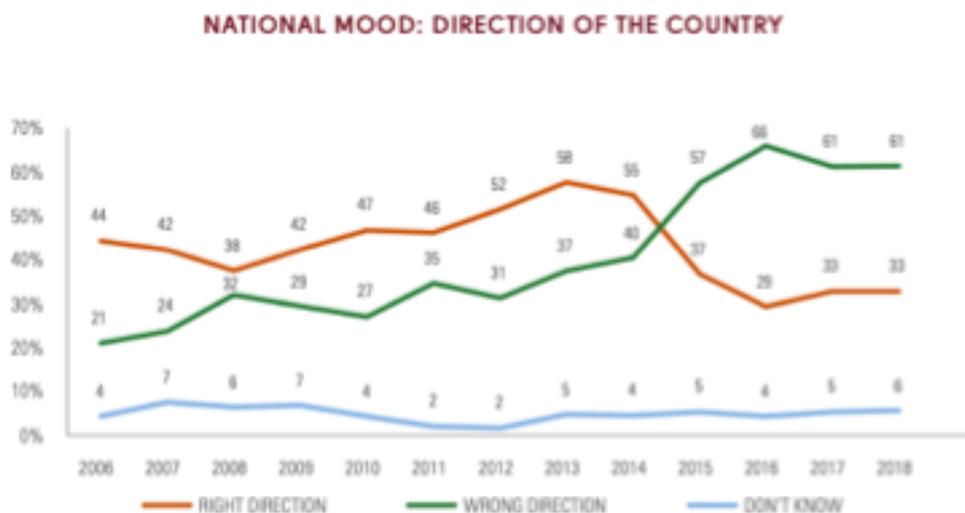
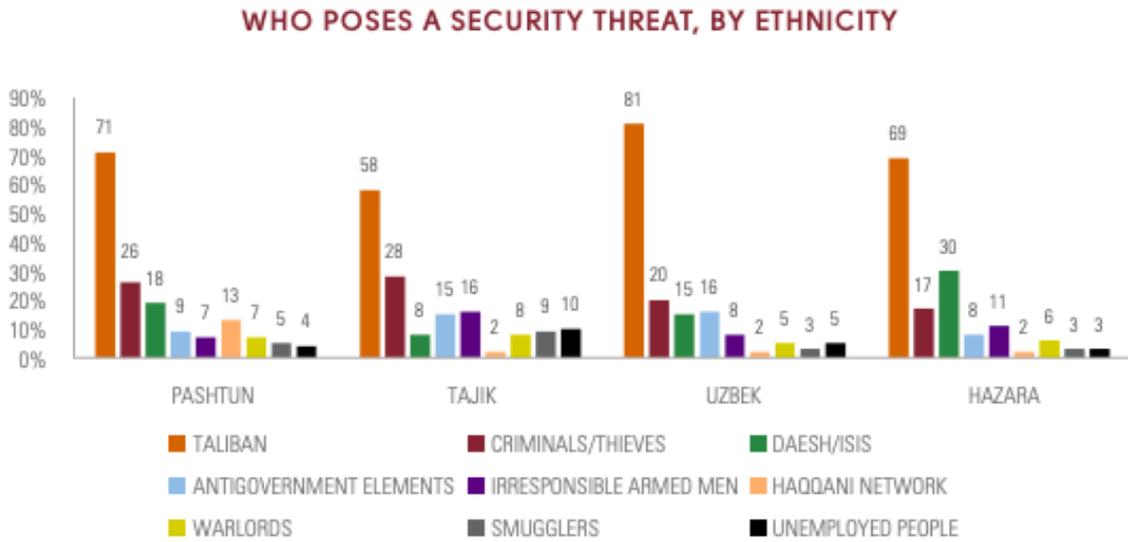


FIG. 1.1: Q-1. Overall, based on your own experience, do you think things in Afghanistan today are going in the right direction, or do you think they are going in the wrong direction?

G: Perceptions of Security Threats



ccv

H: Fear During 2018 Elections



ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.

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