



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Afghanistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Monday 28 January 2019

Information on Taliban including: presence nationwide; & capacity of tracking relocated targets

A report published by *Reuters* in January 2019 points out that:

“...the Taliban controls nearly half of Afghanistan” (Reuters (27 January 2019) *Next round of Afghanistan talks tentatively set for Feb. 25*).

In January 2019 *BBC News* states that:

“The Taliban's power and reach has surged since foreign combat troops left Afghanistan in 2014” (BBC News (21 January 2019) *Afghanistan: Deadly Taliban attack on military compound*).

A report published by the *Associated Press* in January 2019 notes:

“...the Taliban, who now hold sway over about half of the country and regularly target Afghan forces” (Associated Press (15 January 2019) *Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills 4, Wounds Over 100 in Kabul*

The *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect* states in January 2019 that:

“Since the Taliban was overthrown in 2001 by a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coalition of military forces, it has conducted an insurgency against the internationally recognized Afghan government. Following the 2014 withdrawal of most foreign forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban has made substantial military gains, currently controlling or influencing more than half of the country” (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (15 January 2019) *Afghanistan*).

A report published in January 2019 by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* points out that:

“The Taliban controls or contests nearly half of Afghanistan, where it is waging a deadly insurgency against the Western-backed Kabul government and government security forces” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (3 January 2019) *At Least 11 Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks*).

The *United States Department of Defence* in December 2018 notes that:

“The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) remain in control of most of Afghanistan's population centers and all of the provincial capitals, while the Taliban control large portions of Afghanistan's rural areas, and continue to attack poorly defended government checkpoints and rural district centers” (United States Department of Defence (17 December 2018) *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, p.1).

This document also states:

“The ANDSF, with U.S. and coalition support, have limited new Taliban territorial gains and quickly regained control of population centers when attacked” (ibid, p.1).

It is also noted in this document that:

“Afghanistan continues to face an externally enabled and resilient insurgency. The Afghan government retains control of Kabul, major population centers, most key transit routes, provincial capitals, and a majority of district centers. In this reporting period, the Taliban capitalized on the freedom of maneuver they maintain in rural areas to mass combat power against poorly defended district centers and checkpoints. Despite the Taliban’s proclaimed intent to adopt a more asymmetric approach, the group continued to mass and conduct raids on checkpoints, district centers, and threaten population centers. These types of attacks did not result in significant expansion of Taliban-controlled territory; however, they did test the ability of the ANDSF to respond, resulting in over-extension of the ANA in certain areas...” (ibid, pp.24-25).

This report also notes:

“...a continued stalemate with the ANDSF maintaining control of most of the populated areas and lines of communication, and the Taliban consolidating gains in rural and remote portions of Afghanistan as well as areas surrounding population centers” (ibid, p.46).

A report published in October 2018 the *United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction* notes that:

“While the districts, territory, and population under insurgent control or influence also decreased slightly, the districts, territory, and population “contested”—meaning under neither Afghan government nor insurgent control or influence—increased” (United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (30 October 2018) *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, p.66).

A report published by *Amnesty International* in October 2018 notes that:

“Today, Taliban is in control of or has presence in more provinces than was the case in the past 17 years since they were removed from power...” (Amnesty International (8 October 2018) *European states should stop forcing people to danger in Afghanistan*, p.1).

A paper issued in August 2018 by the *UNHCR* states that:

“In light of the available evidence of serious and widespread human rights abuses by AGEs in areas under their effective control, with the inability of the State to provide protection against such abuses in these areas, UNHCR considers that an IFA/IRA is not available in areas of the country that are under the effective control of AGEs...” (UNHCR (30 August 2018) *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, p.10).

This document also states that:

“Given the wide geographic reach of some AGEs, including the Taliban and Islamic State, a viable IFA/IRA may not be available to individuals at risk of being targeted by such groups” (ibid, p.56).

This report also comments on “Assessing where the proposed area of IFA/IRA is practically, safely and legally Accessible” noting:

“In cases where an area of Afghanistan has been identified that is not excluded as a relevant IFA/IRA on the basis of considerations under I and II above, it would still need to be assessed whether the proposed area of IFA/IRA is practically, safely and legally accessible to the individual...In the context of Afghanistan, this requirement entails an assessment of the concrete prospects of safely accessing the proposed area of relocation, including by assessing the risks associated with the widespread use of IEDs and presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) throughout the country; attacks and fighting taking place on roads; and restrictions on civilians' freedom of movement imposed by AGEs...” (ibid, p.57).

This report also notes that:

“A proposed area of IFA/IRA would only be reasonable if the applicant is able to live in the proposed area in safety and security, free from danger and risk of injury...These conditions must be durable, not illusory or unpredictable...In this regard, the volatility and fluidity of the armed conflict in Afghanistan must be taken into consideration” (ibid, p.58).

In June 2018 the *Overseas Development Institute* states that:

“The reach of Taliban governance demonstrates that they do not have to formally occupy territory to control what happens within it. Governance does not come after the capture of territory, but precedes it. The Taliban's influence on services and everyday life extends far beyond areas they can be said to control or contest” (Overseas Development Institute (21 June 2018) *Life under the Taliban shadow government*, p.3).

A report released in June 2018 by the *European Asylum Support Office* points out that:

“...the Taliban are mostly present in rural areas, it is also reported that they run a network of informants and conduct intelligence gathering in the cities” (European Asylum Support Office (June 2018) *Country Guidance: Afghanistan; Guidance note and common analysis*, p.37).

A compilation of COI sources issued by the *European Asylum Support Office* in December 2017 includes noting that:

“...even after relocating, wanted individuals are still ‘at risk of being caught while travelling on the road at a Taliban check point...” (European Asylum Support Office (December 2017) *Afghanistan Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict*, p.62).

A report issued in September 2017 a report issued by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia* notes:

“...there are considerable security and economic factors that limit the ability of Afghans of all ethnicities to relocate internally safely and successfully” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia (18 September 2017) *DFAT Country Information Report Afghanistan*, p.30).

In August 2017 *Landinfo* states in a report that:

“Government officials even in areas of weak Taliban presence believe that the Taliban are informed of everything that happens...The Taliban for sure claim to have an intelligence presence in all provinces of Afghanistan. While this is to some extent true, the level and quality of their presence varies hugely, with some provinces almost entirely under Taliban control, and others barely affected” (Landinfo (23 August 2017) *Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and the intimidation campaign*, p.9).

A compilation of COI research issued in February 2016 by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* includes a source stating that:

“...the Taliban may be able to find a person who relocates to a different area, and that they have been successful in doing so, particularly when targeting their "well known or well positioned opponents"..." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (15 February 2016) *Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016)*, p.1).

Another source cited in this report states that:

“...the Taliban generally has the capability to track individuals, through the use of "formal and informal communication" networks to obtain information about a person's whereabouts..." (ibid, pp.1-2).

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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