

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



# OPERATION ENDURING SENTINEL

AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO

# AFGHANISTAN



OCTOBER 1, 2023–DECEMBER 31, 2023



**On the cover:** A camp for Afghans returning from Pakistan who have nowhere safe to go in Afghanistan. More than 400,000 Afghans living in Pakistan are crossing back into Afghanistan after the Pakistani government's announcement that all undocumented Afghans must leave the country. (WFP photo)



We are pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. section 419).

In October 2021, the Department of Defense (DoD) initiated OES as the U.S. mission to conduct over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations against threats emanating from Afghanistan and to engage with Central Asian and South Asian regional partners to foster counterterrorism partnerships.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OES, as well as the work of the DoD, the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to further the U.S. Government's policy goals in Afghanistan during the period of October 1 through December 31, 2023. This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies—the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs—and our partner oversight agencies.

Handwritten signature of Robert P. Storch in black ink.

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**Paul K. Martin**  
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Development





A camp for Afghans returning from Pakistan who have nowhere safe to go in Afghanistan. More than 400,000 Afghans living in Pakistan are crossing back into Afghanistan after the Pakistani government's announcement that all undocumented Afghans must leave the country. (WFP photo)

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Ruins of dwellings after the earthquake in Herat province, October 8, 2023. (WFP photo)



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **The Taliban’s counterterrorism efforts have been somewhat successful against ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), but the group remains a persistent terrorist threat in Afghanistan.**

Taliban raids removed several key ISIS-K leaders this quarter.<sup>1</sup> ISIS-K attacks targeted Taliban personnel and members of the minority Shia community.<sup>2</sup> ISIS-K propaganda was critical of the Taliban, aiming to use the population’s dissatisfaction with the Taliban regime to attract new recruits.<sup>3</sup> However, ISIS-K failed to expand this quarter, which the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) attributed to Taliban counterterrorism pressure.<sup>4</sup>

### **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attacks on military and police targets in Pakistan increased in 2023.**

Between September and November, the TTP claimed 267 attacks against Pakistani military and security targets, compared to 141 attacks during the same period in 2022, according to the DIA.<sup>5</sup> In December, Tehreek-e-Jihad, a TTP affiliate, claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 23 Pakistani soldiers in Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> In December, Pakistan’s army chief, General Asim Munir, requested U.S. assistance and greater bilateral cooperation in combatting the TTP.<sup>7</sup> The TTP publicly appealed to the international community to refrain from involvement in the group’s conflict with Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Pakistani government—partly out of frustration with the Taliban’s inability or unwillingness to control the TTP—announced a campaign to deport approximately 1.7 million undocumented Afghan nationals living in Pakistan.**

Pakistani officials cited security and economic concerns as the basis for this decision, alleging that the Taliban is providing shelter to militants attacking Pakistani security forces along the border.<sup>10</sup> The influx of returning Afghan refugees has likely diverted some Taliban resources from security to humanitarian needs.<sup>11</sup> The DIA projected that Afghanistan’s economic growth would likely remain stagnant. As returning refugees begin to look for work, the increase in labor supply will probably outpace demand, exacerbating unemployment.<sup>12</sup>

## Lead IG Oversight Activities

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction completed one report during the quarter related to the Taliban’s restrictions on education. As of December 31, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 32 ongoing and planned projects related to OES.

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in two debarments related to an OES legacy investigation into false claims allegations. Investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 2 investigations, and coordinated on 34 open investigations. The investigations involve a variety of alleged crimes, including procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; and abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the DoD OIG hotline investigator received one allegation on personal misconduct and referred one case to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple allegations.

**The U.S. Government continued to work to relocate Afghan allies who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, under the Enduring Welcome program.**<sup>13</sup> The number of Afghans who received Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) to travel to the United States increased during the quarter.<sup>14</sup> State suspended relocation of Afghans to Pakistan for visa processing following the Pakistani government’s large-scale deportations of Afghans.<sup>15</sup> State issued 7,667 SIVs this quarter compared to 4,144 the previous quarter.<sup>16</sup>

**The United States continued to pursue its enduring interests in Afghanistan,** including holding the Taliban to its counterterrorism commitments; pressing the Taliban to respect human rights; and providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.<sup>17</sup> State’s updated Integrated Country Strategy for Afghanistan, in alignment with the U.S. National Security Strategy, prioritizes ensuring that Afghanistan is never again used for attacks against the United States and its allies and reducing Afghanistan’s dependency on U.S. assistance.<sup>18</sup> The strategy emphasizes the importance of working with “likeminded” countries, international organizations, and countries in the region as well as the Taliban itself to meet these priorities.<sup>19</sup>

**In October, four magnitude 6.3 earthquakes struck Afghanistan’s Herat province, resulting in at least 1,480 dead, 1,950 injured, and 131,000 displaced from their homes.**

**In October, four magnitude 6.3 earthquakes struck Afghanistan’s Herat province, resulting in at least 1,480 dead, 1,950 injured, and 131,000 displaced from their homes.**<sup>20</sup> Programs funded by USAID provided emergency shelter assistance, water, sanitation, and emergency relief supplies, such as kits with blankets, family tents, shelter repair tools, solar lamps, and winter clothing for earthquake victims in Herat.<sup>21</sup> USAID’s Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA) also supported the UN World Food Programme’s efforts to provide food to earthquake-impacted communities.<sup>22</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO), who with U.S. Government assistance, supported the health response by providing medical supplies.<sup>23</sup>



# OPERATION ENDURING SENTINEL

*This section describes U.S. activities under the OES mission and related activity that affects the OES mission. The following section, “U.S. Policy Objectives in Afghanistan,” describes diplomatic, political, humanitarian assistance, and development activities in Afghanistan.*

The first food distribution in response to the earthquake took place on October 12 in Wardakha village, Herat province, where every house was flattened. (WFP photo)

## U.S. ACTIVITY

The DoD initiated Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES) on October 1, 2021 following the termination of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, which had two components: counterterrorism operations and the U.S. contribution to the NATO advise-and-assist mission in Afghanistan. OES is the U.S. mission to conduct over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations against threats emanating from Afghanistan and to engage with Central Asian and South Asian regional partners to foster counterterrorism partnerships.

The DoD did not provide publicly releasable information about U.S. military activity related to OES during the quarter. All DoD information on this topic from this quarter can be found in the classified appendix.

The United States’ vital national interest in Afghanistan is to ensure that it never again becomes a safe haven for those who wish the United States or its allies harm, according to State.<sup>24</sup> The Taliban committed in the 2020 Doha Agreement to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.<sup>25</sup> During the quarter, the U.S. Government continued to call publicly and privately on the Taliban to meet its counterterrorism commitments, State said.<sup>26</sup>

This quarter, the Taliban publicly and repeatedly stated that it will not allow terrorists to use Afghanistan to conduct terrorist attacks against other countries, State said.<sup>27</sup> The Taliban



took some steps to counter terrorist threats, including fighting ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K). However, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carried out attacks against Pakistan, and ISIS-K conducted terrorist activity in Pakistan and other neighboring countries this quarter.<sup>28</sup> State said that the U.S. Government does not coordinate with the Taliban on counterterrorism operations.<sup>29</sup>

## Progress on Transfer of Former Afghan National Security Forces Aircraft to Uzbekistan

During the quarter, the U.S. Government and the Uzbek government made progress on the transfer of former Afghan Air Force aircraft now in Uzbekistan, State said.<sup>30</sup> On November 29, the commander of Uzbekistan's Air Force and Air Defense Forces signed U.S. Government-prepared letters of offer and acceptance for the transfer of 6 A-29s, 1 AC-208, 4 C-208s, 11 PC-12s, and 14 Mi-17s to Uzbekistan under the Excess Defense Articles program. State is responsible for assessing the U.S. national security interests in the region and notifying Congress of the excess defense article transfer. On December 15, State completed a site survey in preparation for extracting 7 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters from Uzbekistan.<sup>31</sup>

## VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATION ACTIVITY

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that it observed no external terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan during the quarter.<sup>32</sup> The DIA did not observe any significant changes in the number of al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), or ISIS-K fighters in Afghanistan since the previous quarter. The DIA assessed that AQIS probably maintains approximately 200 members in Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda likely has fewer than a dozen core members in Afghanistan. The Taliban's restrictions on al-Qaeda and AQIS activity, including plotting external attacks from Afghanistan territory, have probably hindered recruitment and retention efforts, according to the DIA. ISIS-K has roughly 2,000 fighters, and maintains a presence in nearly every province, operating clandestinely primarily in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Takhar, Kandahar, Balkh, Badakhshan, and Kunduz provinces, mostly in urban centers.<sup>33</sup>

## ISIS-K is Contained but Remains a Persistent Threat in Afghanistan

Attacks in Afghanistan claimed by or attributed to ISIS-K decreased during the quarter compared to the same time period in 2022. However, attacks increased at the end of the quarter, according to the UN Secretary-General.<sup>34</sup> Since early 2023, Taliban raids in

### THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER TO RECOGNIZE THE TALIBAN OR ANY OTHER ENTITY AS THE GOVERNMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

The U.S. Government has not yet decided whether to recognize the Taliban or any other entity as the government of Afghanistan. Accordingly, any references in this report to so-called "Taliban governance," the "Taliban's ministries" and "officials," a "former" Afghan government, and similar phrases are not meant to convey any U.S. Government view or decision on recognition of the Taliban or any other entity as the government of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan removed at least eight key ISIS-K leaders, including some responsible for external operations plotting, State said.<sup>35</sup> ISIS-K propaganda continued to appear online in an expanded range of languages, and the group's attempts to recruit foreign nationals and Afghan citizens continued.<sup>36</sup> As in previous quarters, ISIS-K attacks targeted Taliban personnel and Afghan civilians, especially the minority Shia community.<sup>37</sup> ISIS-K maintains the capability to conduct high-profile attacks. While the Taliban have a proven track record in degrading the ISIS-K threat, the U.S. Government also maintains its own unilateral capabilities to address emerging threats, State said.<sup>38</sup>

According to the DIA, ISIS-K probably failed to expand due to Taliban counterterrorism pressure.<sup>39</sup> The DIA observed no indications of ISIS-K personnel moving into or from neighboring countries or elsewhere in the region.<sup>40</sup> As in previous quarters, ISIS-K produced media critical of the Taliban and probably is using the population's dissatisfaction with the Taliban regime and its inability to protect its citizens to attract new recruits within Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup>

This quarter, ISIS-K probably continued to prioritize attacks against the Taliban and regional targets, according to the DIA. Although ISIS-K and other ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan aspire to direct or enable an attack against the U.S. homeland, there were no indications of a specific ISIS plot to attack the U.S. homeland from Afghanistan this quarter, according to the DIA.<sup>42</sup>

ISIS-K and other ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan probably will use English-language media as a means to encourage sympathizers to attack the U.S. homeland and may have shifted some focus toward the Israel-Hamas conflict and encouraging attacks against Jewish or Israeli targets this quarter.<sup>43</sup> ISIS-K regularly criticizes the Taliban in its media publications and attempts to undermine Taliban security efforts within Afghanistan and the region through high-profile attacks, almost certainly to bolster local recruitment efforts, according to the DIA. ISIS-K will probably look to exploit the return of disaffected Afghan refugees from Pakistan, the DIA stated.<sup>44</sup>

## Al-Qaeda Continues to Maintain a Low Profile

State reported that during the quarter, al-Qaeda remained at an historical nadir.<sup>45</sup> The Taliban allows al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups (besides ISIS-K, which the Taliban actively opposes) to remain in Afghanistan but have issued directives against conducting external operations and recruitment, according to State.<sup>46</sup> Al-Qaeda and its regional affiliate, AQIS, appeared to maintain a low profile, presumably in accordance with these directives.<sup>47</sup> AQIS continued to praise past al-Qaeda attacks and calls for jihad against al-Qaeda's enemies, including India, Pakistan, the United States, and Israel, in its monthly online magazine *Nawai Ghazwa-e-Hind*, State said.<sup>48</sup>

The DIA reported no change from the previous quarter on the current strategy, priorities, and activities of al-Qaeda or AQIS in Afghanistan. Following the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, al-Qaeda leaders probably decided to comply with the Taliban's directives against using Afghanistan as a base for transnational attacks. The leaders of AQIS almost certainly continue to abide by both the Taliban's restrictions and al-Qaeda leadership's decision regarding attacks from Afghanistan. The DIA said there were no credible indications that

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Afghanistan-based al-Qaeda or AQIS members planned, trained for, or conducted external terrorist operations during the past quarter or that they were attempting to rebuild such a capacity there.<sup>49</sup>

The DIA did not observe any indicators of al-Qaeda senior leaders providing guidance, funding, or propaganda support to AQIS or al-Qaeda's other global affiliates this quarter, nor did it observe any changes in al-Qaeda's or AQIS's behavior toward the Taliban. The Taliban claims that groups such as al-Qaeda do not have a presence in Afghanistan, the DIA stated.<sup>50</sup>

### **TTP Uses Afghanistan as a Base to Attack Pakistani Security Forces**

As of December, the DIA estimated the TTP's presence in Afghanistan to be approximately 4,000 to 6,000 members. However, the precise number in Afghanistan is uncertain because the TTP operates along the porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and the group includes several splinter groups that have left or rejoined the TTP. The group did not hold territory in Pakistan or Afghanistan but has increased the frequency of its attacks against Pakistani military and police forces, especially in areas bordering Afghanistan, according to the DIA.<sup>51</sup>

The DIA did not observe changes in TTP strategy or priorities during the quarter. The TTP's primary objectives almost certainly remain to expel Pakistan's military from the former Federal Administered Tribal Areas and replace the Pakistani government with an Islamic State. In early December, TTP emir Noor Wali reaffirmed his standing guidance that forbids subordinates from attacking U.S. or Western interests and reiterated that Pakistani military and security forces are the group's only targets. Between September and November, the TTP claimed 267 attacks against Pakistani military and security targets, compared to 141 attacks during the same period in 2022, according to the DIA.<sup>52</sup>

The TTP's attacks were largely concentrated in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where provincial police assessed that the number of attacks on security personnel rose 68 percent in 2023, the DIA reported. In December, Tehreek-e-Jihad, a TTP affiliate, claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 23 Pakistani soldiers in Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan.<sup>53</sup>

In early December, the TTP publicly appealed to the international community to refrain from involvement in the group's conflict with Pakistan. U.S. or Western unilateral counterterrorism operations or direct involvement in Pakistani counterterrorism operations against the group almost certainly would drive the TTP to revoke its ban on targeting Western interests, according to the DIA.<sup>54</sup>

In November, Pakistani security agencies claimed that U.S.-origin M4 and M16 rifles were used in an attack on a Pakistani air force base alongside Russian weaponry. The DIA said that the militants are probably using only limited numbers of U.S.-origin weaponry and equipment from the former Afghan government's stocks or captured in combat against the former Afghan government forces, including small arms and night vision goggles, to conduct attacks in Pakistan. The quantity of U.S.-origin weaponry that Pakistani sources allege is in the hands of anti-Pakistan militants is very likely exaggerated, according to the DIA.<sup>55</sup>

## Pakistan Requests U.S. Assistance in Combatting TTP

In December, Pakistan’s army chief, General Asim Munir, met with Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III in Washington, D.C. During their meeting, General Munir requested U.S. assistance and greater bilateral cooperation in combatting the TTP. Following a TTP attack in December, Pakistan’s acting information minister posted and subsequently deleted a series of proposed actions on social media, including the basing of U.S. unmanned aerial systems in Pakistan to target terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan, according to media reporting.<sup>56</sup>

Before coming to Washington, General Munir met with Thomas West, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan, in Islamabad. Following the meeting, West said in a statement that the United States stands with Pakistan against terrorism and acknowledged the threat posed by the TTP.<sup>57</sup> A State spokesperson emphasized the U.S. desire for a diplomatic resolution to relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

## TALIBAN ACTIVITY

According to the DIA, the Taliban almost certainly does not hold any ambitions to threaten the United States or its allies. The DIA reported that it has not observed any indications that the Taliban or the associated Haqqani Network are currently planning attacks against the United States or its allies. The Taliban remain focused on economic development, regime stability, and combating ISIS-K and anti-Taliban resistance groups.<sup>59</sup>

During the quarter, the Taliban conducted several raids against ISIS-K in Afghanistan and has very likely maintained its capability to disrupt ISIS-K. In early November, Taliban security forces conducted a counterterrorism operation in Kunar province, a historic safe haven of ISIS-K, killing three of the group’s members. ISIS-K claimed 5 attacks this quarter, compared to 5 during the previous quarter and 27 in the same quarter last year, according to the DIA.<sup>60</sup>

As of December, the Taliban regime has been successful in ensuring safety from ISIS-K attacks in Kabul, in part due to its Ministry of Interior’s 62,000 cameras monitoring the city, according to the DIA. The DIA had no update on the Taliban’s use of equipment or aircraft in counterterrorism operations.<sup>61</sup>

## Armed Resistance Groups Do Not Threaten Taliban’s Control

Armed resistance groups continued to claim attacks on the Taliban in Afghanistan during the quarter, but they did not threaten the Taliban’s control of the country, State said.<sup>62</sup> According to the UN Secretary-General, compared with 2022, there were fewer attacks in 2023, despite an increase in the number of claimed attacks by groups on social media.<sup>63</sup> The Afghanistan Freedom Front was the most active group, although its attacks remained small in scale, while the National Resistance Front was much less active than in 2022. Four additional armed political opposition groups announced their existence during the reporting period—the Afghanistan National Guard Front, the National Mobilization Front, the National Battle Front, and the Afghanistan United Front—with no attacks claimed by the latter two groups, according to the UN Secretary-General.<sup>64</sup>

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## State: Pakistan's Repatriation Policy Aims to Pressure Taliban to Revisit TTP Support

The apparent ability of the TTP to operate from Afghanistan continued to be a major source of tension between the Taliban and Pakistan's government, State said.<sup>65</sup> On November 1, Pakistan launched a deportation campaign against approximately 1.7 million undocumented Afghan nationals living in Pakistan, media reported.<sup>66</sup>

Pakistani government officials cited security and economic concerns as the basis for this decision, which came amid strained relations with the Taliban and Pakistani allegations that the Taliban is providing shelter to militants attacking Pakistani security forces along the border. Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister, Anwaar ul Haq Kakar, said that foreigners without legal status were linked to those fueling terrorism in Pakistan, alleging that 65 terrorists killed in encounters with security forces were Afghans, according to the DIA.<sup>67</sup>

Pakistan began implementation of its "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan" in part to pressure the Taliban to revisit its support for the TTP, State said.<sup>68</sup> Shortly after Pakistan's announcement of the repatriation policy, Kakar directly linked the Taliban and TTP, saying that there was "clear evidence" of the Taliban enabling terrorism by the TTP.<sup>69</sup> Kakar also publicly stated that Pakistan had repeatedly conveyed concerns about terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan but after non-cooperation by the Afghan interim government, Pakistan decided to "take matters into its own hands."<sup>70</sup> According to State, the repatriation policy has been framed in public by Pakistan authorities as a "response" to security threats.<sup>71</sup> It is unclear whether the Taliban will change its approach to the TTP in response to the repatriation policy, State said.<sup>72</sup>

According to one regional academic, Pakistan's deportation policy created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the region and "perversely helped" the TTP, which was able to look for recruits among the returnees.<sup>73</sup> Taliban Defense Minister Mohammad Yaqub warned Pakistan that it should be mindful of the consequences of its decisions and that "it should plant as much as it will be able to reap," but State did not observe the Taliban directly supporting or facilitating TTP attacks against Pakistan.<sup>74</sup>

The frequency of TTP attacks against Pakistani security forces, especially along the border with Afghanistan, continued to increase. The U.S. Government reiterated during the quarter that it is the Taliban's responsibility to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for launching terrorist attacks, State said. Although the TTP is not currently targeting U.S. interests in Pakistan directly, there is potential for collateral damage to U.S. persons or facilities, State said. The U.S. Government provides extensive assistance programs to strengthen Pakistani civilian institutions' ability to counter terrorism, according to State.<sup>75</sup>

The influx of returning Afghan refugees has very likely diverted some Taliban resources from security to humanitarian needs. The Taliban is employing at least two military corps to set up medical centers to serve returning migrants, according to the DIA. The Taliban's response to the humanitarian crisis has been praised by both domestic Afghan commentators and the Japanese ambassador to Afghanistan. Domestic and international praise for the Taliban's response to the returning refugees indicates that the humanitarian crisis very likely does not jeopardize the

*(continued from next page)*

## State: Pakistan's Repatriation Policy Aims to Pressure Taliban to Revisit TTP Support *(continued from previous page)*

Taliban's rule of the country. The DIA said that the Taliban's competent response to the crisis may strengthen its credibility.<sup>76</sup>

The DIA projected that Afghanistan's economic growth would likely remain stagnant. As returning refugees begin to look for work, the increase in labor supply will probably outpace demand, exacerbating unemployment. The influx of refugees requires the Taliban to reallocate security resources to humanitarian issues, which will probably contribute to a moderate increase in ISIS-K and anti-Taliban resistance attacks, according to the DIA.<sup>77</sup>

## Israel-Hamas Conflict Spurs Muted Protests in Kabul

During the quarter, the Taliban made statements condemning Israel's actions in Gaza and expressed sympathy for and solidarity with the Palestinian people, State said.<sup>78</sup> The Taliban denied that they were seeking to fight for Hamas, and State did not observe any signs of that taking place. State said it will continue to monitor the situation.<sup>79</sup> During the quarter, the Taliban appeared to be more focused on humanitarian crises at home, including recovering from multiple deadly earthquakes in October and addressing the spike in returning Afghans following Pakistan's announcement of a new repatriation policy, State said.<sup>80</sup>

## REGIONAL SECURITY

This quarter, Afghanistan's neighboring countries stated that persistent concerns with Afghanistan-based terrorism would prompt them to intervene to stop the spread of extremism. However, the DIA has not observed regional states conduct military or counterterrorism operations into Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup>

Last quarter, the leaders of the Central Asian states met with U.S. President Biden under the aegis of the C5+1 Central Asian regionally focused dialogue at the UN General Assembly to discuss cooperation on combatting terrorism, promoting energy security, and strengthening regional stability. The Central Asian states have also given priority to these issues and other transnational threats in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization and People's Republic of China (PRC)-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization, according to the DIA.<sup>82</sup>

**PRC:** In October, the PRC Foreign Minister met his Taliban counterpart on the sidelines of the PRC-hosted Trans-Himalaya Forum in Tibet to discuss enhancing bilateral trade and diplomatic ties. Beijing remains concerned about threats to domestic stability in its Xinjiang region allegedly posed by armed Islamic militants in Afghanistan, particularly Uyghur extremists. The DIA said that the PRC's security concerns preclude its official recognition of the Taliban and expanded economic investments in Afghanistan.<sup>83</sup>

**India:** India has not officially recognized the Taliban and continued to advocate for an inclusive Afghan government and preventing the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorists. On October 17, India's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, attended the second meeting of secretaries of the National Security Council of Central Asian countries in Kazakhstan to discuss regional threats stemming from terrorism and drug trafficking, and the importance of creating an inclusive Afghan government. In December, India's Ministry

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of External Affairs said that the Afghan embassy in New Delhi remains operational, refuting claims made by the former Afghan ambassador to India in late November that the embassy had been permanently closed due to pressure from the Taliban and the Indian government to relinquish control, according to the DIA.<sup>84</sup>

**Iran:** Iran continues to engage with the Taliban to ensure stable bilateral relations with a specific interest in water rights in the Helmand River, countering ISIS-K, and protecting Afghanistan's Shia minority, according to the DIA.<sup>85</sup>

**Pakistan:** The DIA said it had no information on whether Pakistan has conducted military or counterterrorism operations into Afghanistan this quarter. Pakistan's pressure tactics on the Taliban to stop the TTP's cross-border attacks, including deporting Afghans, has increased tensions between Pakistan and the Taliban, according to the DIA.<sup>86</sup>

**Russia:** Russia continues to prioritize economic stabilization and humanitarian support in its interactions with the Taliban, while messaging U.S. failures in the region, according to the DIA. Since October, Russia has increased its criticism of the Taliban's inability to maintain security and stepped up engagement with Afghanistan resistance groups, hosting resistance leaders at forums and summits in Russia to speak against the Taliban. In November, a Russian political party hosted the leader of the National Resistance Front, one of the largest anti-Taliban resistance groups, although the Russian Foreign Ministry denied the ministry's involvement in such a meeting, according to the DIA. Russian press also published separate interviews with two anti-Taliban resistance leaders, in which both called for armed resistance to overthrow the Taliban. In November, the Russian Ministry of Defense shipped approximately 40 metric tons of humanitarian aid to Kabul. In October, the director of Russia's Federal Security Service, Aleksandr Bortnikov, alleged that the United States and the United Kingdom were cooperating with the Taliban on intelligence, creating conditions for instability in Central Asia.<sup>87</sup>



# U.S. FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN

Enduring U.S. interests in Afghanistan extend beyond the scope of OES and include pressing the Taliban to ensure the safety of Americans in Afghanistan (including releasing detainees); holding the Taliban to its counterterrorism commitments; ensuring safe passage for those who wish to leave Afghanistan; pressing the Taliban to respect the human rights of all Afghans; establishing a credible process to deliver representative governance for the people of Afghanistan; and providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people—assistance that is channeled through the United Nations and NGOs, not the Taliban.<sup>88</sup>

During the quarter, State finalized and published an updated Integrated Country Strategy for Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup> The strategy’s top-line priorities align with the U.S. National Security Strategy, in that U.S. interests are to ensure Afghanistan is never again used for attacks against the United States and its allies and to reduce Afghanistan’s dependency on U.S. assistance.<sup>90</sup> (See Table 1.) The strategy emphasizes the importance of working with “likeminded” countries, international organizations, and countries in the region as well as the Taliban itself to meet these priorities, State said.<sup>91</sup>



Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III attend the fifth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi, India, November 10, 2023. (DoD photo)



Table 1.

**Integrated Country Strategy for Afghanistan**

Achieve an Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and its neighbors and does not pose a threat to the United States or its partners;

Alleviate suffering, build economic self-reliance, and transition to a private-sector-led economy;

Promote a reconciliation dialogue among Afghans inside and outside the country; and

Support American citizens in need in Afghanistan and Afghan nationals relocating to the United States.

**Source:** State, “Integrated Country Strategy: Afghanistan,” 11/14/2023.

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

### U.S. ACTIVITY

#### State Continues to Talk with Taliban, International Community to Advance Foreign Policy Priorities

During the quarter, the U.S. Government continued to engage with the Taliban in order to press the Taliban leadership to honor their counterterrorism commitments; urge the Taliban to reverse policies responsible for the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly for women, girls, vulnerable populations, and the media; press for the continued relocation of Afghan partners remaining in Afghanistan; demand the release of detained U.S. citizens; and underscore concern regarding the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, according to State.<sup>92</sup> The U.S. Government meets with Taliban officials when it is in “our interest to do so,” State said.<sup>93</sup>

Following high-level talks in Doha in July, State officials continued to meet at a “technical level” with Taliban representatives to discuss counternarcotics, economic stabilization, and other issues, State said.<sup>94</sup> The talks provided an opportunity to discuss the basic conditions needed for Afghan economic stability and the deficiencies that undermine international confidence in the Afghan banking and regulatory sector. State said that it reiterated the economic case for reversing discriminatory edicts that restrict economic and educational opportunities for Afghan women and girls.<sup>95</sup>

According to a former senior State official previously involved with Afghanistan, these ongoing discussions at a technical level are “necessary” to advance specific and urgent interests, such as the release of American hostages and out-migration of Afghans processed for U.S. residency.<sup>96</sup> U.S. Government representatives are able to meet regularly with Taliban representatives through the Afghanistan Affairs Unit in Doha. State expects these engagements to continue.<sup>97</sup> During the quarter, State representatives met with their diplomatic counterparts worldwide at all levels to build consensus across the international community to press the Taliban on security, human rights, and freedom of movement.<sup>98</sup>

## Diplomatic Interactions Related to Afghanistan this Quarter

**OCTOBER** U.S. Special Representative Thomas West attended a meeting in Rome of special representatives for Afghanistan from the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada, Norway, and the United Kingdom. At the meeting, the group “acknowledged” Taliban actions to address terrorist threats from ISIS-K; however, they expressed concern that terrorist groups still reside “safely” inside Afghanistan and can plan and carry out cross-border terrorist attacks, State said.<sup>99</sup>

**NOVEMBER** Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken attended the fifth U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi with Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III where, along with their Indian counterparts, they jointly called on Taliban leadership to honor their commitment to “prevent any group or individual from using the territory of Afghanistan to threaten the security of any country,” State said.<sup>100</sup> Both sides mentioned UN Security Council Resolution 2593 (2021), which “demands that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or attack any country or to shelter or train terrorists, or to plan or finance terrorist attacks.”<sup>101</sup> The ministers urged the Taliban to respect the human rights of all Afghans, including women, children, and members of minority groups; and uphold freedom of travel.<sup>102</sup>

**DECEMBER** The United States and Italy co-hosted a Small Group meeting in Rome for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, where the coalition intensified its focus on the threat posed by ISIS in Central Asia and highlighted the need for members to increase engagement with non-member Central Asian states to enhance border security and counterterrorism capacity, State said.<sup>103</sup> The U.S. Government convened the second Resettlement Diplomacy Network senior officials meeting in Geneva, on the margins of the Global Refugee Forum, to galvanize the network’s Emergency Coordination Platform for countries to coordinate emergent refugee crises, including Afghans in need of settlement, according to State. Initially convened by Secretary Blinken, the U.S. Government continues to use the Resettlement Diplomacy Network to expand access to refugee resettlement and coordinate on emergency situations, State said.<sup>104</sup>

Special Representative West and Rina Amiri, State’s Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, met with international counterparts at the Doha Forum. Special Envoy Amiri discussed girls’ access to education in Afghanistan as well as the more than 50 Taliban edicts that discriminate against Afghan women and girls. Amiri also attended the Women in Islam Conference in Saudi Arabia, hosted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, in which Muslim-majority countries stressed the importance of respecting the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>105</sup>

While in Doha, Special Representative West met with a representative of the Taliban and pressed for the release of American detainees.<sup>106</sup> He also met with Qatari officials to express thanks for Qatar’s support of the Afghan people, including prioritizing their educational needs, State said.<sup>107</sup>

Special Representative West also traveled to Saudi Arabia where he met with high-level government officials to coordinate shared security, human rights, and humanitarian issues of concern in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>108</sup> While in Saudi Arabia, Special Representative West met with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Special Envoy for Afghanistan for talks on humanitarian and economic challenges, protection support for Afghan refugees, and the human rights of Afghans, including women and girls.<sup>109</sup>

In late December, State supported a UN Security Council resolution calling for the appointment of a Special Envoy for Afghanistan to increase engagement with Afghanistan and its Taliban leaders, State said.

## U.S. Supports New UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan

In late December, the United States supported a UN Security Council resolution calling for the appointment of a Special Envoy for Afghanistan to increase engagement with Afghanistan and its Taliban leaders, State said.<sup>110</sup> The UN resolution followed a November independent assessment report, conducted by UN Special Coordinator Feridun Sinirlioglu, which clearly identified the need for greater engagement. One purpose of the report was to identify a roadmap toward political dialogue that ensures Afghanistan meets its international obligations, State said. It also provided clear recommendations addressing human rights; the status of religious and ethnic minorities; security and terrorism; narcotics; development, economic, humanitarian, and social challenges; governance; and the rule of law, according to State.<sup>111</sup>

The resolution demonstrated continued UN support for the people of Afghanistan, State said.<sup>112</sup> Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), said that the Taliban should understand the value of the resolution which “elevates” the issue of Afghanistan at a time when other issues are filling the international agenda.<sup>113</sup> The Taliban publicly responded, saying that a UN Special Envoy was “unnecessary,” but that more robust and enhanced engagement was welcome, according to State.<sup>114</sup>

At the end of the quarter, the UN also endorsed a recommendation to postpone a decision on restoring a seat for Afghanistan, denying it UN representation for at least another year.<sup>115</sup> Accepting and working to uphold the international norms and standards set out in the UN treaties that Afghanistan has ratified will continue to be a “non-negotiable” condition for a seat at the United Nations, Otunbayeva said.<sup>116</sup>

## Sanctions Remain Under U.S. Counterterrorism and UN Authorities

The Taliban remained sanctioned under U.S. counterterrorism authorities, and many Taliban leaders also remained sanctioned under UN authorities, State said.<sup>117</sup> The Taliban have requested sanctions relief, State said, but the United States will not grant relief until the Taliban meet the expectations of the international community and the Afghan people. Until then, absent exemptions to UN travel bans, Taliban leaders must seek permission before traveling internationally, State said.<sup>118</sup>

On December 8, State—in coordination with the Departments of Treasury and Homeland Security—announced the sanctioning of two Taliban leaders for serious human rights abuse related to the restriction of access to secondary education for women and girls in Afghanistan.<sup>119</sup>

**Fariduddin Mahmood**, a member of the Taliban’s interim cabinet that made decisions to close education centers and schools to women and girls after the sixth grade. Mahmood serves as the Taliban’s head of the Afghanistan Academy of Sciences and supported the education-related bans on women and girls.<sup>120</sup>

**Khalid Hanafi**, the Taliban’s Minister for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Since August 2021, members of his ministry have engaged in serious human rights abuse, including abductions, whippings, and beatings. They have also assaulted people protesting the restrictions on women’s activity, including access to education.<sup>121</sup>

On December 11, Treasury sanctioned Mir Rahman Rahmani, former Afghan Speaker of Parliament, and Ajmal Rahmani, his son and a former member of the Afghan Parliament, under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, for their involvement in significant corruption, including stealing millions of dollars from U.S. Government-funded fuel contracts. Treasury noted that its effort was conducted in close coordination with the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.<sup>122</sup>

## U.S. Supports Renewal of Afghanistan Sanctions Committee Monitoring Team

On December 14, the U.S. Government welcomed the renewal of the UN Security Council Monitoring Team mandate supporting the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions committee and the reaffirmation of its asset freezes, travel bans, and arms embargoes for 1 year.<sup>123</sup> The same Monitoring Team supports the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and al-Qaeda sanctions committee, according to UN reporting.<sup>124</sup> The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations said the team’s reporting remained crucial to understanding the impact of sanctions in Afghanistan and allowed member states to track whether the Taliban “follows through” on its commitments, including those involving counterterrorism and human rights for women and girls.<sup>125</sup> According to UN reporting, China said the resolution was vital to ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a “hub” for terrorist organizations.<sup>126</sup>

## U.S. Citizens Wrongfully Detained in Afghanistan Remain a High Priority for State

The U.S. Government, according to State, has no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas.<sup>127</sup> During the quarter, U.S. officials pressed for the immediate and unconditional release of U.S. citizens detained by the Taliban and continued to be in “regular contact” with families of American citizen detainees, State said.<sup>128</sup> A State spokesperson said that Secretary of State Blinken meets with families of wrongfully detained Americans whenever possible, and a National Security Council spokesperson said that the U.S. Government was “fully committed to doing everything we can to bring home Americans who are wrongfully detained abroad,” media reported.<sup>129</sup> In December, Special Representative West met in Qatar with a representative of the Taliban and pressed for the release of American detainees, according to State.<sup>130</sup> Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens and Special Representative West have returned several U.S. citizens held by the Taliban to their families, State said.<sup>131</sup>

## Afghan Fund Still Not “Disbursement Ready”

The Board of Trustees of the Fund for the Afghan People (Afghan Fund) was established in September 2022 to manage \$3.5 billion of Afghanistan’s central bank reserves, which were held in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York at the time of the Taliban takeover in 2021.<sup>132</sup>

According to State, by the end of the quarter the Afghan Fund was still not “disbursement ready.” However, the Afghan Fund did start to put a compliance framework in place so that disbursements could eventually be made.<sup>133</sup> During the economic stabilization technical talks with Taliban officials, State reiterated the requirements that Afghanistan’s Central

**During the quarter, U.S. officials pressed for the immediate and unconditional release of U.S. citizens detained by the Taliban and continued to be in “regular contact” with families of American citizen detainees, State said.**

Bank (Da Afghanistan Bank or DAB) must fulfill before the U.S. Government can consider re-capitalization of the DAB through assets in the Afghan Fund and said that no condition has been even partially met. The conditions are that the DAB must: demonstrate independence from political influence and interference; show that it has instituted adequate anti-money laundering and countering-the-financing-of-terrorism controls; and complete a third-party needs assessment and onboard a reputable third-party monitor, State said.<sup>134</sup>

### Relocation of Afghans Continues

The U.S. Government continued to work to fulfill its commitment to Afghans who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>135</sup> The Enduring Welcome program, formerly Operation Allies Welcome, relies on all immigration pathways for resettlement of Afghan allies in the United States, State said.<sup>136</sup>

The number of Afghans who received Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) to travel to the United States increased during the quarter.<sup>137</sup> (See Figure 1.) State cannot issue Afghan SIVs to applicants located in Afghanistan, so applicants must first depart Afghanistan and travel to a country where State has a consular presence.<sup>138</sup> State’s Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) continued to relocate SIV-eligible Afghans from Afghanistan to platforms in various countries. Unlike the previous quarter, the Taliban did not prevent applicants and eligible individuals from leaving Afghanistan and remained compliant with its freedom of movement pledge, State said.<sup>139</sup>

During the quarter, State suspended relocation of Afghans to Pakistan for visa processing following the Pakistani government’s large-scale deportations of Afghans.<sup>140</sup> (See page 25.) State said that before the deportations began, the U.S. Government provided the Pakistani government a list of Afghan individuals in U.S. immigration pathways to protect them from

Figure 1.  
Special Immigrant Visa Issuances, January–December 2023

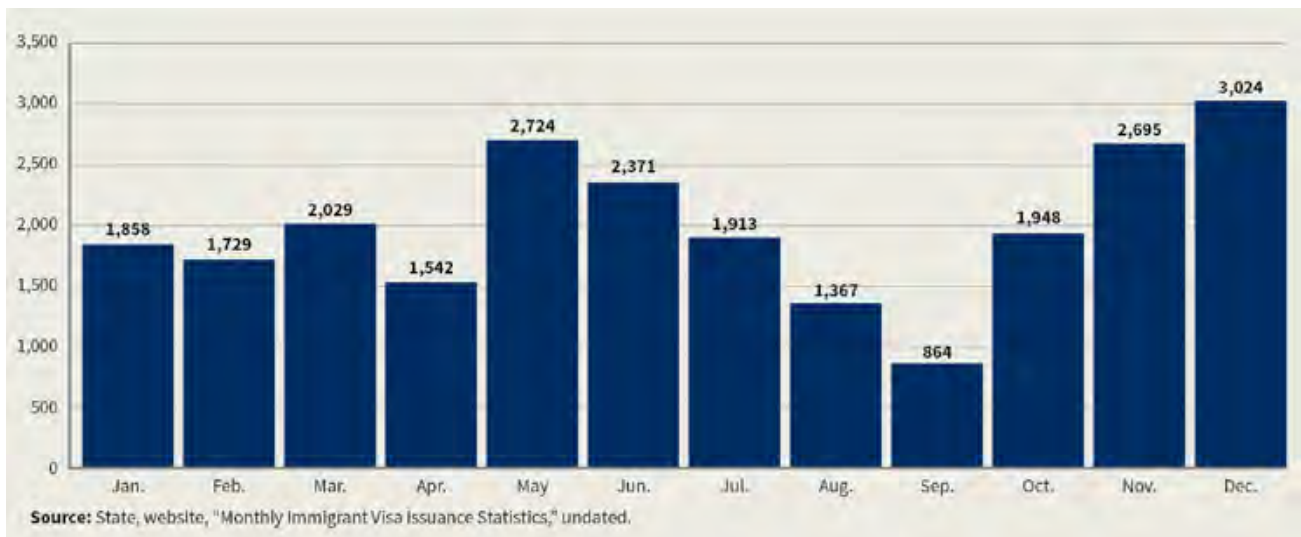
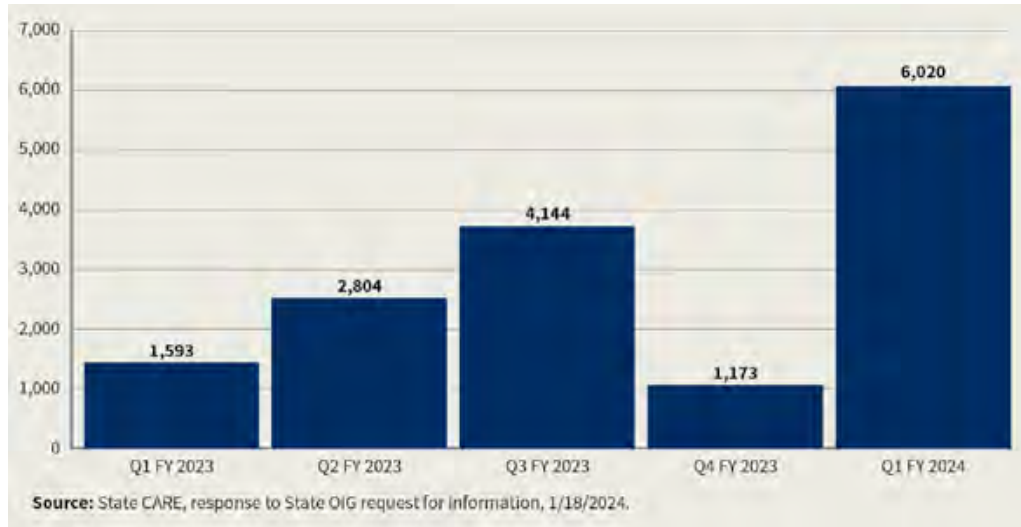


Figure 2.

**Total Number of SIV Candidates Departing Kabul by Quarter**

arrests and deportations. U.S. Government agencies also provided letters to thousands of individuals in their respective resettlement or immigration pipelines. State said that it had seen many examples at the local level of Pakistani authorities respecting the status of applicants because of the list and letters. However, despite U.S. efforts, Pakistan deported some Afghans in the U.S. immigration pathway, State said.<sup>141</sup>

The number of Afghans resettled to the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program continues to increase as well. During the quarter, DHS officers interviewed roughly 4,100 Afghan refugee applicants throughout the world and over 2,900 arrived in the United States.<sup>142</sup>

State said that it was in communication with the Pakistani government on the safety of individuals in the U.S. resettlement and immigration pipelines. According to UN border monitoring reporting, repatriations and deportations of Afghans started to decrease by the end of the quarter.<sup>143</sup> The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad continued processing SIVs during the quarter and will continue to do so, State said.<sup>144</sup>

In early 2023, State initiated the Welcome Corps, a private sponsorship program that allows permanent resettlement pathways for refugees, including eligible Afghan refugees and SIVs. State funds a consortium of non-profit organizations with expertise in refugee resettlement, protection, and welcome to implement the Welcome Corps under a cooperative agreement with State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). Working in groups of five or more American citizens, sponsor groups fulfill core sponsorship requirements that are similar to the support provided to refugees and SIVs by resettlement agencies through the reception and placement program.<sup>145</sup> The first privately sponsored refugees arrived in June 2023. During the quarter, State finalized plans to expand the Welcome Corps to enable private sponsors to identify specific refugees, including Afghans, that they want to support and to refer those refugees for consideration to the United States Refugee Admissions Program.<sup>146</sup>

**During the quarter, State suspended relocation of Afghans to Pakistan for visa processing following the Pakistani government's large-scale deportations of Afghans.**

**December 21 marked the first anniversary of the Taliban's ban on women's attendance in higher education institutions, making Afghanistan the only country in the world to officially ban girls from education after sixth grade.**

## TALIBAN ACTIVITY

During the quarter, the Taliban did not meet the international community's expectations in ways that warrant normalization of relations with the United States, State said.<sup>147</sup> The Taliban's continued human rights abuses, particularly the increased restrictions on women and girls, remained a major obstacle to more normalized relations with the Taliban.<sup>148</sup> The U.S. Government has been clear, publicly and privately, that legitimacy "begins at home," State said.<sup>149</sup> No government recognized the Taliban this quarter; however, many countries sent delegations to Afghanistan.<sup>150</sup>

Despite clear messaging to the Taliban by the United States and the broader international community, the Taliban continued to seek international recognition and to represent the Afghan people in official capacities, State said.<sup>151</sup> The Taliban gradually increased the number of Taliban-aligned "diplomats" at both working and senior levels in Afghanistan missions in capitals. State continued to urge other countries not to take any steps to lend unearned legitimacy to the Taliban until they show a sustained track record of meeting their commitments.<sup>152</sup> In her December briefing to the UN Security Council, UNAMA head Roza Otunbayeva said that the lack of progress in resolving human rights issues was a key factor behind the current impasse with the international community.<sup>153</sup>

### Taliban Continues Ban on Education and Other Restrictions Against Women

December 21 marked the first anniversary of the Taliban's ban on women's attendance in higher education institutions, making Afghanistan the only country in the world to officially ban girls from education after sixth grade.<sup>154</sup> Media sites featured images showing girls finishing sixth grade, "despondent" because of the ban, State said.<sup>155</sup> Special Representative for Afghanistan West called the ban "indefensible" and said that women's access to education must remain a key U.S. priority.<sup>156</sup>

Taliban restrictions on women and girls, including in education, employment, and freedom of movement, have increased the vulnerability of women and girls and exacerbated their humanitarian needs. More than 100,000 female university students and over 80 percent of girls aged 13 to 17 no longer attend school, heightening their vulnerability to child protection risks, including exploitation, early marriage, and gender-based violence, and threatening their mental well-being, according to the Gender in Humanitarian Action working group.<sup>157</sup>

The Taliban has issued more than 50 discriminatory edicts targeting Afghan women and girls. There has been no indication from the Taliban that the restrictions would be reversed in the near term, according to U.S. Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, Rina Amiri.<sup>158</sup> Given the power dynamics and extreme ideology within the Taliban, Amiri said that she foresees continued challenges ahead.<sup>159</sup> Some local Taliban leaders have made exceptions, but overall, the trend has been toward increased enforcement of restrictive edicts, including enforcement of rules regarding women's attire, State said.<sup>160</sup>

A UNAMA report released during the quarter documented several Taliban practices that put women in danger. For example, the Taliban closed the 23 state-sponsored women's shelters. Instead, officials asked male family members to make a "commitment" to not

harm the woman survivor. In cases where a woman had no male relatives to stay with, the Taliban would send a survivor of gender-based violence to a prison facility for “protection.” Confining women who were already in a vulnerable situation would likely impact their mental and physical health, re-victimize them, and put them at risk of discrimination and stigmatization when released, the report stated.<sup>161</sup>

During the quarter, the U.S. Government worked with partners to ensure that UN resolutions reflected the unified stance of the international community that women and girls should be allowed to return to school and resume their place in Afghan society. Special Envoy Amiri met in person and virtually with Afghan experts and civil society organizations, inside and outside Afghanistan, to ensure that the rights and priorities of women, girls, journalists, and at-risk ethnic and religious communities were integrated into U.S. and international policy conversations, State said.<sup>162</sup>

### Minority Ethnic Groups Face Increase in Targeted Attacks

During the quarter, members of some minority religious and ethnic groups continued to face repression, discrimination, and denial of public services, State said.<sup>163</sup> Although prevention of violent attacks against civilians is in the security interests of the Taliban, this quarter saw a rise in ISIS-K attacks against the Shia Hazara community, which continued to be concerned about lack of accountability, State said.<sup>164</sup> During a briefing to the UN Security Council in late December, UNAMA head Roza Otunbayeva, said that the Shia community remained at “disproportionate risk” of harm, with 39 members killed in three attacks in recent months, all which were claimed by ISIS-K. Nine people were also killed in targeted attacks against Shia clerics in Herat, according to media reporting.<sup>165</sup>

### Taliban Takes No Action on Inclusivity, Opposition Groups Lack Consensus

The Taliban did not take any actions to allow political parties or groups to operate within Afghanistan during the quarter, State said.<sup>166</sup> Opposition groups continued to meet outside Afghanistan in Austria, Russia, and Tajikistan, media reported.<sup>167</sup> However, one analyst noted that these meetings are often characterized by “infighting, factionalism, and worrisome ideas” for next steps and that the lack of vision and consensus among opposition groups have allowed the Taliban to solidify power.<sup>168</sup>

### Poppy Cultivation Plunges an Estimated 95 Percent but Methamphetamine Trafficking Surges

An Afghanistan opium survey, funded by State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and released in November by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that opium poppy cultivation plunged by an estimated 95 percent following the drug ban imposed by the Taliban in April 2022.<sup>169</sup> According to State, there were few other potential causal factors for the decline other than the Taliban’s ban on intoxicants.<sup>170</sup> However, there was a shift from opiate trafficking to methamphetamine trafficking, according to the UNODC, and the “rapid expansion” in methamphetamine manufacturing could lead to a reshaping of illicit drug markets long

**There was a shift from opiate trafficking to methamphetamine trafficking, according to the UNODC, and the “rapid expansion” in methamphetamine manufacturing could lead to a reshaping of illicit drug markets long dominated by Afghan opiates.**



dominated by Afghan opiates.<sup>171</sup> Potential Taliban profits from methamphetamines versus potential Taliban profits from opium are unknown, State said.<sup>172</sup>

Afghans struggling with opium addiction cited lack of employment as a contributing factor to their substance abuse, which probably leaves them vulnerable to engaging in illicit activities or committing acts of violence to acquire drugs, according to the DIA. In the past year, the Taliban destroyed poppy crops, shut down processing labs, and detained drug users. However, the Taliban has not provided alternative jobs to Afghans who are reliant on the drug trade for income nor provided adequate treatment for an estimated 4 million addicts—roughly 10 percent of the country’s population, the DIA said.<sup>173</sup>

The Taliban’s ability to address widespread drug addiction is strained by humanitarian, economic, and security requirements resulting from the repatriation of more than 400,000 undocumented Afghans from Pakistan, which included drug producers and smugglers hidden among the refugees, according to Pakistani authorities. The Taliban regime’s crackdown on the narcotics trade will probably increase local crime, which may negatively affect the overall security situation in Afghanistan, according to the DIA.<sup>174</sup>

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The U.S. Government’s primary humanitarian objectives in Afghanistan are to promote a principled humanitarian response that advocates for the independence of humanitarian partners in facilitating aid; support and provide appropriate protection assistance to vulnerable Afghans; and improve protection and living conditions of Afghan internally displaced persons, refugees, and new Afghan arrivals in neighboring countries, particularly Afghan women and girls, State said.<sup>175</sup>

According to the 2024 UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan, 23.7 million Afghans—more than half of Afghanistan’s population—are projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2024.<sup>176</sup>

The U.S. Government continues to be the leading provider of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, having contributed more than \$2 billion since August 2021, State said.<sup>177</sup> The U.S. Government also works closely with other donors to encourage international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, to make additional

resources available to meet Afghans’ basic needs.<sup>178</sup> On December 22, State announced more than \$14 million in additional funding to respond to humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and the region, including support for refugees returning from Pakistan in response to the government of Pakistan’s recent repatriation policy. This includes funding to international organizations for activities benefiting Afghan returnees at border transit and reception sites, 80 percent of whom were women and children, State said.<sup>179</sup> (See Figure 3.) State contributed nearly \$201 million and USAID provided more than \$643 million to respond to the humanitarian needs of Afghanistan’s vulnerable populations, bringing the total U.S. Government humanitarian contribution in Afghanistan for Afghan refugees in the region to more than \$844 million in FY 2023.<sup>180</sup>

Table 2.

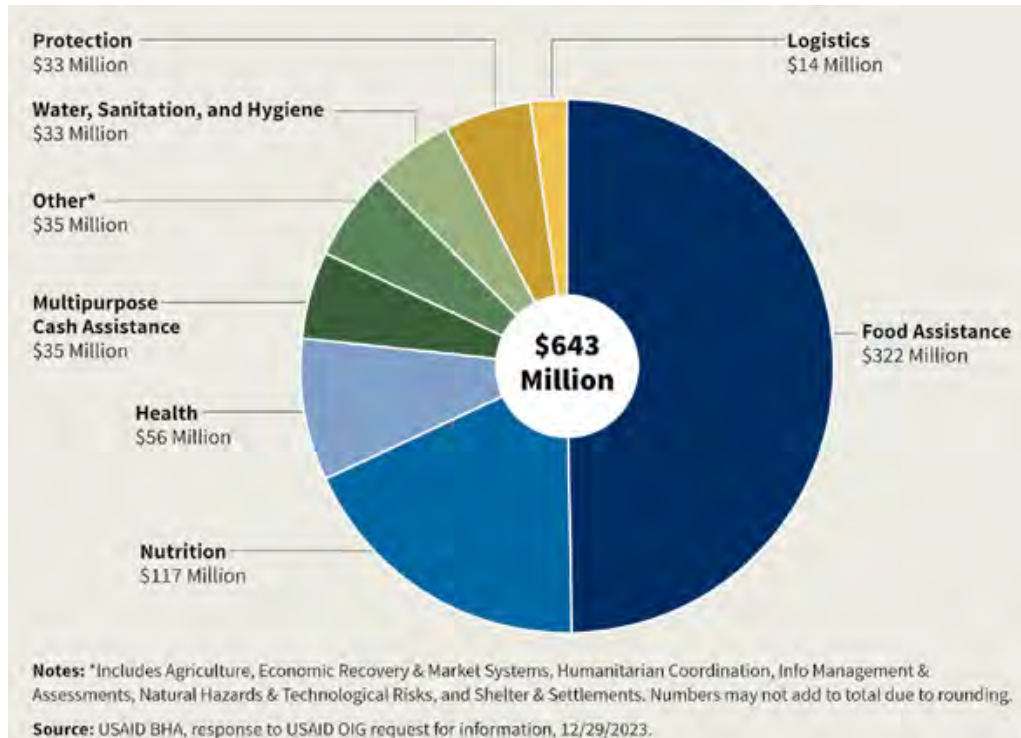
### U.S. Government Humanitarian Funding for the Afghanistan Response in FY 2024

<b>USAID BHA</b>	\$66,035,660
<b>State PRM</b>	\$14,060,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$80,095,660</b>

**Note:** Funds committed or obligated in FY 2023.

**Source:** USAID, “Afghanistan–Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #1,” 12/22/2023.

Figure 3.

**USAID Humanitarian Assistance Funding by Sector, FY 2023**

## U.S. Government Continues to Monitor Implementation of U.S.-funded Humanitarian Assistance

The U.S. Government continued to have significant oversight measures in place to monitor the implementation of U.S.-funded humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>181</sup> Activities were continually assessed to ensure that the assistance reached those for whom it is intended, and partners had appropriate mitigation measures in place to help safeguard against diversion, State said.<sup>182</sup>

During the quarter, State and its partners' risk mitigation efforts demonstrated effectiveness at countering Taliban attempts at direct interference, State said.<sup>183</sup> Examples of attempted direct interference included demands to replace female staff with male staff, requests for beneficiary lists, attempted diversion of assistance to ineligible people, scrutiny of NGO and UN operational plans and budgets, and uninvited entry into NGO/UN offices to enforce Taliban rules. The primary concerns resulting from attempted indirect interference include program delays while partners negotiate an acceptable way forward and decreased access to aid for female beneficiaries. Restrictions on female aid workers have led State NGO and UN partners to temporarily suspend operations or not directly reach vulnerable women, particularly female-headed households. NGOs have informed State that they fear the Taliban aims to fabricate a narrative of NGO interference in Taliban "governance" as justification for future restrictions on NGO operations, State said.<sup>184</sup>

**USAID BHA supported IOM with \$9 million to support emergency shelter assistance and water and sanitation activities for earthquake response in Herat province.**

## Earthquakes Displace More than 131,000 People from Their Homes

In October, four magnitude 6.3 earthquakes struck northwestern Afghanistan's Herat province.<sup>185</sup> According to a joint multi-sector rapid assessment conducted by relief organizations in late October, the earthquakes resulted in at least 1,480 deaths and injury to at least 1,950 individuals.<sup>186</sup> The earthquake has had a disproportionate impact on females. According to UNICEF, more than 90 percent of those killed were women and children.<sup>187</sup> Humanitarian needs, including critical shelter needs, continued in earthquake-affected areas as of the end of the quarter.<sup>188</sup> Approximately 7,100 people were internally displaced, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).<sup>189</sup> Households sheltering in damaged or destroyed shelters without fortification against winter weather face increased health and protection risks, including acute respiratory infections, gender-based violence, and hypothermia.<sup>190</sup> Additionally, more than 131,000 people remain displaced near to or within their village of origin and are not considered internally displaced persons.<sup>191</sup>

As of December 6, U.S.-funded aid organizations had reached 267,000 people with multi-sector assistance.<sup>192</sup> USAID BHA supported IOM with \$9 million to support emergency shelter assistance and water and sanitation activities for earthquake response in Herat province.<sup>193</sup> IOM's emergency shelter response included emergency relief supplies, such as kits with blankets, family tents, shelter repair tools, solar lamps, and winter clothing.<sup>194</sup>

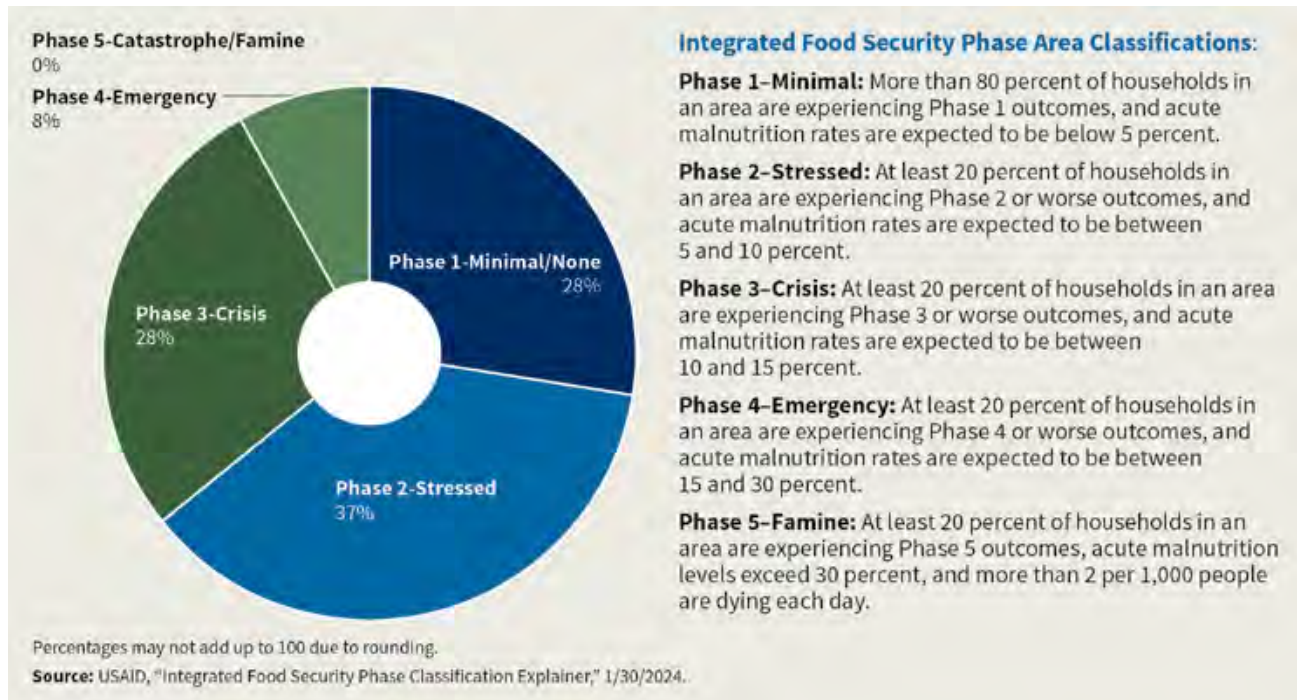
USAID announced \$12 million in humanitarian assistance to respond to the earthquakes, including funding to IOM to strengthen access to safe drinking water through emergency water deliveries and water point rehabilitation and to provide emergency shelter and relief items.<sup>195</sup> Additionally, the announcement includes support for a USAID BHA-funded organization to provide child protection case management, emergency infant and young child feeding support for earthquake-affected children and their caregivers, primary health services through mobile health and nutrition teams, mental health and psychosocial support, multipurpose and winterization cash assistance, water point rehabilitation, and water, sanitation, and hygiene kits.<sup>196</sup>

USAID BHA also supported the UN World Food Programme (WFP) by providing support for mixed food commodities to earthquake-impacted communities and supported the UN Population Fund with dignity kits to earthquake-impacted women and girls.<sup>197</sup> WHO supported the health response by providing medical supplies.<sup>198</sup> USAID BHA-funded organizations provided multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance, including hygiene activities, emergency water trucking, psychosocial support services, and multi-purpose cash assistance.<sup>199</sup>

According to the United Nations, Taliban authorities showed responsiveness in their handling of the large-scale earthquakes in western Afghanistan and the mass returns from Pakistan, as well as water and road infrastructure efforts amid widespread scarcity.<sup>200</sup>

State UN and NGO partners also reported that the Taliban cooperated when responding to the Herat earthquakes and the influx of new arrivals from Pakistan at border reception and transit centers.<sup>201</sup>

Figure 4.

**Projected Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, November 2023–March 2024****Food Security Needs Remain High in Afghanistan**

Food security improved in Afghanistan in 2023 but needs remain high, according to the USAID-funded Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) measure.<sup>202</sup> Economic contraction continued to be a high driver of food insecurity.<sup>203</sup> IPC projections reflect a slightly improved food security outlook—decreasing from 19.9 million people expected to experience Phase 3 (Crisis) or worse outcomes during the same period a year prior—due to anticipated improvements in food access, larger harvests, and the delivery of humanitarian assistance.<sup>204</sup> An estimated 15.8 million people in Afghanistan are projected to experience Phase 3 (Crisis) or worse levels of acute food insecurity between November 2023 and March 2024, based on findings from a December IPC analysis.<sup>205</sup> (See Figure 4.) The main drivers of this acute food insecurity included challenging economic conditions, high unemployment rates, reduced livelihood opportunities and decreased remittances.<sup>206</sup> The adverse impact of extreme and variable climatic conditions—particularly the multi-year drought experienced between 2021 and 2023—continue to be felt in late 2023.<sup>207</sup> Additionally, other natural hazards such as flooding and earthquakes further compromised the limited coping capacity of the population, resulting in the persistence of a severe food insecurity situation.<sup>208</sup>

Between November 2023 and March 2024 (corresponding to the winter lean season) a further deterioration in food security is expected, with the number of people in Phase 3 (Crisis) or worse likely to surpass 36 percent of the total population (15.8 million), including about 3.6 million people in Phase 4 (Emergency), and about 12.3 million people in Phase 3.<sup>209</sup>

Compared to the same period from previous years, the decrease of the number of people facing high food insecurity (Phase 3 or worse) during the lean season (November 2023–March 2024), and especially in Phase 4, can be attributed predominantly to the extensive, timely and efficient delivery of humanitarian food and agriculture assistance.<sup>210</sup> Falling food prices also increased food security, according to the World Bank.<sup>211</sup>

However, FEWS NET disagrees with the magnitude and severity of acute food insecurity reported by the IPC, especially in the projection period.<sup>212</sup> According to FEWS NET, while the population facing Phase 3 and worse outcomes has declined, those in northern and higher-elevation areas of Afghanistan continued to face crisis outcomes.<sup>213</sup> Meanwhile, a November FEWS NET report projected less widespread levels of acute food insecurity during the November 2023 to May 2024 period compared to IPC projections, though FEWS NET and IPC assessments have historically produced divergent estimates on the number of households facing acute food insecurity outcomes in Afghanistan due to methodological differences.<sup>214</sup> FEWS NET projects acute food insecurity concentrated predominantly in rural areas in the north, northeast, and parts of the western regions during the winter season, with Crisis levels of acute food insecurity likely to increase across additional rural areas, including in eastern, southern, and southeastern regions, during the peak of the lean season, between February and April 2024, when food is most scarce.<sup>215</sup> Households in northern and higher-elevation areas have little to no access to food they produce themselves as well as limited income to purchase food.<sup>216</sup>

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) reported a reduction in caseload, due to limited funding levels, from 5.3 million to 3.2 million people experiencing acute levels of food insecurity in September.<sup>217</sup> It estimated that 4.4 million total people were assisted with 24,691 metric tons of food distributed.<sup>218</sup> WFP also made cash-based transfers totaling \$8.3 million across various programs.<sup>219</sup> During the quarter, USAID BHA did not obligate any additional funding to WFP.<sup>220</sup> USAID BHA is currently reviewing a FY 2024 application submitted by WFP and expects additional funding may be obligated, should the application be approved, by the end of the quarter or early in the next quarter.<sup>221</sup>

## Nearly 472,000 Afghans Depart Pakistan

On September 26, the Pakistan Ministry of the Interior issued a plan to deport non-citizens who resided in Pakistan.<sup>222</sup> Between September 15 and December 16, nearly 472,000 individuals crossed into Afghanistan from Pakistan.<sup>223</sup> The United Nations estimates that 770,000 Afghan nationals will return to Afghanistan by July 2024.<sup>224</sup> However, while nearly 90 percent of returnees have indicated that they expect to return to their provinces of origin, it remains to be seen how many returnees will become internally displaced, according to relief actors.<sup>225</sup> USAID BHA continues to monitor as returnees settle in areas around the country, and identify needs of displaced individuals, returnees, and host communities.<sup>226</sup>

The United Nations estimates that 100 percent of Afghan returnees require humanitarian assistance—including food, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance—both upon arrival and in destination areas.<sup>227</sup> Returnees have limited connections within Afghanistan and Pakistani authorities have reportedly seized possessions and money from returning populations, exacerbating humanitarian needs.<sup>228</sup> Humanitarian

organizations have also highlighted the need to provide sustained, needs-based assistance in areas of destination and to integrate host communities and existing internally displaced populations into the response, USAID said.<sup>229</sup>

## USAID Supports Winterization Efforts

According to USAID, winter wheat harvests this winter are likely to benefit from the favorable 2023-2024 seasonal forecast.<sup>230</sup> There is a likelihood of above-average precipitation this winter and therefore an increased risk of floods.<sup>231</sup> WFP reports that they project to support 3.3 million people over the winter months of 2023-2024.<sup>232</sup>

USAID distributed 120,000 food baskets to 10,000 individuals which enabled rural, vulnerable families to be food secure throughout the harshest winter months.<sup>233</sup> U.S. Government-funded organizations provide emergency shelter for displaced and otherwise vulnerable people, as well as shelter repair kits, transitional shelter, and multipurpose cash assistance to support the housing needs of affected populations to help with the harsh winter weather.<sup>234</sup> USAID-funded organizations also pre-position shelter materials each year for distribution ahead of the harsh winter months and support heating costs for at-risk households.<sup>235</sup> With USAID BHA and other donor support, IOM distributed emergency relief and shelter kits, and winter items, including blankets and clothing, reaching approximately 84,000 individuals affected by earthquakes in Herat through late November.<sup>236</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT

USAID supported 25 fully operational activities during the quarter.<sup>237</sup> An additional two activities are in the design phase, two activities are in the planning phase, and one activity is in the procurement phase.<sup>238</sup> To fund these activities, USAID/Afghanistan obligated approximately \$43.6 million during the quarter, of which approximately \$10 million were funds that were appropriated from FY 2012 to FY 2016.<sup>239</sup> Approximately \$154.3 million remained unobligated.<sup>240</sup>

In addition, USAID donated \$50 million to the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund in FY 2023 and supported the Afghanistan Health Emergency Response, Emergency Education Response in Afghanistan, and the Water Emergency Relief Project during the quarter.<sup>241</sup> The U.S. remains the largest donor to the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund.<sup>242</sup>

## Afghan Economy Stabilizes but Remains Fragile

During the quarter, the Afghan economy stabilized but remained fragile with little outlook for growth, State said.<sup>243</sup> According to the World Bank, the large-scale return of Afghans from Pakistan (approximately half a million returnees) exacerbated economic difficulties by straining employment opportunities and resources, further escalating the unemployment rate.<sup>244</sup> Pakistan, Afghanistan's biggest trading partner, was "frustrated" and willing to upset economic ties for political reasons, media reported.<sup>245</sup>

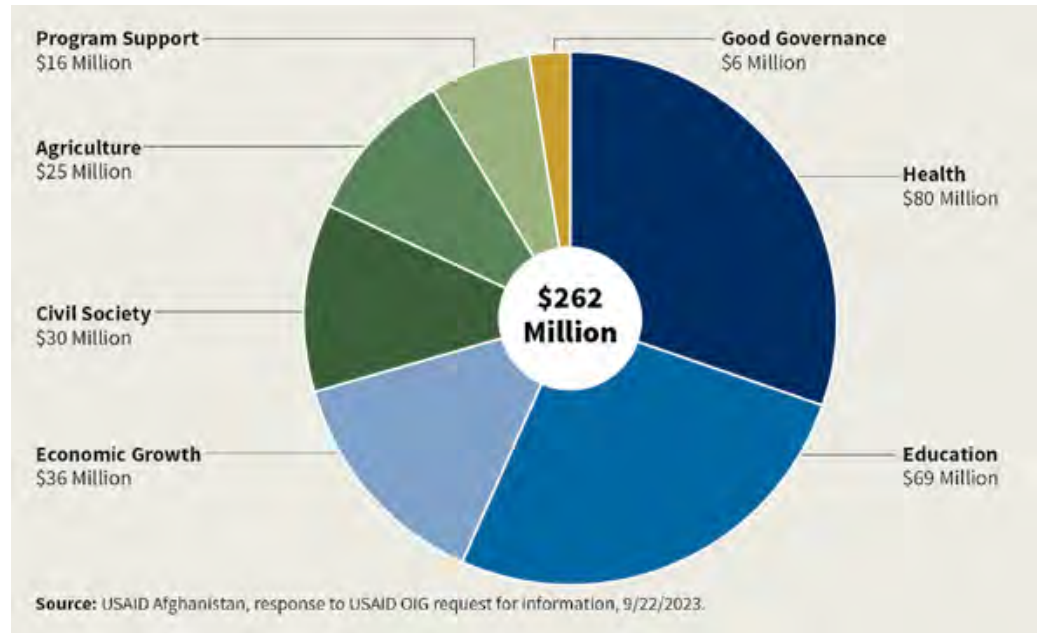
Table 3.

**USAID Development Funding by Sector (FY 2024, Q1)**

Sector	Obligated
Good Governance	\$4.0 million
Health	\$31.6 million
Program Support	\$8.0 million

Source: USAID Afghanistan, response to USAID OIG request for information, 12/22/2023.

Figure 5.

**USAID Development Funding by Sector Obligated in FY 2023**

The World Bank noted that in a survey of private sector firms in Spring 2023, nearly half of firms reported being not fully operational.<sup>246</sup> While Afghanistan exports have increased in value, the country still has a substantial trade deficit due to an increase in imports.<sup>247</sup> Unemployment has also doubled, and half of all Afghans (approximately 20 million people) are below the national poverty line, according to the World Bank.<sup>248</sup>

Afghan businesses faced numerous challenges in running their operations, including a lack of financial transaction facilitation, limited access to working capital, inadequate trade infrastructure, and the absence of sector diversification and entrepreneurship promotion.<sup>249</sup> Drought in rural areas of Afghanistan also affected the operation of several livestock-assisted businesses, according to USAID.<sup>250</sup>

Declining household savings, reduced public spending, shocks to farmer income, and the recent deadly earthquakes continued to depress overall prices, the World Bank said.<sup>251</sup> A recent Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring survey reported that one in two Afghans—or 20 million people—remain poor.<sup>252</sup> Declining humanitarian aid and lower UN shipments of U.S. dollars will also have adverse implications for macroeconomic stability, State said.<sup>253</sup>

Afghanistan was not represented in the UN Climate Change Conference in November, despite its experience with extreme weather events and natural disasters, including droughts, floods, storms, and landslides, media reported.<sup>254</sup> UNAMA tried to arrange for participation of a technical delegation from Afghanistan in the conference, arguing that the Taliban authorities needed to be “part of the conversation,” however, a delegation was not approved. Afghanistan is the sixth most impacted country by climate change related disasters, according to the Global Climate Risk Index.<sup>255</sup>

## USAID Seeks to Respond to Address Weak Economy

USAID reported that in response to the weak economy, its activities pivoted to focus on the domestic economy, supporting livelihoods, food security, income generation, and developing resilience to drought and natural disasters.<sup>256</sup> USAID's work with the private sector continued, prioritizing livelihoods support and domestic production activities.<sup>257</sup> The intent of these activities was to enhance the competitiveness of Afghan export-oriented businesses, with export facilitation activities aiming to identify export markets and link export-oriented businesses to buyers in those markets.<sup>258</sup> In the agriculture sector, USAID continued to provide feed, seed, fertilizer, equipment, and technical assistance to help keep farms and businesses operating and staff employed.<sup>259</sup> Activities included cash-for-work for small scale irrigation improvements, rehabilitating orchards, improvements in packaging, post-harvest handling and storage, and planting kitchen gardens to improve household nutrition and food security.<sup>260</sup> In the industry sector, USAID reported providing support to carpet, cashmere, and saffron value chains, using private sector partnerships to create job opportunities and help communities recover livelihoods through market-based approaches.<sup>261</sup>

USAID noted that its programs do not aim to impact the Afghan economy at the macro level and are not intended to address the trade deficit.<sup>262</sup> Instead, the intent of USAID programming is to create linkages between producer groups, processors, input suppliers, and service providers, to create profitable value chains that will reduce crop loss, increase incomes, and increase exports in support of the Afghan economy.<sup>263</sup> According to USAID, its programs also aim to improve employment through apprenticeships in the carpet, cashmere, and saffron industries, to help Afghans (especially women and youth) earn incomes and provide for their families.<sup>264</sup> Women face persistent restrictions and prohibitions on employment, business, and participation in gatherings, including training and workshops, by the Taliban.<sup>265</sup> Women also faced challenges in obtaining business licenses for women-owned businesses, USAID said.<sup>266</sup>

In FY 2023, USAID reported extending \$1.93 million in working capital advances to 21 businesses in the carpet, handicraft, food, agriculture, pharmaceutical, and cashmere sectors in Balkh, Herat, Jawzjan, Kabul, Laghman, Nangarhar, and Parwan provinces to address financial challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>267</sup> The working capital advances, according to USAID, allowed companies to resume operations, retain staff, pay salaries, purchase raw materials, and increase production.<sup>268</sup> At the time, there was no other formal source of commercial credit available from Afghan financial institutions.<sup>269</sup>

**USAID reported that in response to the weak economy, its activities pivoted to focus on the domestic economy, supporting livelihoods, food security, income generation, and developing resilience to drought and natural disasters.**



## As Unemployment Rises, USAID Activities Focus on Employment Opportunities

To address employment among Afghans, USAID reported that it introduced an apprenticeship program to support those in need, particularly women and youth.<sup>270</sup> Participants in the program receive a modest stipend during the 3-month apprenticeship period and are intended to acquire new skills.<sup>271</sup> After the apprenticeship, participants are placed in businesses related to USAID's supported value chains (for example, carpets).<sup>272</sup> Over 23,000 individuals went through the apprenticeship program since its inception, according to USAID, with 11,000 gaining employment opportunities.<sup>273</sup>

Since businesses struggle to access formal credit sources in Afghanistan, USAID also introduced its Business Recovery Initiative to provide zero-interest returnable working capital advances to small and medium-sized businesses to help maintain operations, purchase raw materials, pay staff salaries, and sustain and generate employment opportunities for unemployed individuals.<sup>274</sup> USAID plans to help provide employment for approximately 43,000 individuals, 84 percent of which will be women, with this initiative according to USAID.<sup>275</sup> To alleviate food insecurity due to unemployment, USAID's food-for-work activity engaged 10,000 individuals from vulnerable households for 3 months in agriculture infrastructure rehabilitation work in exchange for weekly food baskets.<sup>276</sup> Over 12 weeks, USAID reported distributing 120,000 food baskets to 10,000 individuals.<sup>277</sup>

**The Taliban's December 24, 2022, ban on female employment in NGOs and its extension to Afghan women working for the United Nations continues to negatively impact and restrict civic space for the women-led civil society organizations that are the main implementers for many USAID projects.**

## Taliban Edicts Restricting Women Adversely Impact Implementation of USAID Programming

The Taliban's December 24, 2022, ban on female employment in NGOs and its extension to Afghan women working for the United Nations continues to negatively impact and restrict civic space for the women-led civil society organizations that are the main implementers for many USAID projects.<sup>278</sup> Taliban authorities have made frequent visits to USAID-funded organizations to verify that restrictions are being followed and have requested meetings at Taliban offices, taking management staff away from project management and implementation, increasing stress on staff, and undermining implementers' ability to create a productive working environment, according to USAID, and resulting in delays in project implementation.<sup>279</sup> Civil society organizations are also required to register their entities and report their activities to the Ministry of Economy, with possible direct monitoring of their activities.<sup>280</sup>

During the quarter, women's organizations told USAID that the Ministry of Economy requested that they remove women from their boards of directors and replace them with men. Some organizations are unable to register their female staff in the Ministry of Economy online portals.<sup>281</sup> NGOs reported to USAID that they are also unable to register projects with female beneficiaries or any projects with a focus on women's rights in the Ministry of Economy portals.<sup>282</sup> USAID also reported threats, intimidation, and detention of women human rights defenders.<sup>283</sup>

## Local Authorities Interfere with USAID Economic Growth Programs

Taliban authorities also interfered or resisted the implementation of program activities for reasons not directly related to the ban on female employment, particularly in certain provinces, such as in Wardak and Paktia, which were traditionally controlled by the Taliban, according to USAID.<sup>284</sup> Taliban government policies and directives were not uniformly enforced across different areas of Afghanistan.<sup>285</sup> For example, while a letter of support or authorization from a Taliban Ministry might be accepted in one location, enabling USAID to implement activities without interference, in other locations, programs faced difficulties getting agreement to proceed.<sup>286</sup> As a result, activities were interrupted and, in some cases, USAID-funded organizations and beneficiaries were summoned or detained by local government authorities who wanted to direct funding support in a different manner.<sup>287</sup>

## State Continues Support for Non-humanitarian Assistance Activities in Afghanistan

This quarter, State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) continued to focus on its two priority areas for Afghanistan, counternarcotics and gender justice, through international organization implementing partners. State INL monitored programs through regular check-ins with program implementers and receipt of program quarterly reports and no major issues surfaced this quarter in quality assurance efforts. At the end of last quarter, State INL signed a new International Organization Letter of Agreement with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to continue ongoing third-party monitoring and impact assessment of the United Nation's Development Program's Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development program and add new monitoring and evaluation activities for UN Women's Service Points program.<sup>288</sup> State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM) continued to support humanitarian demining and survivor assistance through international and non-governmental organizations. State PM monitored programs through a third party, in addition to reviewing regular quarterly reports and other check ins. With State PM support, the UN Mine Action Service restarted quality assurance visits to operational demining sites throughout Afghanistan and management of the mine action program database.<sup>289</sup> (See Appendix D.)

**This quarter, State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement continued to focus on its two priority areas for Afghanistan, counternarcotics and gender justice, through international organization implementing partners.**



# OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

Under the Lead Inspector General (IG) framework, the DoD OIG, State OIG, USAID OIG, and partner agencies conduct audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations related to Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES).

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group serves as the primary venue to coordinate audits, inspections, and evaluations of U.S. Government-funded activities supporting overseas contingency operations, including those relating to Afghanistan and the Middle East. The Joint Planning Group meets quarterly to provide a forum for coordination of the broader Federal oversight community, including the Military Service IGs and audit agencies, the Government Accountability Office, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and the OIGs of the Departments of Justice, the Treasury, Energy, and Homeland Security (DHS), the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Intelligence Community. Additionally, the DHS OIG hosts the Afghanistan Project Coordination Group as a forum for IG community representatives to coordinate ongoing and planned oversight work stemming from the August 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

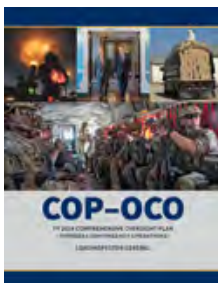
Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for Operation Enduring Sentinel*, published on September 26, 2023, as part of the *FY 2024 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*, is organized by three strategic oversight areas: Military Operations; Diplomacy, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance; and Support to Mission.

## AUDITS, INSPECTIONS, AND EVALUATIONS

The Lead IG agencies use dedicated, rotational, and temporary employees, as well as contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide consolidated planning and reporting on the status of overseas contingency operations.

DoD OIG oversight and investigative personnel continued to work on OES-related cases from the United States, Bahrain, Germany, Kuwait, and Qatar. State OIG personnel performed their oversight duties from Washington, D.C., and Frankfurt, Germany. USAID OIG personnel continued oversight work from the USAID Asia Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand, and from Washington, D.C.



**FY 2024  
Comprehensive  
Oversight Plan  
for Overseas  
Contingency  
Operations**

## COMPLETED PROJECTS

Between October 1 and December 31, 2023, SIGAR issued one oversight report related to OES, as detailed below. Completed reports by Lead IG and partner agencies are available on their respective web pages.

### SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

#### ***Status of Education in Afghanistan: Taliban Policies Have Resulted in Restricted Access and a Decline in Quality***

SIGAR-S-24-01-IP; October 13, 2023

SIGAR evaluated the conditions of the Afghan education system following the collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021; the challenges affecting the access and quality of education; and the source and method of funding teacher salaries, and school administrative and maintenance costs, and the extent to which those funds have directly benefited the Taliban regime, or other prohibited entities and individuals.

Prior to August 2021, the United States' \$1.3 billion investment in education-related programming contributed to significant improvements in Afghanistan's education. However, shortly after the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, the group began issuing policies targeting Afghanistan's educational system with wide-ranging implications for who could attend school and what they could learn. In November 2021, several public international organizations began identifying critical interventions to prevent the collapse of the Afghan education sector and loss of important educational achievements. They activated Afghanistan's Education Cluster, a group of NGOs responsible for coordinating the implementation of education-related programs funded by international donors. State and USAID have also continued to support Afghanistan's education sector through six programs totaling about \$185.2 million.

SIGAR determined that Taliban policies and priorities have also: reduced the overall quality of education in Afghanistan; limited students' access to education because restrictions on women teachers; and student enrollment numbers for secondary school have dropped since August 2021. SIGAR did not make any recommendations in its report.

## ONGOING AND PLANNED OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of December 31, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 32 ongoing and planned projects related to OES, including the examples highlighted below. Tables 6, 7, and 8, contained in Appendixes E and F, list the titles and objectives for all ongoing and planned projects.

### Military Operations

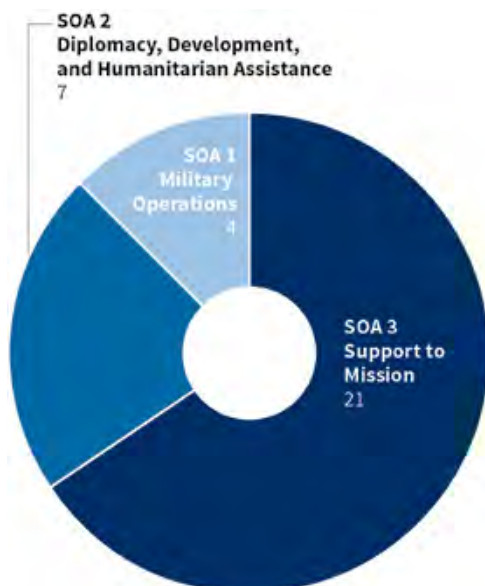
- The **Intelligence Community IG** is conducting a review to determine whether the Intelligence Community's support to screening and vetting of persons from Afghanistan was adequate.

### Diplomacy, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance

- **State OIG** is conducting a multipart review of the Afghan special immigrant visa (SIV) program, covering SIV application processing times, the status of previous recommendations, the status of SIV recipients, adjustments to the SIV application process, and the status of SIV and refugee screening and vetting since August 2021. A final report will cover all of State OIG's reporting on the SIV Program. Four of the reports have been issued.
- **USAID OIG** is conducting an evaluation to determine whether USAID was prepared for its evacuation of implementing partner staff from Afghanistan.
  - **USAID OIG** is conducting an audit to assess USAID oversight of implementer efforts to manage security and safety risks and mitigate Taliban interference with assistance in Afghanistan.

Figure 6.

#### Ongoing and Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



### Support to Mission

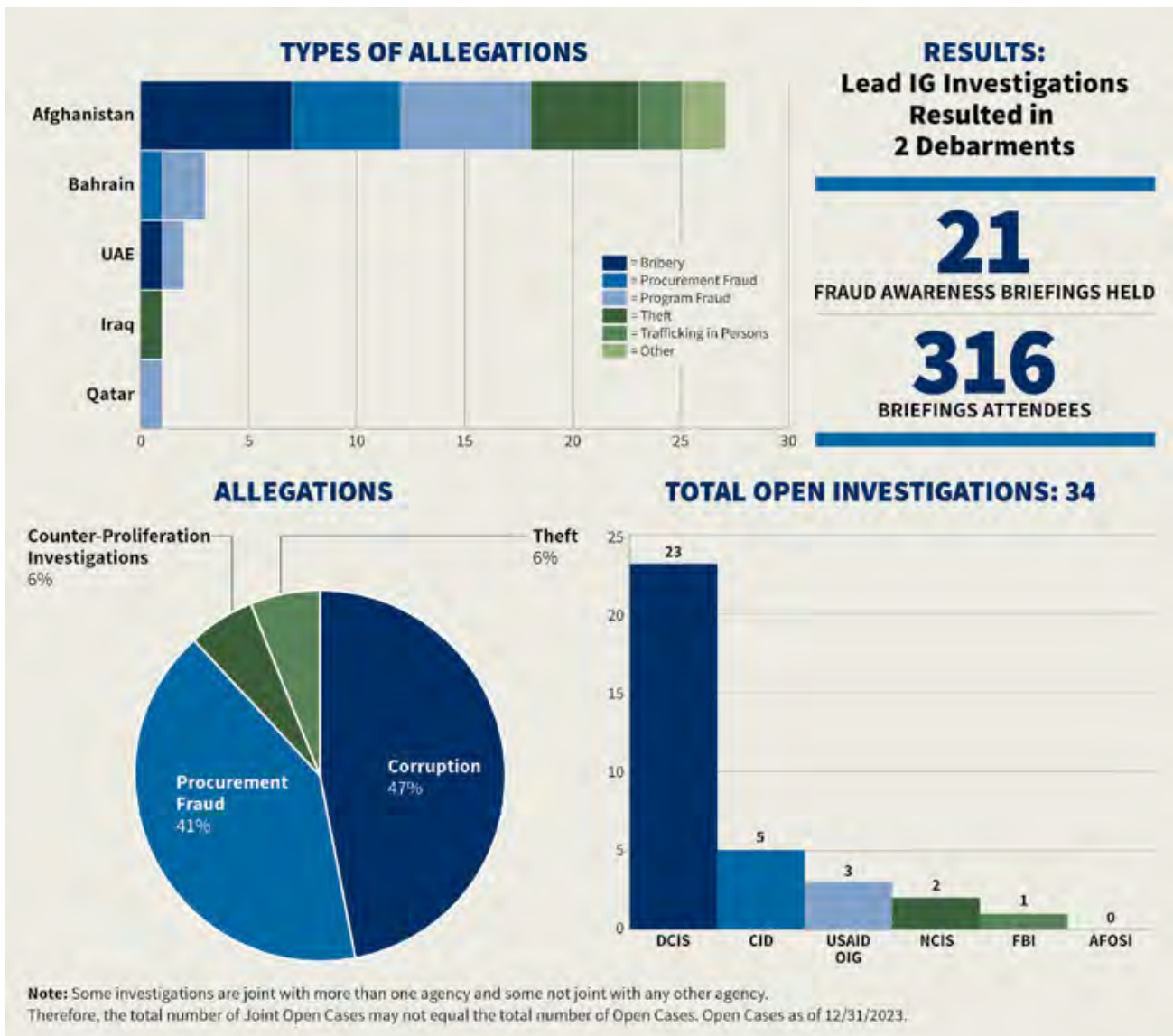
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an evaluation to determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OES operations.
- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether DoD contracting officials appropriately closed out contingency contracts supporting Afghanistan operations.
- **State OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the U.S. embassies in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Kyiv, Ukraine, managed, safeguarded, and disposed of sensitive security assets in advance of the evacuation and suspension of operations at each post in accordance with State guidance.
- **SIGAR** intends to conduct an audit to determine the extent to which U.S. agencies providing continuing assistance to Afghanistan coordinate their ongoing activities with other U.S. Government agencies and coordinate their ongoing activities with international donors and organizations.

# INVESTIGATIONS

The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OES during the quarter. The DoD OIG’s criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), and investigative components of other Lead IG agencies worked on OES-related cases from offices in the United States, and in Bahrain, El Salvador, Germany, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, South Africa, Thailand.

Figure 7.

OES Related Investigation Activities, October 1–December 31, 2023



The Lead IG agencies and partners continued to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from DCIS, State OIG, USAID OIG, the Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI). During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 21 fraud awareness briefings for 316 participants.

Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies closed 2 investigations, initiated 6 investigations, and coordinated on 34 open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking allegations. DCIS has eight ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OES area of operations that occurred prior to the formal designation of OES. Figure 7 displays the primary offense locations, allegations, and other data on investigations related to OES.

During this quarter, Lead IG investigations resulted in one debarment related to a legacy investigation into allegations of a contractor submitted false claims for computers and other equipment claimed they delivered to the U.S. Military in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2017.

The U.S. Air Force Office of General Counsel issued the debarment on December 27 against Zuhmat Group Logistic Services (Zuhmat Group) of Kabul, Afghanistan; Faiz Ahmad, Afghanistan Office Manager-Zuhmat Group; and Ahmad Adnan, Pakistan Office Manager-Zuhmat Group. The joint investigation by DCIS and AFOSI was related to a 2017 claim the contractor submitted for \$13,951 for equipment that was never delivered.

## HOTLINE ACTIVITY

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority.

During the quarter, the DoD OIG hotline investigator received one allegation on personal misconduct and referred one case to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple allegations.

# APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

### **Classified Appendix to this Report**

A classified appendix to this report provides additional information on Operation Enduring Sentinel, as noted in several sections of this report. The appendix will be delivered to relevant agencies and congressional committees.

## APPENDIX B

### **About the Lead Inspector General**

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. section 419, previously found at 5 U.S.C. App, section 8L) established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. The primary Lead IG agencies are the Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Section 419 requires the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead IG from among the inspectors general of the primary Lead IG agencies upon the commencement or designation of a military operation that exceeds 60 days as an overseas contingency operation; or receipt of notification thereof.

Lead IG oversight of the operation “sunset” at the end of the first fiscal year after commencement or designation in which the total amount appropriated for the operation is less than \$100,000,000.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

- Submit to Congress on a quarterly basis a report on the contingency operation and to make that report available to the public.
- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.



## APPENDIX C

# Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Report

This report complies with the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. section 419), which requires that the designated Lead IG provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on each overseas contingency operation, and is consistent with the requirement that a biannual report be published by the Lead IG on the activities of the Inspectors General with respect to that overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of the Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES). State IG is the Associate IG for the operation.

This report covers the period from October 1 through December 31, 2023. The three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG—and partner oversight agencies contributed the content of this report.

To fulfill the congressional mandate to report on OES, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

### INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, State, USAID, and other Federal agencies about their programs and operations related to OES. The Lead IG agencies use the information provided by their respective agencies for quarterly reporting and oversight planning.

This report also draws on current, publicly available information from reputable sources. Sources used in this report may include the following:

- U.S. Government statements, press conferences, and reports
- Reports issued by international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks
- Media reports

The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operation.

### REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD IG, as the Lead IG for this operation, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in editing the entire report. Once assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process of the report within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial views of the DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

## APPENDIX D

# State- and USAID-funded Activities During the Quarter

Table 4.

### State-funded Non-Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Afghanistan During the Quarter

<b>Women’s Economic Empowerment</b> South and Central Asian Affairs/Security and Transnational Affairs (SCA/STA)	
<b>Afghan Women Economic Empowerment Through Leveraging the Private Sector</b>	Advances the economic security and resilience of Afghan women in Afghanistan and in third countries. Supports the ability of the private sector, NGOs, and other civil society organizations to engage and provide assistance to Afghan women.
<b>Demining</b> Political-Military Affairs/Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA)	
Non-technical Survey in 20 Districts: Collect up-to-date, reliable, and accurate data and information to identify and confirm actual scope and socio-economic impact of mines/Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), within the 20 designated districts.	
Land Release and Mine/ERW Clearance for Border Communities in Badakhshan province	
Weapons and Ammunition Disposal in Afghanistan: Remove and destroy ammunition, explosives, explosive source material, and weapons to restrict their flow to armed opposition groups and prevent civilian accidents.	
Third Party Monitoring in Afghanistan: Third-party monitoring and oversight of conventional weapons destruction program.	
Former Afghan Local Police as Deminers in Afghanistan: Economically reintegrate demobilized Afghan Local Police through immediate employment as deminers, simultaneously reducing the risk of accidents and increasing available land for productive use through ERW clearance.	
Conventional Weapons Destruction Teams in Afghanistan: Improve security and stability for the Afghan civilian population by removing and destroying ammunition, explosives, explosive source material, and weapons to restrict their flow to armed opposition groups and prevent civilian accidents.	
Humanitarian Mine Action in Baghlan: Employ former combatants, improve security, stability, and sustainability in Afghanistan through the application of land release procedures for select hazard sites in Puli Hisar district, Baghlan province.	
Humanitarian Mine Action and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Nangarhar: Employ former combatants, improve security, stability, and sustainability in Afghanistan through the application of land release procedure for select hazard sites in Nangarhar province.	
Support to Emergency Mine Action Coordination: Ensure the safety and security of Afghan communities from landmine contamination and other explosive hazards. Provide emergency support and interim management of the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan.	
Clearance of Abandoned Improvised Munitions in Helmand: Increase stability and improve human security through the removal of abandoned improvised munitions and other explosive ordnance from impacted communities in Helmand province.	

**Demining & Victim Assistance**

Political-Military Affairs/Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA)

Victim Assistance and Physical Rehabilitation in Paktiya: Support disability and rehabilitation services within general healthcare services.

Victim Assistance–Afghanistan: Conduct emergency activities to support landmine survivors through physical rehabilitation, psychological support, with focus on survivors of explosive ordnance; and enhance quality and availability of prosthetics and orthotics service delivery to strengthen the resilience of underserved and hard-to-reach communities.

Victim Assistance–Afghanistan: Provide vocational skills development training for landmine victims and their family members living with disabilities.

**Rule of Law**

International Narcotics and Law Enforcement/Europe and Asia (INL/EA)

**Supporting Access to Justice through Non-State Actors**

\$11,585,000

Assists non-state justice actors in the protection of human rights of Afghans, especially women, girls, and ethnic minorities, by supporting civil society organizations and other non-state justice service providers to sustain and expand the rule of law in Afghanistan.

**Counternarcotics**

International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL/EA )

**Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development–Access to Licit Livelihoods**

\$30,000,000

Supports male and female farmers in six provinces with history of high opium poppy cultivation to transition to licit crop production and connects them with agribusinesses and exporters to facilitate market linkages.

**Afghan Women’s Leadership Fellowship**

\$2,668,079

Provides scholarships to female Afghan university students to complete their university education in Bangladesh and complete a fellowship with a counternarcotics focus.

**Afghan Opiate Trade Project**

\$3,272,548

Supports UN research and analysis initiatives to understand global trafficking trends of Afghan opiates.

**Afghanistan Opium Survey**

\$4,096,317

Supports the UN Office on Drugs and Crime’s annual Afghanistan opium cultivation survey to inform international community of opium poppy cultivation and production trends.

**Drugs Monitoring Platform**

\$4,096,317

Monitors trafficking and seizures of Afghan-origin drugs in near real-time.

**Counternarcotics Public Information**

\$4,481,895

Supports Voice of America and Radio Free Europe-affiliated public information outlets in Afghanistan to promote counternarcotics public awareness campaigns.

**Assistance to Drug Treatment Centers**

\$11,174,568

Supports drug treatment centers in Afghanistan prioritizing treatment of women and children.

**Monitoring & Evaluation and Impact Assessment of Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development and UN Women Service Points**

\$4,837,516

Provides in-depth third-party monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment services for the Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development program and third-party monitoring for INL’s work with UN Women.

**Source:** State, SCA, response to State OIG request for information, 1/12/2024.

Table 5.

**State-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities During the Quarter**

Implementer	Activity Highlights
<b>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</b> Funds Obligated: \$5,000,000 Funds Expended: \$0 As of 12/31/2023	UNHCR and partners in Afghanistan are working to ensure a harmonized and coordinated cross-border response to support undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan.
<b>State Implementer</b> Funds Obligated: \$4,400,000 Funds Expended: \$0 As of 12/31/2023	Partner is providing health care, supporting health care infrastructure, rehabilitation support, vocational training, multi-purpose cash assistance and water, sanitation, and health (WASH) activities.
<b>State Implementer</b> Funds Obligated: \$3,430,000 Funds Expended: \$3,430,000 As of 12/31/2023	Support efforts at border reception and transit to cope with a massively increased flow of people.
<b>State Implementer</b> Funds Obligated: \$1,000,000 Funds Expended: \$0 As of 12/31/2023	Project will provide critical services in high refugee-returnee areas.
<b>State Implementer</b> Funds Obligated: \$230,000 Funds Expended: \$0 As of 12/31/2023	Provides lifesaving services for Afghan women and adolescent girls at border reception and transit centers.

**Source:** State PRM, response to State OIG request for information, 1/12/2024.

## APPENDIX E

# Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 6 and 7 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OES.

Table 6.

### Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Agencies, as of December 31, 2023

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### ***Evaluation of Combatant Command Military Deception Planning***

To determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OES operations.

##### ***Evaluation of the DoD's Treatment of Operational Data from Afghanistan***

To determine whether the DoD has comprehensively, effectively, and efficiently archived, standardized, and made available for utilization operational data from Afghanistan operations, as required by law.

#### DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### ***Review of the Department of State Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program***

To assess the number of SIV applications received and processed and their processing times; the status and resolution of recommendations made by State OIG in its reports "Quarterly Reporting on Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Needs Improvement" (AUD-MERO-20-34, June 2020) and "Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program" (AUD-MERO-20-35, June 2020); the status of SIV recipients; adjustments made to processing SIV applications between 2018 and 2021; the status of SIV and refugee screening and vetting since August 2021; and the whole of State OIG reporting on the SIV Program in a capping report.

##### ***Audit of the Disposition of Defensive Equipment and Armored Vehicles in Advance of Evacuations of U.S. Embassies Kabul and Kyiv***

To determine whether U.S. Embassies Kabul, Afghanistan, and Kyiv, Ukraine, managed, safeguarded, and disposed of sensitive security assets in advance of the evacuation and suspension of operations at each post in accordance with State guidance.

##### ***National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2023, Section 5275 Final Joint Report***

Joint report with the DHS OIG to provide a consolidated accounting of U.S. Government completed, ongoing, and planned oversight work on the vetting, processing, and resettlement of Afghan evacuees and the Afghan SIV Program while responding to requirements in section 5275 of the FY 2023 NDAA.

##### ***Accounting of Individuals Evacuated from Afghanistan in 2021 and SIV Screening and Vetting***

To assess 1) State's systems, staffing, policies, and programs used to vet Afghan evacuees and Afghan SIV holders and 2) State's systems, policies, and programs used to determine the number of individuals evacuated from Afghanistan.

#### U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### ***Evaluation of USAID's Role in the Evacuation of Implementer Staff from Afghanistan***

To review USAID's role in the evacuation of implementing partners from Afghanistan and determine whether USAID's risk management procedures effectively prepared it for its role in the evacuation of implementing partner staff.

##### ***Audit of USAID's Efforts to Safeguard Implementers and Activities in Afghanistan***

To determine USAID's oversight of implementer efforts in Afghanistan to mitigate 1) security and safety risks in activities and 2) Taliban interference in activities.

Table 7.

**Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 2023****DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****National Snapshot of Recent Trends in the Refugee Resettlement Program***

To 1) summarize nationwide data on the ORR Refugee Resettlement Program; 2) identify recent trends in participation and outcomes; and 3) identify any challenges encountered by States, Replacement Designees, and domestic resettlement agencies and other non-profit organizations in administering ORR-funded benefits and services.

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****DHS Tracking of OAW Population with Potential Derogatory Records***

To assess DHS' identification and resolution for OAW member with potentially derogatory records.

**INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****Special Review of Intelligence Community Support to Screening and Vetting of Persons from Afghanistan***

To review the Intelligence Community's support to screening and vetting of persons from Afghanistan.

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****Federal Bureau of Investigation's Participation in Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome***

To assess the effectiveness of the FBI's coordination with its federal partners to support Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome.

**SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION*****Audit of U.S. Funds Directly Benefiting the Taliban***

To assess the extent to which U.S. Government funds intended to respond to humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan have been provided to the Taliban to pay taxes, fees, import duties, or for the purchase or receipt of permits, licenses, or public utility services since August 2021.

***Evaluation of the Purchase, Transfer, Conversion, and Use of U.S. Currency in Afghanistan***

To examine the purchase, transfer, conversion, and use of U.S. currency for humanitarian and development assistance in Afghanistan.

***Audit of U.S. Agencies' Oversight of Funds Provided to Public International Organizations for Activities in Afghanistan***

To assess the extent to which U.S. agencies and PIOs conduct oversight of U.S. funds provided for assistance to Afghanistan.

***State Implementing Partner Agreements with the Taliban***

To determine the extent to which: 1) State's implementing partners have entered into agreements with the Taliban to facilitate program implementation; 2) those agreements were completed and reviewed in accordance with applicable requirements; and 3) agreements with the Taliban have affected program implementation.

***Audit of USAID's Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene Projects***

To determine the extent to which USAID has conducted oversight of Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene projects; whether these projects have met their goals and objectives; and identify the challenges faced by USAID and Afghanistan in sustaining the progress made by the Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene program going forward.

***Assessment of the Afghan Fund's Operations, Policies, and Disbursements***

To determine the scope and nature of the Afghan fund, and potential risks and safeguarding measures.

**Follow on Performance Audit of State's Demining Activities in Afghanistan**

To determine the extent to which State performed all required oversight activities including annual reviews of award risk assessment and monitoring plans, quarterly reviews of performance progress and financial reports, and final review memoranda; State developed measurable award agreement targets and objectives and connected them to higher level goals; funds provided for demining activities have directly benefited the Taliban regime, or prohibited entities and individuals.

**Audit of USAID's Afghanistan Competitiveness of Export-Oriented Businesses Activity Program**

To evaluate USAID's oversight and management of Afghanistan Competitiveness of Export-Oriented Businesses Activity since January 2020 to assess the extent to which USAID and its partners conduct required oversight of the program; achieve stated program goals and objectives; and ensure that the program results are sustainable.

**Audit of Contractor Vetting**

To assess State and USAID's adherence to the requirements by the Global Terrorism Sanctions Regulations, the Foreign Terrorist Organizations Sanctions Regulations, and Executive Order 13224 when awarding contracts, and their ability to oversee direct programming activities and revoke funding if necessary.

**Personnel: U.S. Government Efforts to Deploy the Right People, in the Right Numbers, for the Right Amount of Time in Order to Accomplish Reconstruction Objectives in Afghanistan**

To identify the challenges the U.S. Government faced in deploying the right people, in the right numbers, for the right amount of time in order to achieve reconstruction objectives in Afghanistan; identify the ways in which the U.S. Government attempted to overcome those challenges, and whether those measures were effective; and distill lessons learned from efforts to rectify personnel problems within the Afghanistan context.

**Audit of State and USAID Efforts to Reduce Gender-Based Violence in Afghanistan**

To determine the extent to which USAID, State, and international partners have coordinated their efforts to address gender-based violence in Afghanistan to prevent duplication of efforts, and whether USAID and State have processes in place to ensure that they are meeting gender-based violence related goals and objectives.



## APPENDIX F

# Planned Oversight Projects

Table 8 lists the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OES.

Table 8.

### Planned Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of December 31, 2023

#### SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

##### ***Status of Equipment, Weapons, and Trained Personnel***

To determine 1) the current use and disposition of military equipment and weaponry funded by the DoD that it left in Afghanistan, and 2) the efficacy of any U.S. efforts to track or capture military equipment and weaponry provided to the ANDSF that the DoD left behind.

##### ***U.S. Counternarcotics (CN) Efforts in Afghanistan Since 2021***

To assess the extent to which INL: 1) planned and implemented U.S.-funded CN programs in accordance with U.S. and agency strategies and goals; 2) U.S.-funded CN programs achieved intended outcomes; and 3) and Taliban governance has affected program implementation.

##### ***USAID's Livelihood Programming in Afghanistan***

To determine the extent to which USAID's non-agriculture livelihood programs are 1) achieving intended outcomes; 2) USAID and its partners took steps to ensure that the program results are sustainable; 3) implementing and adjusting current programs based on the lessons from previous livelihood programs to improve the likelihood of success; and 4) the extent to which USAID has conducted required oversight.

##### ***USAID's Strengthening Rural Livelihoods and Food Security***

To determine the extent to which USAID: 1) has performed the required oversight of SRL-FS, 2) SRL-FS has achieved, or is achieving, its intended outcomes; and 3) Taliban governance has affected program implementation.

##### ***Follow-up to Capital Assets Report***

To update our February 2021 report to determine the status of select capital assets and whether the reemergence of the Taliban as the de facto authority resulted in additional wasted infrastructure investments.

##### ***Audit of State and USAID's Internally Displaced Persons Camps Within Afghanistan***

To determine the extent to which State and USAID funded activities with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are meeting their intended goals and objectives; and State and USAID are performing oversight of their funding to these organizations.

##### ***Audit of USAID's Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation Efforts***

To determine the extent to which USAID measured Afghanistan Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Activity's progress in meeting its goal of providing meaningful external evaluations of project performance; measured third-party monitoring of development and humanitarian programming; reliable data collection and analysis, and aligning interventions with the mission's strategic goals; determined whether the program is meeting its performance targets outlined in the contract; and demonstrated the extent that AMELA is sustainable despite changing conditions in Afghanistan.

##### ***Evaluation of Interagency and International Coordination of Continuing Assistance***

To determine the extent to which U.S. agencies providing continuing assistance to Afghanistan: coordinate their on-going activities with other agencies within the U.S. Government; and coordinate their on-going activities with international donors and organizations.

##### ***Evaluation of the Condition of the Afghanistan Financial Sector's Impact on U.S. Programming***

To determine the extent to which the current state of the Afghan financial system has impacted the planning and execution of U.S. activities to assist the people of Afghanistan; previous U.S. assistance and projects to improve Afghanistan's financial sector have been sustained; and U.S. activities to assist the people of Afghanistan conduct oversight of their efforts and ensure U.S. funds are received by the desired party.



## ACRONYMS

Acronym	
AQIS	al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CARE	State Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts
CSO	civil society organizations
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
ERW	explosive remnants of war
FY	fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
INL	State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ISIS-K	ISIS-Khorasan
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	DoD, State, and USAID OIGs
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OAW	Operation Allies Welcome
OES	Operation Enduring Sentinel

Acronym	
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OUSDP	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SCA	State Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSN	Social Security number
State	Department of State
Treasury	Department of the Treasury
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
WFP	World Food Programme





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