

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



# OPERATION ENDURING SENTINEL AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO AFGHANISTAN



JANUARY 1, 2024–MARCH 31, 2024



**On the cover:** Beneficiaries wait for food assistance at a World Food Programme distribution site in Logar.  
(World Food Programme 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 Section 419 of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

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 combat terrorism and promote regional stability.

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 January 1 through March 31, 2024. 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.

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Beneficiaries wait for food assistance at a World Food Programme distribution site in Logar. (WFP photo)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria–Khorasan (ISIS-K) demonstrated increased transnational terrorism capabilities during the quarter through large scale, multi-casualty attacks in Iran and Russia.**<sup>1</sup> ISIS-K conducted a suicide bombing on January 3 at a memorial in Kerman, Iran for Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force Commander Ghasem Soleimani, who was killed in Iraq in 2020 by a U.S. air strike.<sup>2</sup> The attack killed at least 100 people.<sup>3</sup> ISIS-K gunmen stormed a concert venue near Moscow, Russia on March 22, killing at least 140 people in what was described as the worst terrorist attack in Russia in 20 years.<sup>4</sup> While ISIS-K demonstrated large-scale regional attacks, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) observed no ISIS-K plans against the United States.<sup>5</sup> However in March, General Michael “Erik” Kurilla, the Commander of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), testified to Congress on the growing terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan, warning that ISIS affiliates “retain the capability and the will” to attack the United States and its allies in Europe in as little as 6 months.<sup>6</sup>

**ISIS-K demonstrated increased transnational terrorism capabilities during the quarter through large scale, multi-casualty attacks in Iran and Russia.**



Afghans wait in line to receive food or cash assistance from a WFP distribution site in Logar. (WFP photo)

**U.S. intelligence personnel warned their counterparts in Iran and Russia before the ISIS-K attacks.**<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Embassy in Moscow issued a public security alert for U.S. nationals prior to the Russia attack, and U.S. officials also shared credible intelligence information with Russian security services about the ISIS-K plot. Russian officials did not act on the information.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. Government privately warned Iran before the attack in Kerman, Iran.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Government rarely shares intelligence with adversary nations but did so in these particular instances under “duty to warn” policies that aim to protect innocent civilian lives.<sup>10</sup>

**The Taliban continued to privately provide shelter to al-Qaeda senior leaders while publicly denying that al-Qaeda uses its territory to pose threats to outside countries.**<sup>11</sup> A January UN Security Council report indicated that al-Qaeda established up to eight new terror training camps in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> However, the Intelligence Community generally assesses that al-Qaeda has a limited presence in Afghanistan, has not reconstituted its presence since the U.S. departure in August 2021, and does not have a capability to launch attacks against the United States or its interests abroad from Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) probably lack the ability to attack the U.S. homeland or U.S. interests in the region, the DIA stated.<sup>14</sup>

**U.S. diplomats continued to press Taliban leaders to honor their counterterrorism commitments and reverse their harsh human rights edicts, particularly for women and girls.** State continued to demand the immediate and unconditional release of U.S. citizens wrongfully detained in Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> A Taliban spokesperson told the media in March that two American citizens were imprisoned along with other foreign nationals.<sup>16</sup> State said it has made clear to the Taliban that the detentions were a significant obstacle to positive engagement.<sup>17</sup> State

also continued to press the Taliban to cooperate with efforts to relocate eligible Afghans and their families through the Enduring Welcome program.<sup>18</sup> The number of Afghans who received Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) to travel to the United States increased during the quarter.<sup>19</sup> State said that it increased its capacity to process SIV and refugee applicants in Pakistan during the quarter and continued efforts to establish additional processing capacity elsewhere in the region.<sup>20</sup>

**Heavy rainfall across Afghanistan in March caused flooding that resulted in at least 25 deaths and injury to several others.** Flooding destroyed more than 1,500 acres of agricultural land and resulted in severe damage to over 540 homes. Weather damaged other critical infrastructure across seven provinces, including six bridges and 450 km of road.<sup>21</sup> USAID-funded programs provided emergency shelter assistance, water, sanitation, and emergency relief supplies, such as kits with blankets, family tents, shelter repair tools, and other supplies.<sup>22</sup> U.S. and international humanitarian assistance programs this quarter also focused on addressing acute food insecurity.<sup>23</sup> Taliban interference continued to limit the effectiveness and scope of aid operations in Afghanistan this quarter, particularly women’s ability to access and deliver assistance.<sup>24</sup>



A WFP Deputy Regional Manager visits Kabul City where he met with families who were among the 10 million people dropped from emergency food assistance due to a massive funding shortfall. (WFP photo)



# OPERATION ENDURING SENTINEL

*This section, “Mission Update,” 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 that are integral to the OES mission.*

## U.S. ACTIVITY

The mission of Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES) is to contain terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan, to protect the homeland by maintaining pressure on those threats, and to engage with Central Asian and South Asian regional partners to foster counterterrorism partnerships.

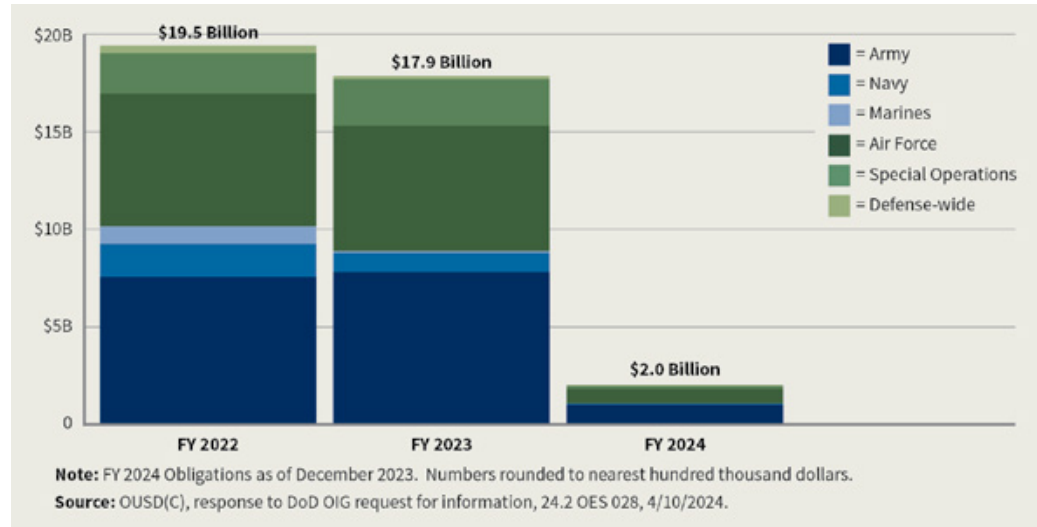
The DoD provided limited publicly releasable information about U.S. military activity related to OES during the quarter. More DoD information on OES counterterrorism activities this quarter can be found in the classified appendix. The DoD Comptroller reported that the DoD had obligated more than \$2 billion for activities related to OES as of the end of 2023, out of approximately \$8.1 billion requested for FY 2024.<sup>25</sup> (See Figure 1.)

### **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 made a decision 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.



Figure 1.

**DoD Obligations for OES, FY 2022–FY 2024**

In March, General Michael “Erik” Kurilla, Commander of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), told Congress that the United States has had to divert intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets from watching over Afghanistan to Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to better protect troops and ships under attack amid growing tensions in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> He also said that U.S. intelligence was “degraded,” but there were ongoing efforts to close the gap with alternative airborne ISR and other intelligence.<sup>27</sup>

February 29 marked the fourth anniversary of the Doha Agreement. Under the Doha Agreement, the Taliban committed to preventing any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using territory in Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. Government continued to push the Taliban to fulfill all of its counterterrorism commitments and make clear that it is the Taliban’s responsibility to ensure that no safe haven is provided to terrorists.<sup>29</sup>

State reported that the U.S. Government has demonstrated a commitment to hold terrorists in Afghanistan accountable while making it clear to the Taliban that it is in their interest to counter violent terrorist groups inside Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup>

## VIOLENT EXTREMIST ACTIVITY

### USCENTCOM, United Nations Warn of Growing ISIS-K Risk

During his Congressional testimony in March, General Kurilla said that the risk of violent extremist organization (VEO) attacks emanating from Afghanistan is increasing.<sup>31</sup> ISIS affiliates in Afghanistan and Syria “retain the capability and the will” to attack the United States and its allies in Europe in as little as six months, Kurilla said.<sup>32</sup> The threat is more likely against U.S. interests abroad and European allies, and it would take “substantially more resources” to hit the U.S. homeland, General Kurilla said.<sup>33</sup>

In a January report, the UN Security Council said that the greatest threat within Afghanistan still comes from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria–Khorasan (ISIS-K), which has the ability to project into the region and beyond.<sup>34</sup> ISIS-K has continued to pose a major threat in Afghanistan and the region despite losses in territory, casualties, and high attrition among senior and mid-tier leadership figures.<sup>35</sup> The UN report also noted concerns by member states that travel by some individuals of North Caucasus and Central Asian descent from Afghanistan to Europe could provide an opportunity for ISIS-K “to seek to project violent attacks in the West.”<sup>36</sup>

ISIS-K threatens Taliban credibility, Afghanistan’s security and, if unchecked, the wider region, State said.<sup>37</sup> Although the Taliban made efforts to counter ISIS-K, it is “critical they adhere to their counterterrorism commitments,” State said.<sup>38</sup> ISIS-K has “adapted” by transitioning to “less frequent, more sensational attacks” and moved key leaders and recruitment efforts out of Afghanistan, according to an independent analyst.<sup>39</sup> The United Nations estimates that ISIS-K cells operate in Kabul, Kunar, Nangarhar, and Nuristan provinces in addition to smaller groups of fighters in other provinces and was actively recruiting in multiple languages, including Pashto, Persian, and Russian.<sup>40</sup>

During the quarter, National Counterterrorism Center Director Christy Abizaid said that ISIS-K was the “threat actor I am most concerned about” and stated that ISIS-K’s ambition may go beyond Afghanistan, media reported.<sup>41</sup> However, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said that most ISIS attacks have been initiated by parts of ISIS that are located outside of Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup>

## ISIS-K Attacks in Russia and Iran Kill Hundreds, Despite U.S. Warnings

During the quarter, ISIS-K conducted attacks in Iran and Russia that demonstrated the group’s transnational terrorism capabilities, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).<sup>43</sup> The DIA stated that ISIS-K probably considers regional external operations a priority compared to operations against U.S. interests and the U.S. homeland.<sup>44</sup>

On January 3, ISIS-K conducted a suicide bombing in Kerman, Iran at a memorial for Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in Iraq in 2020 by a U.S. air strike.<sup>45</sup> The attack killed at least 100 people and injured more than 140, according to the DIA.<sup>46</sup> ISIS-K claimed the attack as an act of revenge against Soleimani, who led Iran’s fight against ISIS and its affiliates prior to his death.<sup>47</sup>

On March 22, ISIS-K gunmen stormed the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow, killing at least 140 people and injuring 180, according to the DIA and several media outlets.<sup>48</sup> The attack was described as the worst terrorist attack to hit Russia in 20 years.<sup>49</sup> Russian authorities arrested 11 people after the attacks. At least four of them had Tajikistan passports, according to media reports.<sup>50</sup>

ISIS-K released a document celebrating the Russia attack, highlighting the Taliban’s failure to prevent international attacks from Afghanistan, even though it pledged to do so as part of the Doha Agreement.<sup>51</sup> A Taliban spokesperson condemned the attack in Russia and asked for regional countries to take a “clear and coordinated” position against incidents aimed at regional destabilization.<sup>52</sup>

**ISIS-K threatens Taliban credibility, Afghanistan’s security and, if unchecked, the wider region, State said.**



Inside Afghanistan, ISIS-K targeted the Taliban’s historic stronghold of Kandahar.<sup>53</sup> On March 21, an ISIS-K suicide bomber struck Taliban members at a bank in Kandahar City, killing at least 21 people and injuring 51.<sup>54</sup> The attack has significant symbolic value, as Kandahar is considered the birthplace of the Taliban.<sup>55</sup> Kandahar is also known as the Taliban’s political headquarters. The reclusive Taliban supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, lives in Kandahar and governs Afghanistan from there.<sup>56</sup> ISIS-K also claimed responsibility for an attack targeting a bus in a Shia-dominated area in Kabul on January 6, USCENTCOM reported.<sup>57</sup> The attack against Shiite Muslims killed and injured approximately 20 people.<sup>58</sup>

According to the DIA, the ISIS-K attacks during the quarter against targets in Afghanistan and external attacks in the region—including those in Iran and Russia—were consistent with the group’s past attack patterns.<sup>59</sup> The DIA stated it observed no indications that ISIS-K changed its strategy, priorities, or activities this quarter, but its attacks were more lethal than in previous quarters.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the DIA stated that it observed no indications of a specific ISIS-K plot emanating from Afghanistan to attack the U.S. homeland.<sup>61</sup> Several media outlets reported that ISIS-K’s expanded regional focus and capabilities are due to its leader, Sanaullah Ghafari, who took over the group in 2020.<sup>62</sup> (See page 8.)

## U.S. Provided Intelligence Warnings to Russia and Iran Before ISIS-K Attacks

In the days leading up to the January 3 bombings in Kerman, Iran and the March 22 assault in Moscow, U.S. officials warned officials in both countries of the respective ISIS-K plots, informing them that attacks were imminent.<sup>63</sup> According to open-source reporting, the U.S. Government privately warned Iran that ISIS-K was preparing to conduct a terrorist attack before the January 3 bombings in Kerman.<sup>64</sup>

**In the days leading up to the January 3 bombings in Kerman, Iran and the March 22 assault in Moscow, U.S. officials warned officials in both countries of the respective ISIS-K plots, informing them that attacks were imminent.**

Prior to the ISIS-K attack on the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow issued a public security alert on March 7, warning U.S. nationals that VEOs were targeting large gatherings.<sup>65</sup> Embassy officials shared specific, timely, and credible intelligence information with Russian security services about the ISIS-K plot prior to the attack. However, Russian officials misrepresented and publicly dismissed the usefulness of the information, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Lynne Tracy said, according to media reporting.<sup>66</sup>

Iran also warned Russia of a possible “major terrorist” operation before the Moscow attack, based on information from interrogations of those detained in connection with the earlier attacks on Iranian soil, according to media reporting.<sup>67</sup> Iran arrested 35 people in January following the Kerman attack, including an ISIS-K commander, according to media reporting.<sup>68</sup>

While the U.S. Government rarely shares intelligence with adversary nations, it did so in these particular instances under the “duty to warn” policy, which aims to protect innocent civilian lives. This policy was outlined in 2015 to establish “a consistent, coordinated approach for how the Intelligence Community will provide warning regarding threats to specific individuals or groups of intentional killing, serious bodily injury, and kidnapping.”<sup>69</sup>

## The Leader Who Made ISIS-K the Deadliest Branch of ISIS

Much of ISIS-K's recent regional expansion and increase in visibility can be attributed to the leadership of Sanaullah Ghafari, known as Shahab al-Muhajir, who was appointed ISIS-K's emir in June 2020, according to press reporting quoting global terrorism experts.<sup>70</sup> Ghafari is responsible for approving all ISIS-K operations throughout Afghanistan and arranging funding to conduct operations.<sup>71</sup>

Ghafari rose to prominence after the deadly 2021 Kabul airport attack. Little is known about his life before that time. Some sources say he is an Afghan Tajik who served as a soldier in the Afghan army and later joined ISIS-K, while others describe him as an engineer educated at Kabul University.<sup>72</sup> Ghafari was initially reported killed in Afghanistan in June 2023 during a Taliban intelligence-led raid, but he reportedly escaped with injuries across the border into Pakistan.<sup>73</sup> He is now believed to be based in Pakistan's Balochistan province along the border with Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup>



Sanaullah Ghafari (State image)

State designated Ghafari as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in November 2021.<sup>75</sup> In February 22, State's Rewards for Justice program offered a \$10 million reward for information leading to Ghafari's whereabouts, which still stands.<sup>76</sup>

Ghafari has reinforced ISIS-K's reputation for hardline ideology and high-profile attacks, while also expanding the group's propaganda into various languages, including English, Farsi, Hindi, Kyrgyz, Malayalam, Russian, Tajik, Urdu, and Uzbek. Ghafari also expanded ISIS-K recruitment to younger Afghans, as well as Uzbeks, Tajiks, and others in Afghanistan and abroad.<sup>77</sup> Some of the suspected gunmen arrested by Russian authorities after the Moscow ISIS-K attack in March had Tajikistan passports.<sup>78</sup>

Besides the recent attacks in Iran and Russia, and the Kabul airport bombing in 2021, ISIS-K high profile attacks under Ghafari's leadership included a suicide attack at the Russian embassy in Kabul in September 2022.<sup>79</sup> ISIS-K has set its sights on Russia because of its legacy from the Soviet-Afghan war, Russia's military operations in the Chechen wars, and Russia's support of the Syrian Regime, according to media analysis.<sup>80</sup>

ISIS-K under Ghafari has steadily increased its ranks, capabilities, financial network, and global recruitment from its safe haven in Afghanistan, according to press reports quoting former senior American, Afghan, and European intelligence officials.<sup>81</sup> The Taliban has been unable to eliminate or fully restrain ISIS-K. Experts say that ISIS-K is one of the branches most likely to drive a resurgence threat globally.<sup>82</sup>



## No Indicators of ISIS-K Plans to Attack U.S. or U.S. Interests

While ISIS-K proved capable of conducting attacks outside of Afghanistan, the DIA observed no indicators of ISIS-K attempting to plan an attack against the United States and U.S. interests, the DIA reported.<sup>83</sup> Al-Qaeda legacy members and members of the Afghan regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), probably lack the ability to attack the U.S. homeland or U.S. interests in the region without assistance from like-minded groups, the DIA stated.<sup>84</sup>

Al-Qaeda's ability to threaten the United States from Afghanistan or Pakistan was probably at its lowest point since the group relocated from Sudan in 1996, State said.<sup>85</sup> Less than a dozen al-Qaeda core members with historical ties to the group remain in Afghanistan.<sup>86</sup>

The DIA estimated that overall numbers of VEO fighters probably remained roughly consistent with data from the previous two quarters. (See Table 1.) The DIA said that Taliban restrictions on al-Qaeda activity, including a ban on conducting terrorist attacks from Afghan territory, has likely hindered recruitment and retention efforts.<sup>87</sup>

## Taliban Continues to Deny al-Qaeda Has Presence in Afghanistan

The DIA reported no changes in its assessments from the previous quarter that al-Qaeda and AQIS are maintaining a low profile in Afghanistan.<sup>88</sup> The Taliban continued to deny that VEOs, such as al-Qaeda, have a presence in Afghanistan and are using its territory to pose threats to outside countries, the DIA stated.<sup>89</sup>

The Taliban continued to allow senior al-Qaeda leaders, the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and other insurgent groups to operate in Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup> Ties between the Taliban and al-Qaeda remained strong, operating under a system of Taliban patronage, and posed a threat to the region, according to the United Nations.<sup>91</sup>

The DIA stated that it observed no indications that al-Qaeda senior leaders provided guidance, funding, or propaganda support to AQIS or other global affiliates during the

quarter.<sup>92</sup> Since the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, al-Qaeda leaders have largely complied with the Taliban's public pledges that Afghanistan would not serve as a base for transnational attacks, according to the DIA.<sup>93</sup> The leaders of AQIS almost certainly are abiding by the Taliban's restrictions and al-Qaeda leaders' decisions regarding attacks from Afghanistan.<sup>94</sup>

The DIA stated that al-Qaeda has not publicly named a successor to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the former leader of the terrorist group who was killed in a U.S. counterterrorism strike in 2022.<sup>95</sup> Sayf al-Adl, who serves as al-Qaeda's overall military commander and was al-Zawahiri's second-in-command, is likely the top contender, the DIA stated. Al-Adl helped found al-Qaeda and played a role in planning the 1998 U.S. embassy attacks in East Africa.<sup>96</sup> Given his experience and tactical acumen, al-Adl would

Table 1.

### Estimated Number of VEO Fighters in Afghanistan and Region

<b>Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)</b>	4,000-6,000
<b>ISIS-K</b>	2,000
<b>Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)</b>	200
<b>Al-Qaeda</b>	Fewer than a dozen core members

Source: DIA, responses to DoD OIG request for information, 23.4 OES 031, 9/27/2023 and 24.2 OES 038, 4/10/2024.

be al-Qaeda's most tactically proficient emir and would probably pose the greatest threat to the West as successor, according to the DIA. The significance of al-Qaeda not publicly naming a successor is probably because al-Adl is based in Iran, the DIA assessed.<sup>97</sup> Given the long absence of a named leader, it is also plausible that the group may be operating with al-Adl as an unnamed emir. Alternatively, al-Qaeda may covertly adopt a structure based on leadership by committee in which the group's branches decide strategy via consensus.<sup>98</sup>

## UN Report Claims al-Qaeda Is Running Training Camps in Afghanistan

The DIA said that it has seen no credible indications that Afghanistan-based al-Qaeda or AQIS members planned, trained for, or conducted external operations or that they were attempting to rebuild such a capacity there this quarter.<sup>99</sup> However, a January UN Security Council report indicated that the Taliban continues to shelter al-Qaeda senior leaders in Afghanistan while obscuring public visibility of these relationships. Al-Qaeda reportedly established up to eight new training camps in Afghanistan, including four in Ghazni, Laghman, Parwan, and Uruzgan provinces.<sup>100</sup> Some of the camps may include weapons stockpiles and host suicide bomber training for the TTP, a globally designated terrorist group also known as the Pakistani Taliban. Five al-Qaeda madrasas operate in Laghman, Kunar, Nangarhar, Nuristan, and Parwan provinces.<sup>101</sup> The United Nations stated that al-Qaeda, along with the Afghan Taliban, conducts suicide bomber training to support the TTP in its attacks in Pakistan.<sup>102</sup> Al-Qaeda continues to pose a threat in the region and potentially beyond, the UN report stated.<sup>103</sup>

The DIA stated that al-Qaeda and AQIS are probably involved in training activities at camps in Afghanistan, although the DIA lacks reporting that corroborates the number of camps mentioned in the report.<sup>104</sup> Specifically, the DIA stated that it lacks information on whom the AQIS members are training and "whether these members are providing training with the sanction of AQIS leaders or are providing their skills in a freelance situation."<sup>105</sup> The DIA stated that it and other DoD elements are monitoring for any al-Qaeda or AQIS-linked camps in Afghanistan. In early February, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid denied the allegations in the UN report, the DIA stated.<sup>106</sup> The Taliban further accused the UN of spreading propaganda and said that there was "no one related to" al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, media reported.<sup>107</sup>

The DIA reported that a pro-Taliban political commentator claimed in March that ISIS-K operated training camps in Balochistan, Pakistan.<sup>108</sup> Balochistan province, located in southwest Pakistan neighboring Afghanistan and Iran, remains a hotbed of violent insurgency and one of the most volatile areas in Pakistan, media reported.<sup>109</sup>

## Recent ISIS-K Member Arrests Highlight Concern of Regional Expansion

According to the January UN Security Council report, arrests of ISIS-K affiliates dating back to at least summer 2023 raised concerns about ISIS-K's intent to strike targets in Europe.<sup>110</sup> In July, authorities arrested seven Tajik, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz individuals linked to ISIS-K in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The men were planning to conduct high-profile terrorist attacks and were obtaining necessary weapons and surveilling possible targets.<sup>111</sup>

**A January UN Security Council report indicated that the Taliban continues to shelter al-Qaeda senior leaders in Afghanistan while obscuring public visibility of these relationships.**



**This quarter, German media reported that authorities thwarted an ISIS-K plot against the Swedish parliament.**

This quarter, German media reported that authorities thwarted an ISIS-K plot against the Swedish parliament.<sup>112</sup> German authorities arrested two Afghans near Gera in the central state of Thuringia, Germany. The men were accused of planning an attack with firearms near the Swedish parliament under direction from ISIS-K in response to Quran burnings in that country in 2023.<sup>113</sup> The pair had been conducting internet research on targets and tried several times to obtain weapons. Both had previously raised funds in Germany for ISIS and sent money to the terrorist organization through intermediaries, according to press reporting.<sup>114</sup>

The Department of the Treasury (Treasury) has also reported on U.S. concerns about ISIS-K and its efforts to increase the use of its base in Afghanistan to establish external financial and logistical cells that could enable terrorist attacks worldwide.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, ISIS-K serves as a regional hub, transferring hundreds of thousands of dollars to financial facilitators. It also provides personnel and weapons to support external operations, Treasury stated.<sup>116</sup> ISIS-K continues to raise a significant amount of money through kidnapping for ransom and extortion, Treasury said.<sup>117</sup>

## TALIBAN ACTIVITY

### Taliban Counterterrorism Activity Reduced ISIS-K Attacks in Afghanistan

The Taliban conducted raids against ISIS-K during the quarter and has likely maintained its capability to disrupt ISIS-K cells in Afghanistan, the DIA stated.<sup>118</sup> In early February, Taliban counterterrorism raids on ISIS-K hideouts in Kabul and Kunduz resulted in six fighters detained. Since January, ISIS-K has claimed three attacks in Afghanistan, compared to five over the same period last quarter and eight during the same time in early 2023, the DIA reported.<sup>119</sup> However, ISIS-K probably conducted at least two additional attacks targeting a Taliban provincial governor and Shia civilians in Kabul, the DIA reported.<sup>120</sup>

As of late February, a UN report showed a 38 percent rise in security incidents from November 1, 2023, to January 10, 2024 in Afghanistan compared to the same period in 2022-2023, but the report attributed the increase to Taliban regime arrests of small-scale drug traffickers and noted that ISIS-K attacks have decreased, the DIA stated.<sup>121</sup> The Taliban claims to have full control over U.S.-origin military equipment and aircraft transferred to the former Afghan government, but the DIA had no information as to the extent to which the Taliban was employing these items in counterterrorism operations.<sup>122</sup>

Militants, including the TTP, are probably using only a limited quantity of U.S.-origin weaponry and equipment, including small arms and night vision goggles, to conduct attacks in Pakistan.<sup>123</sup> In January, Pakistani intelligence forces recovered a few U.S. manufactured small arms following operations, including M-16 and M-4 rifles. However, the amount of U.S.-origin weaponry that Pakistani sources allege is in the hands of anti-Pakistan militants is likely an exaggeration, the DIA stated.<sup>124</sup>

In January, a Taliban official claimed that the attacks that did occur in Afghanistan were “all carried out by foreigners, especially the citizens of Tajikistan.”<sup>125</sup> Afghanistan’s acting Defense Minister Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid claimed that Taliban security forces killed or

arrested “dozens” of Tajikistan citizens during counterterrorism operations and that there had been a dramatic decrease in ISIS-K attacks during the year.<sup>126</sup>

General Kurilla said that the Taliban’s “inability, or unwillingness, to rein in VEOs could destabilize Central and South Asia,” and VEOs leveraged poor economic conditions, lax governance in Afghanistan, and a sophisticated network to recruit, train, and sustain an expanding cadre of fighters.<sup>127</sup>

During the quarter, armed resistance groups continued to claim attacks on the Taliban in Afghanistan, but they did not threaten the Taliban’s control of the country, State said.<sup>128</sup>

## Unsanctioned Reprisal Killings Against Former Afghan Government Personnel Continue

According to the DIA, Taliban leadership is almost certainly not directing attacks against former Afghan government and military personnel.<sup>129</sup> However, Taliban members or suspected Taliban members arrested, tortured, or killed at least seven members of the former Afghan government during the quarter.<sup>130</sup> The DIA stated that low-level Taliban members are likely responsible for the reprisal attacks.<sup>131</sup> The DIA stated that it is not able to verify reports of reprisal attacks against former Afghan government personnel or the number of former Afghan government personnel detained since the Taliban’s August 2021 takeover.<sup>132</sup> Despite public statements by Taliban leaders referring to an August 2021 general amnesty decree, there were numerous reports of the Taliban detaining or killing individuals associated with the former Afghan government. Political prisoners made up as much as 90 percent of the prison population, State said in its 2023 Annual Human Rights Report, released in April.<sup>133</sup>

## REGIONAL SECURITY

The DIA reported that countries neighboring Afghanistan continued to engage with the Taliban and voiced persistent concerns about terrorist threats emanating from the country.<sup>134</sup>

**Central Asian States:** During the quarter, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan engaged the Taliban through diplomatic dialogue to discuss regional infrastructure and investment projects in Afghanistan.<sup>135</sup> During the talks, Uzbekistan also indicated it would accept a Taliban ambassador in the near future. Additionally, Uzbekistan security officials met with the Taliban’s acting defense minister to discuss border security. Tajikistan turned to the Russia-aligned Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for border security assistance and sought to identify opportunities to improve security cooperation with Afghanistan, the DIA stated.<sup>136</sup>

**PRC:** The DIA stated that it had not observed People’s Republic of China (PRC) military engagements with the Taliban government during the quarter. The PRC remains concerned about threats allegedly posed by armed Islamic militants in Xinjiang on its border with Afghanistan, particularly from Uyghur extremists, the DIA stated. The PRC’s security concerns preclude its official recognition of the Taliban and expanded economic investments in Afghanistan, the DIA stated.<sup>137</sup> However, press reporting indicates the PRC recognized Bilal Karimi, a former Taliban spokesman, as an official envoy to Beijing.<sup>138</sup>



**India:** India pursued low-level engagement with the Taliban focused on humanitarian assistance, according to the DIA. India also called on the Taliban to prevent terrorist groups from using Afghan territory as a safe haven.<sup>139</sup> In January, India participated in a Taliban-led, multilateral engagement in Kabul to promote regional stability and development efforts in Afghanistan, according to the DIA.<sup>140</sup>

**Iran:** Iran and the Taliban continued to have complex and strained relations during the quarter, according to the DIA and media reporting.<sup>141</sup> The DIA stated that sectarian differences and disputes over their shared border and water rights were consistent points of contention.<sup>142</sup> Iran has not formally recognized the Taliban, the DIA stated. Additionally, Iran announced border closures with Afghanistan and Pakistan in response to the ISIS-K-claimed attack in Kerman.<sup>143</sup> Afghan officials condemned the border closures, saying that the two countries should jointly fight terrorists along their shared border.<sup>144</sup>

**Pakistan:** Pakistan conducted airstrikes in Afghanistan on March 18 targeting the TTP-affiliated Hafiz Gul Bahadur, probably in response to an attack claimed by the group two days earlier that killed seven Pakistani soldiers, the DIA stated. The Taliban issued statements saying that Pakistan carried out two air strikes against targets in Afghan territory, killing five women and three children. A Taliban spokesman condemned the attack as a violation of sovereignty, and Taliban fighters fired heavy weapons at Pakistani forces along the border in retaliation, media outlets reported.<sup>145</sup>

The DIA stated that Pakistan also conducted multiple counterterrorism operations against the TTP near the border with Afghanistan during the quarter.<sup>146</sup> Pakistan has criticized the Taliban regime for failing to prevent the TTP and affiliated militant groups from using Afghanistan as a staging ground for terrorism, the DIA reported.<sup>147</sup>

**Russia:** Russia maintains a brigade at its military base in Tajikistan and conducts counterterrorism activities in the region through the CSTO, according to the DIA.<sup>148</sup> In March, the Russian-led CSTO announced new border and security measures to be implemented in July because of an increase in ISIS fighters near Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan.<sup>149</sup> Since January, Russia has arrested or killed people in Russia with links to Afghanistan-based terrorism networks, the DIA stated.<sup>150</sup> Russia also allowed the Taliban to post a military attaché at Afghanistan's embassy in Moscow. In January, Russia held a conference with the Taliban, Iran, Pakistan, and China to discuss counterterrorism and counternarcotics in Afghanistan, according to the DIA. Russia does not recognize the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan.<sup>151</sup>

**This quarter, the TTP claimed 207 attacks against military and security targets, compared to 228 attacks last quarter, according to the DIA.**

## TTP Continues Assaults on Pakistani Security Forces

The DIA stated that it had observed no changes in TTP strategy, priorities, or activities during the quarter.<sup>152</sup> The TTP's primary objectives almost certainly remain to expel Pakistan's military from the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas and replace the Pakistani government with an Islamic state. In late March, the TTP reiterated that Pakistan's military and security forces are the group's only targets, the DIA reported.<sup>153</sup>

This quarter, the TTP claimed 207 attacks against military and security targets, compared to 228 attacks last quarter, according to the DIA.<sup>154</sup> In late March, the TTP's spokesperson

denied any involvement in an attack against Chinese personnel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, reiterating that the TTP targeted only Pakistani security forces and their supporters, the DIA stated.<sup>155</sup>

The DIA stated that TTP violence may present an indirect, collateral risk to U.S. interests in Pakistan.<sup>156</sup> However, the TTP has sought to avoid antagonizing the West, almost certainly to avoid incurring counterterrorism pressure, the DIA reported. For example, the TTP urged its media outlets to refrain from offending international powers.<sup>157</sup> The TTP almost certainly does not have the intent or capability to launch attacks against U.S. or Western interests outside of Afghanistan or Pakistan. However, U.S. or Western unilateral counterterrorism operations or direct involvement in Pakistan counterterrorism operations against the group may drive the TTP to revoke its ban on targeting Western interests, the DIA stated.<sup>158</sup>

The DIA stated that it did not observe any reporting that indicates the Taliban, in coordination with al-Qaeda or AQIS, has sheltered, supported, or trained TTP members during the quarter.<sup>159</sup>

## **TTP: Afghanistan–Pakistan Relationship Remains Tense**

During the quarter, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained tense, media reported.<sup>160</sup> The Taliban continued to be “sympathetic” to the TTP and supplied it with weapons and equipment and some Taliban members reportedly joined the TTP, according to the UN Secretary-General.<sup>161</sup> During the quarter, Pakistani jets targeted suspected TTP hideouts in Afghanistan, killing eight people, according to news reporting. Taliban forces reportedly denounced the strikes as an aggression on Afghanistan’s territorial integrity.<sup>162</sup> State urged the Taliban to ensure that terrorist attacks were not launched from Afghan soil, and urged Pakistan to exercise restraint and ensure civilians are not harmed in their counterterrorism efforts.<sup>163</sup> General Kurilla, the USCENTCOM Commander, said that the Taliban showed “little interest” in applying counterterrorism pressure against the TTP and he did not expect this dynamic to change.<sup>164</sup> He also said that the presence of safe havens in Afghanistan increased the risk of VEOs inciting regional conflict, noting that VEOs killed at least 2,300 Pakistanis in 2023, with “TTP in particular attacking Pakistan 881 times, the highest rate in more than 5 years.”<sup>165</sup>

According to media reporting, Taliban representatives met with Pakistani officials in Islamabad to ease tensions stemming from a surge in deadly cross-border attacks blamed on terrorists based on Afghan soil.<sup>166</sup> Pakistani officials have claimed that since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, TTP militants have intensified cross-border attacks with “greater operational freedom.” TTP-led bombings and small-arms attacks killed nearly 1,000 Pakistanis—half of them security forces—nationwide in 2023, marking the highest number of fatalities in six years, according to press reporting.<sup>167</sup>

## **Afghans Returning from Pakistan Not Affecting Security**

As of March 9, approximately 530,000 displaced Afghans have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan since Pakistan’s announcement that it would repatriate foreigners without valid immigration and identification documents beginning in September 2023.<sup>168</sup> The intended destinations of almost 75 percent of returnees were Nangarhar, Kandahar, and

Kabul provinces. Pakistani officials blamed Afghans for a recent uptick in attacks by militant groups, linking these to “illegal migrants.”<sup>169</sup> The DIA stated that the influx of Afghans displaced from Pakistan did not affect the security situation in Afghanistan.<sup>170</sup> As of February, the Taliban has managed the security situation, in part, by biometrically identifying returnees, probably to screen for known criminal or terrorist affiliates, and providing returnees with transportation or money for transportation, the DIA stated. The DIA stated it had no information on whether ISIS-K, al-Qaeda, or the TTP were exploiting the Afghan returnee situation during the quarter.<sup>171</sup>

### Iran and Pakistan Exchange Strikes

On January 16, Iran struck two Jaish al-Adl militant group strongholds in southwest Pakistan, several media outlets reported.<sup>172</sup> The strike, which Pakistan claimed killed two children, led to Pakistan recalling its ambassador to Iran and threatening retaliation against Iran, media reports indicated.<sup>173</sup>

Almost immediately, on January 18, Pakistan retaliated, launching a series of strikes inside Iran. Pakistan said its strikes targeted members of the separatist Balochistan Liberation Army and Balochistan Liberation Front, which view themselves as representing the Baluch community that lives across Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, media reported, citing Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry.<sup>174</sup>

Jaish al-Adl, or Army of Justice, is a separatist militant group that operates on both sides of the border and has previously claimed responsibility for attacks against Iranian targets. Its stated goal is the independence of Iran’s Sistan and Baluchestan province, according to media reports.<sup>175</sup>

### Transfer of Former Afghan National Security Forces Aircraft in Uzbekistan Progresses

The governments of the United States and Uzbekistan continued to work together to transfer former Afghan National Security Forces aircraft now in Uzbekistan to ownership by Uzbekistan.<sup>176</sup> State’s role in negotiating the transfer is to assess U.S. national security interests in the region and notify Congress on the Excess Defense Article transfer, State said.<sup>177</sup>





# U.S. POLICY OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN

The U.S. Government’s primary enduring interests in Afghanistan are the safety and security of U.S. citizens and that Afghanistan can never again be a launching pad for terrorist attacks against the United States. U.S. Government officials engage with Afghans outside and inside Afghanistan, including the Taliban, to protect U.S. interests and support the Afghan people. Human rights and the return to school for women and girls remain at the forefront of engagement. The U.S. Government continues to urge the Taliban to respect the rights of all Afghans and to reverse discriminatory decrees. It is also in the U.S. Government’s interest to prevent a humanitarian crisis that would destabilize the region, according to State.<sup>178</sup>

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

### U.S. ACTIVITIES

#### “Doha II” Meeting of Afghanistan Special Envoys Convened, but Invited Taliban Representatives Absent

In mid-February, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West attended the second meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan hosted by the UN Secretary-General in Doha, Qatar. The Taliban was invited but refused to participate.<sup>179</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that the Taliban sent him a letter outlining what Guterres described as unacceptable conditions for their participation. The Taliban insisted that the special envoys not interact with representatives of Afghan civil society who were invited to attend the meeting. The Taliban also sought to cast its involvement in the conference as similar to recognition as the government of Afghanistan.<sup>180</sup> State concurred with the UN decision not to meet the Taliban’s demands but nonetheless expressed disappointment at the Taliban’s absence from the meeting.<sup>181</sup>

Table 2.

#### U.S. Priorities in 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.

**Representatives from 25 countries and regional organizations participated in the “Doha II” meeting, which was also attended by Afghan civil society and women’s groups.**

The conference was intended to increase international engagement in a more coherent, coordinated, and structured way as well as to consider the recommendations of a recent UN independent assessment on Afghanistan.<sup>182</sup> Meeting participants agreed with the assessment’s programmatic proposals, but there was no agreement on key issues, including the rights of women and girls. The UN Secretary-General said that the meetings of the special envoys on Afghanistan should continue, but in a way that the Taliban can attend, potentially by convening the meeting with lower-level representatives.<sup>183</sup>

The United States welcomed the continuation of the meetings and expressed support for the independent assessment’s recommendations, including calls for a UN-led process to develop a roadmap for Afghanistan’s full integration into the international system.<sup>184</sup> Representatives from 25 countries and regional organizations participated in the “Doha II” meeting, which was also attended by Afghan civil society and women’s groups. Media reported that Russia expressed some support for the Taliban’s position and did not participate in the session with the civil society representatives.<sup>185</sup> The UN is already planning a third conference, State said.<sup>186</sup> In mid-March, the United States also joined other UN Security Council members in support for the renewal of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan’s (UNAMA) mandate and praised the “essential role” UNAMA plays in coordinating the UN’s efforts on the ground.<sup>187</sup>

## State Continues to Advocate for U.S. Policy Priorities

During the quarter, State continued to advocate for policy priorities through diplomatic engagement. The goals of U.S. participation in international efforts like the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS are to monitor terrorist threats from the region and prevent terrorists’ ability to raise funds, travel, and spread propaganda, State said.<sup>188</sup> In March, Special Representative West traveled to India and the United Arab Emirates to discuss the importance of a collective diplomatic approach in Afghanistan as well as current and future needs for humanitarian aid and medicine deliveries to the Afghan people.<sup>189</sup>

State continued to engage with the Taliban this quarter 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 and girls; press for the continued relocation of Afghan partners remaining in Afghanistan; demand the release of wrongfully detained U.S. citizens; and underscore concern regarding the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.<sup>190</sup> State and Treasury officials met at a technical level with Taliban representatives this quarter to discuss economic stabilization. The talks follow the July 30-31 high level and October 17-18 economic technical talks in Doha, Qatar.<sup>191</sup>

According to State, Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU) staff travel to meet with Afghans outside of Afghanistan, in countries like Pakistan, the Central Asian states, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates, and coordinate with U.S. missions in those countries.<sup>192</sup> In March, AAU Chargé d’Affaires Karen Decker met with Afghan activists in Istanbul where she observed “strong support” among civil society representatives for a UN-led process to reintegrate Afghanistan into the international community and readiness to support a political roadmap and engagement with the Taliban.<sup>193</sup>

State said it was working to secure the release of all American citizens wrongfully detained abroad, including in Afghanistan. U.S. officials, in meetings with Taliban representatives, continually press for acknowledgement of, family contact opportunities for, and consular access to all American detainees, and for release of those designated wrongfully detained or in need of release on humanitarian grounds.<sup>194</sup> State says it has made clear to the Taliban that the detentions were a significant obstacle to positive engagement.<sup>195</sup> According to media reporting, the Taliban confirmed for the first time that two Americans were detained. Taliban spokesperson Mujahid said that the two were imprisoned along with other foreign nationals.<sup>196</sup> It has been more than 1 year since the U.S. and Qatari governments negotiated the release of Mark Frerichs, who was the fourth detained American freed from Afghanistan since August 2021.<sup>197</sup>

**State said it was working to secure the release of all American citizens wrongfully detained abroad, including in Afghanistan.**

## **U.S. Continues to Advocate for Women and Girls in Afghanistan**

On February 26, the United States joined 10 of the 15 UN Security Council members in a statement condemning the Taliban's repression of women and girls. Algeria, China, Mozambique, and Russia did not sign the statement, media reported.<sup>198</sup>

State said that it funds gender justice activities that have increased Afghan women's access to legal aid and social services. State support for non-governmental justice actors and civil society organizations helped protect and advocate for human rights and access to justice. State also funded gender-based violence prevention and intervention services through UN Women.<sup>199</sup>

The new academic year started in Afghanistan at the end of March, and for the third year, more than a million Afghan women and girls were banned from school. By the end of the quarter, more than 900 days had passed since girls older than 12 were first banned from attending school.<sup>200</sup> U.S. Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights Rina Amiri said that Afghanistan loses more than \$1 billion annually due to the Taliban's extreme decrees against women and girls.<sup>201</sup> Surveys indicate that more than 85 percent of the Afghan population believes women should have equal access to education, State said.<sup>202</sup>

On March 4, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken honored Benafsha Yaqoobi at the 2024 Women of Courage Awards. Yaqoobi, a visually impaired Afghan woman, worked as a lawyer defending the rights of female Afghan victims of violence. She also founded an organization in 2008 that provides education and rehabilitation to visually impaired people in Afghanistan. Yaqoobi hosted a daily television show to raise awareness about disability rights and served as a Commissioner for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, where she focused on educating blind children. Yaqoobi, who lives in exile, remains an advocate for Afghans with disabilities and works to ensure that the rights of disabled persons are incorporated in humanitarian response efforts, State said.<sup>203</sup>



## State Announces Expansion of Afghan Women’s Economic Resilience Initiative

On February 27, Secretary Blinken hosted the Alliance for Afghan Women’s Economic Resilience (AWER) summit. AWER, a public-private partnership between State and Boston University, was launched by Secretary Blinken in 2022 to support Afghan women’s economic security both inside and outside of Afghanistan. AWER was created to facilitate collaborations between the private sector, civil society, academia, governments, and Afghan women leaders.<sup>204</sup>

**Secretary  
Antony J. Blinken  
delivers remarks  
at the Alliance for  
Afghan Women’s  
Economic Resilience  
Summit at the  
Department  
of State in  
Washington, D.C.,  
February 27, 2024.  
(State photo)**

In his remarks, Secretary Blinken highlighted AWER’s growth over the past 2 years, including the recruitment of additional partners, program expansion, and more opportunities for Afghan women to work with mentors in their fields. Secretary Blinken announced AWER’s partnership with a high-profile private sector organization that focuses on educating women and girls to create new scholarships for Afghan women refugees in the United States to finish their bachelor’s and master’s degrees and to support more Afghan women-owned businesses.<sup>205</sup> During the quarter, State continued to advocate for women’s access to the labor market and women-led business opportunities working in Afghanistan and third countries by funding the Afghan Women Economic Empowerment program which facilitates engagement of the private sector to support Afghan women’s economic security and resilience.<sup>206</sup>



## State’s Afghanistan Affairs Unit Serving as “Embassy in Exile”

The AAU, which operates out of the U.S. Embassy in Doha, serves as an “embassy-in-exile” for U.S. diplomacy related to Afghanistan. AAU staff will work from Doha until conditions permit a return to Kabul.<sup>207</sup> (See Table 3.) AAU personnel travel to engage Afghan diaspora communities, former leaders, activists, and alumni of U.S. exchange programs to connect with the Afghan people as well as the Taliban itself. According to the Integrated Country Strategy for Afghanistan, negative stories relayed by Afghan Special Immigration Visa (SIV) applicants in addition to an uncertain policy and resource environment created mental health challenges for AAU personnel, some of whom were Afghans. An objective addressing AAU staff mental health was therefore added.<sup>208</sup>

Table 3.

### AAU Management Objectives

#### Establish an embassy-in-exile platform in Doha and other locations as determined:

- Recruit inclusively for effective expeditionary diplomacy.
- Obtain sufficient resources for travel to engage diaspora and regional partners.
- Obtain appropriate mental health resources.
- Ensure strong communications with the U.S. Embassy in Doha.

#### Participate in Return-to-Kabul planning:

- Establish best practices with like-minded missions on travel to and in Kabul.
- Implement Protecting Power Arrangement provisions related to oversight of U.S. Government facilities in Kabul.
- Map interagency security capabilities to support travel to Kabul.
- Participate in prudent planning discussions with Washington and Doha-based colleagues.

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

## Secretary Blinken and Qatari Foreign Minister Discuss Goals for Afghanistan

The Qatari government continued to serve as the protecting power for the United States in Afghanistan, State said. In this capacity, Qatar facilitates support to American citizens in need in Afghanistan and Afghan nationals relocating to the United States.<sup>209</sup>

On March 5, the United States hosted the U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue in Washington, D.C. Secretary Blinken thanked Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani for Qatar’s continued support for the protection of U.S. interests in Afghanistan. Qatar’s support included helping detained Americans return home to their families, and relocating thousands of eligible individuals from Afghanistan, through Qatar, to the United States.<sup>210</sup>

In a joint statement, the two countries announced an agreement on hosting individuals at risk. The agreement enhances State’s ability to process Afghanistan relocations through Qatar and

extends previous agreements authorizing the U.S. Government to transit eligible Afghans through Qatar for immigration processing.<sup>211</sup> The statement also highlighted both countries’ commitment to countering violent extremism and combating terrorism, including financing of terrorism.<sup>212</sup>

## ENDURING WELCOME

Enduring Welcome (EW) is a whole-of-government effort to process eligible Afghan allies and their families from Afghanistan. The previous interagency effort to relocate Afghan allies, Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) formally ended on September 30, 2022, with the shift to EW. As part of EW, State’s Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) handles the planning and logistics of relocating eligible Afghans—including those who qualify for SIVs, Immigrant Visas, and approved United States Refugee Assistance

Table 4.  
Roles and Responsibilities within State for Enduring Welcome

<b>South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA)’s Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (SCA/CARE)</b>	Leads State’s EW efforts, including sustainment functions previously provided by the DoD. Assumed responsibility for preparing eligible individuals and facilitating their travel. Responsible for general oversight of the key functions and implementers of EW processes, including integrating support from relevant bureaus.
<b>SCA/Afghanistan Special Immigration Visa Unit</b>	Processes all applications for Chief of Mission approval, in line with criteria established under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended. This is the first step in the SIV process. An individual may not move forward in the Afghan SIV process, or be issued an SIV, without Chief of Mission approval.
<b>Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)</b>	Leads and manages the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program processing for Afghan refugee applicants and provides humanitarian assistance support at overseas processing facilities. Undertaken in multiple locations, these services include the provision of mental health and psychosocial support; non-food items and supplemental food; education; protection case management; community engagement; local integration support; and medical screenings.  Monitors overseas site management and programming practices to promote alignment with international humanitarian standards and protection principles, as well as maintain accountability to Afghan guests who are awaiting processing of their applications.  Manages transportation from processing sites to the United States and initial domestic resettlement services for Afghan refugees and SIV recipients.
<b>Consular Affairs (CA)</b>	Oversees SIV processing for Afghans. Support includes temporary duty assignment travel for State personnel, interpreters to provide translation services in the adjudication process, supplies, and equipment.  Supports SIV processing in Islamabad for Afghans residing in Pakistan.
<b>Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO)</b>	Provides facilities in support of EW operations.  Supports project development, physical security, and other upgrades needed to ensure facilities meet security and operational standards.
<b>Diplomatic Security (DS)</b>	Provides security services and infrastructure support for EW facilities, including Worldwide Protective Services guards for static security, Emergency Response Teams, and Explosive Detection Canines.

Source: State Bureau of Budget and Planning, “Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2025,” 3/9/2024; State, vetting comment, 5/8/2024.



Program cases—on flights or by ground transportation to processing sites.<sup>213</sup> Camp as-Sayliyah, in Doha, Qatar, is the primary overseas platform for processing applications. During the quarter, State said that it increased its capacity to process SIV and refugee applicants in Pakistan and continued efforts to establish additional processing capacity, including in the East Asian and Pacific Affairs area of responsibility.<sup>214</sup>

### State Works to Improve Processing Times Across All Relocation Locations

State said that it continued to develop efficiencies in the pre-travel vetting plus (PTV+) process during the quarter. The PTV+ process initiates some screening for SIV applicants while they are still in Kabul in order to detect any cases that could require long stays at one of processing platforms. PTV+ is now being done for applicants scheduled for flights going to the processing locations in Albania, Germany, and Qatar.<sup>215</sup>

State also implemented Pre-Travel Assurances for travelers during the quarter, which enables cases to be allocated to a resettlement agency and assured to a location in the United States prior to arrival at a processing site.<sup>216</sup> The first Pre-Travel Assurances were requested in the last week of February, and the first flights with some pre-assured cases were scheduled to arrive at their processing location in early May. Applicants who arrive with Pre-Travel Assurance, who did not have adjudication issues, are ready for departure after as few as 7-12 days at the processing location. A larger cohort of Pre-Travel Assured cases are scheduled to arrive starting in late May, State said.<sup>217</sup>

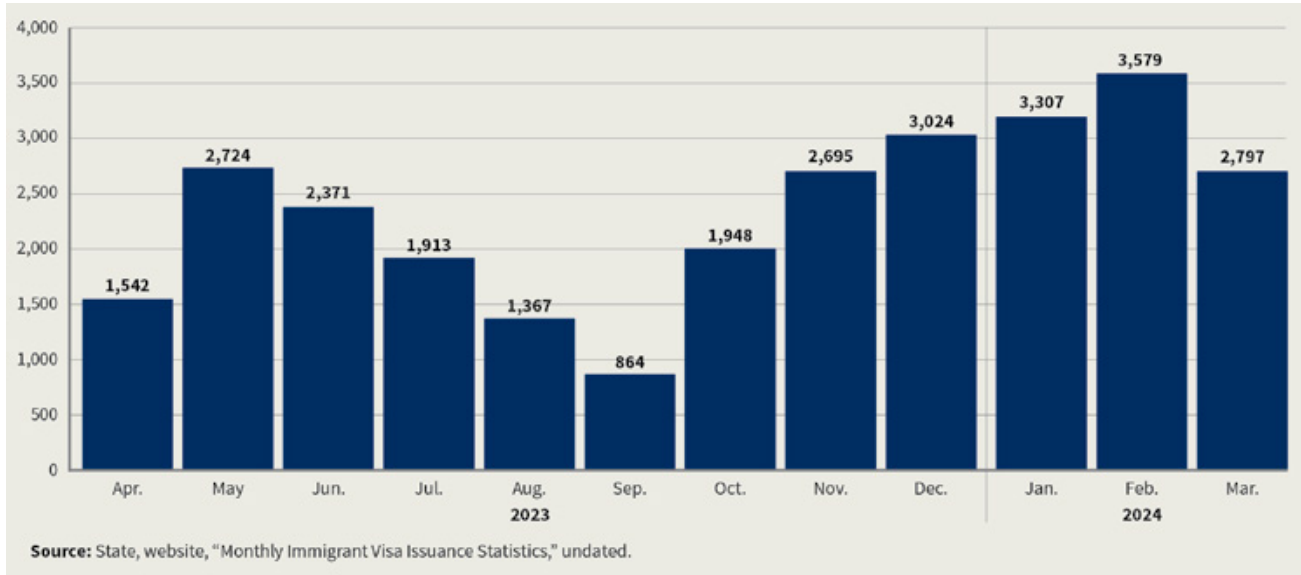
The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) continued to expand Afghan refugee processing of all priority categories in countries worldwide. From October 1, 2023, through March 6, 2024, USCIS initially interviewed approximately 8,600 Afghan refugee applicants in approximately 22 countries. From October 1, 2020, to March 6, 2024, USCIS interviewed approximately 24,400 Afghan refugee applicants.<sup>218</sup> In addition, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) encountered 68 Afghan “inadmissible non-citizens”

Table 5. Relocations from Afghanistan, October 1, 2022–March 31, 2024

	FY 2023				FY 2024	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
<b>U.S Citizens</b>	60	37	42	4	17	15
<b>Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs)</b>	7	16	29	1	17	18
<b>Family Members of U.S. Citizens or LPRs</b>	73	142	198	40	217	349
<b>SIV Applicants</b>	1,582	2,800	4,144	1,173	5,997	7,362
<b>Refugee Applicants</b>	149	778	733	183	2,507	1,786
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,871</b>	<b>3,773</b>	<b>5,146</b>	<b>1,401</b>	<b>8,755</b>	<b>9,530</b>

Source: State CARE, response to State OIG request for information, 4/15/2024.

Figure 2.

**Special Immigrant Visa Issuances, April 2023–March 2024**

at the U.S. Southwest Border in FY 2022 and 342 in FY 2023. As of March 5, CBP had encountered 932 in FY 2024.<sup>219</sup>

### State Expands Onsite Educational and Safety Programming at Camp as-Sayliyah

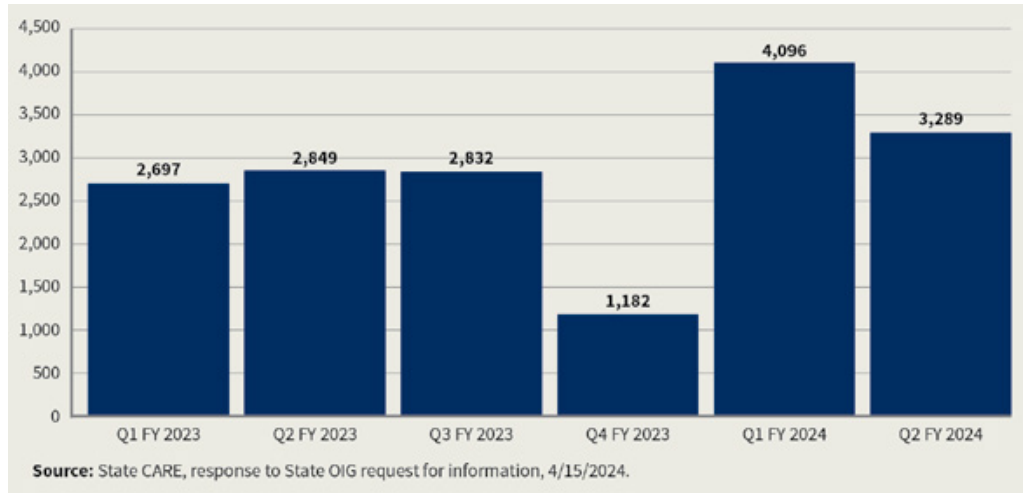
Last year, State assumed management responsibilities for Camp as-Sayliyah (CAS), which was previously supported by the DoD. As part of the transition of leadership, the DoD transferred OAW-specific Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) funding to State. The funding was used to provide sustainment, comprehensive services, and medical care for Afghans while their applications were processed.<sup>220</sup>

According to State, CAS operations are similar to when the DoD ran the compound with the same functions on the operational side (maintenance, Afghan guest housing, guest medical services, etc.) and the programmatic side (child education and adult cultural orientation, etc.). (See Figure 3.) However, after taking over the compound in September, State expanded educational programming focused on women and required all compound employees—more than 1,300 people—to complete the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse training.<sup>221</sup>

State continued to use the DoD’s Logistics Civil Augmentation Program contracting mechanism for life support, operations and maintenance, and medical services, but added a contract for perimeter security and community order in the Afghan guests’ zone of the compound, a function previously performed by uniformed DoD Service members. The DoD’s logistics support mechanism will be replaced by a State contract by the end of the fiscal year, State said.<sup>222</sup>

Figure 3.

**Total Number of Afghans Residing in Camp As-Sayliyah (by quarter)**



Some Afghans living in Pakistan who were in U.S. immigration pathways were arrested or deported when the Pakistani government started implementing its plan to deport undocumented Afghans in November 2023.<sup>223</sup> According to State, the U.S. Government communicated with the Pakistani government on the safety of individuals in U.S. resettlement and immigration pipelines during the quarter. However, repatriation of Afghans living in Pakistan who were not in U.S. resettlement or immigration pathways continued, with more than 520,000 Afghans returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan since the policy announcement, State said.<sup>224</sup> Pakistan is set to begin a new phase of Afghan deportations in April, according to media reporting.<sup>225</sup>

The Department of Homeland Security reported that Afghan nationals paroled by CBP through the EW effort were required to undergo an interagency vetting process. All evacuees who were paroled into the United States undergo continuous vetting for the duration of their parole.<sup>226</sup>

Table 6.

**Relocation of Afghans as of March 31, 2024**

<b>Number Afghans relocated during the quarter from Afghanistan with U.S. Government support</b>	9,521
<b>Number of people identified to be eligible individuals in Afghanistan</b>	128,730
<b>Number of people who have been in contact with State</b>	86,025

Source: State CARE, response to State OIG request for information, 4/15/2024.



Although the Taliban has requested sanctions relief, State said that it continued to make clear that relief was not possible until the expectations of the international community were met.

## TALIBAN ACTIVITY

The Taliban remained sanctioned under U.S. counterterrorism authorities and many Taliban leaders also remained sanctioned under UN authorities, State said. Although the Taliban has requested sanctions relief, State said that it continued to make clear that relief was not possible until the expectations of the international community were met.<sup>227</sup> The UN sanctions regime on the Taliban, which prohibit international travel for designated members of the Taliban absent an exemption, remained in place.<sup>228</sup>

### Taliban Expands on Harsh Edicts

During the quarter, the Taliban began new and increased enforcement of their restrictive edicts. Emir Hibatullah Akhundzada prioritized hardline Islamic governance and restrictions in Afghanistan despite persistent global criticism, media reported.<sup>229</sup> Members of some minority religious and ethnic groups continued to face repression, discrimination, and marginalization in public service delivery, State said.<sup>230</sup> In February, Akhundzada declared that any criticism against him was against Islamic law and sows distrust, media reported.<sup>231</sup> In late March, Akhundzada said in an audio message that the Taliban intended to implement harsh interpretations of Shariah law, noting that women could be stoned to death in public for moral crimes.<sup>232</sup> Afghan women feared further erosion of their rights and women's rights groups warned that Akhundzada's statements could be interpreted as a mandate for increased violence against women.<sup>233</sup>

### Taliban Defense Minister Attends Defense Trade Fair in Doha

In March, the Taliban's acting Minister of Defense Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, attended the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition, according to media reporting.<sup>234</sup> A Taliban spokesperson said that the delegation met with Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani during the visit and thanked him for Qatar's hospitality, noting that the invitation to the exhibition meant that the world was ready to interact with Taliban-led Afghanistan, according to a news report.<sup>235</sup>

At the exhibition, Yaqoob and his delegation visited the Chinese, Turkish, and American pavilions. The Doha-based Taliban Political Commission described Yaqoob's weeklong stay in Qatar as part of an "official" visit, State reported.<sup>236</sup>

### International Activity

During the quarter, State continued to track the nature of interactions between the Taliban and other countries and urged 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>237</sup> According to State's Integrated Country Strategy for Afghanistan, "predatory powers like Iran, PRC, and Russia" seek strategic and economic advantage or, at a minimum, to put the United States at a disadvantage.<sup>238</sup>

Table 7.

### Regional Country Acknowledgement of Taliban Authorities in Afghanistan During the Quarter

**Azerbaijan:** In January, Azerbaijan’s ambassador to Afghanistan presented Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaqi with an official letter announcing Azerbaijan’s intention to open an embassy.

**PRC:** In January, PRC President Xi accepted ambassador credentials from a Taliban representative in a ceremony in Beijing.

**Uzbekistan:** In February, the Uzbekistani government handed control of the Afghan embassy in Tashkent to the Taliban, a day after Uzbekistan’s State Security Service head met with Afghanistan’s acting defense minister.

**Sources:** Embassy Baku, cable, “Baku Daily Report for February 15, 2024,” 24 BAKU 140, 2/15/2024; Akmal Dawi, “China’s President Accepts Credentials from Afghan Representative,” Voice of America, 1/31/2024; Kun.UZ, “Taliban-appointed Diplomat Takes Charge of Afghanistan’s Embassy in Uzbekistan,” 2/5/2024.

### Afghanistan’s Neighbors Acknowledge Taliban Diplomats Stopping Short of “Formal Recognition”

In January, media reported that PRC President Xi Jinping accepted ambassador credentials from a Taliban representative in a ceremony in Beijing, on the heels of the PRC ambassador to Afghanistan presenting his credentials to high-level Taliban authorities in September.<sup>239</sup> Afghanistan’s neighbors have elevated diplomatic engagement similarly, but no country has yet recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan, State said.<sup>240</sup> (See Table 7.) At the end of the quarter, the Russian government invited Taliban representatives to attend the Russian-Islamic World Forum in Kazan.<sup>241</sup> Withholding formal recognition is one of the international community’s main tools of leverage and normalized relations erode collective international leverage, according to a U.S.-based regional expert.<sup>242</sup>

### Regional Envoys Gather in Kabul for Taliban-hosted Conference

On January 29, the Taliban hosted a conference of regional envoys in Kabul. According to media reporting, envoys from the PRC, Russia, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Indonesia, and India participated.<sup>243</sup> During the meeting, Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaqi expressed the need for a region-centric narrative for constructive engagement with the Taliban to tackle regional threats.<sup>244</sup>

Media commentators observed that the meeting, the first hosted in Kabul for regional leaders since the Taliban seized power in 2021, was an opportunity for Taliban authorities to advance their agenda of formal recognition by the international community.<sup>245</sup> Since August 2021, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, China, Russia, and Qatar have accepted diplomats appointed by the Taliban. Tajikistan remains the only neighbor of Afghanistan that has not allowed the Taliban to appoint its representative of choice, media reported. Tajikistan continues to recognize the pre-Taliban ambassador.<sup>246</sup>

During the quarter, the World Bank decided to deploy funding from its International Development Association fund for Afghanistan through UN agencies and other international organizations.

## ECONOMY

During the quarter, Afghanistan’s economy remained stable, but was marked by low overall economic activity and extreme fragility, State said. Although the World Bank reported price deflation, prolonged deflation may stunt economic growth and impede employment. Exports were down by 5 percent overall compared with the previous year, but most of the decline came from an 87 percent decline in coal exports to Pakistan.<sup>247</sup>

### Afghan Fund Board Addresses the Need for Safeguards to Protect Disbursements

The Afghan Fund’s board of trustees met on January 29 in Washington, D.C. During the meeting, the trustees signed an agreement with the Swiss government that grants the Fund and its board privileges and immunities under Swiss law, State said. The board took steps to finalize the operationalization of the Fund and put in place safeguards to prevent disbursements from being used for illicit activity, State said.<sup>248</sup> Treasury reported that the board is finalizing a draft framework to ensure that the Afghan Fund has in place appropriate due diligence and control procedures related to any potential disbursements. Upon approval of these policies and procedures, the board agreed that the Afghan Fund will make its first disbursement to the Asian Development Bank, intended to address Afghanistan’s outstanding arrears to that institution. The board anticipates that these funds will unlock additional resources that will be dedicated to enhancing the welfare of the Afghan people.<sup>249</sup> As of the end of the quarter, the Afghan Fund had not disbursed any funds.<sup>250</sup>

The Afghan Fund is responsible for the management of \$3.5 billion of Afghan Central Bank reserves, which were held in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York at the time of the Taliban takeover in 2021.<sup>251</sup> The United States transferred the funds to an account at the Swiss Bank for International Settlements.<sup>252</sup>

### World Bank Decides to Deploy International Development Association Funds for Afghanistan

During the quarter, the World Bank decided to deploy funding from its International Development Association fund for Afghanistan through UN agencies and other international organizations. According to media reporting, the funding would remain outside of Taliban control and would be the first time that World Bank own funds would be used in Afghanistan since August 2021. Media reported that the goal of the World Bank’s “Approach 3.0” to Afghanistan is to deliver basic services, support employment, and encourage private sector participation in aid delivery.”<sup>253</sup>

## OTHER STATE PROGRAMS

### State Continues Monitoring Mine Action Programs for Safety and Quality Assurance

In late-March, nine children were killed when a landmine exploded while they were playing with it in a small village in eastern Afghanistan.<sup>254</sup> Afghanistan is among the most

heavily mined countries in the world and an estimated 1,275 square kilometers of land is contaminated by minefields and unexploded ordnance.<sup>255</sup> During the quarter, State continued to fund humanitarian demining, survey, munitions destruction, and mine-risk education in Afghanistan.<sup>256</sup>

On March 14, State coordinated a high-level meeting with the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to develop goals, objectives, and implementation strategies for quality assurance and quality control site assessment visits to U.S.-funded clearance projects. As a result, UNMAS will now report any major safety violations that they identify. The Taliban did not interfere with State-funded humanitarian mine action projects or processes in Afghanistan during the quarter, State said.<sup>257</sup>

## State Supports Counternarcotics Public Awareness Campaigns in Afghanistan

State continued to support counternarcotics public awareness campaigns in Afghanistan via an interagency agreement with the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). USAGM seeks to “inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.”<sup>258</sup> USAGM works directly with Afghan journalists in Afghanistan affiliated with Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to produce counternarcotics public awareness campaigns for Afghan television, radio, online publications, and social media.<sup>259</sup>

According to State, media campaigns continued to be effective despite the restrictive media environment. In 2022, USAGM’s counternarcotics public awareness campaigns reached 49 percent of Afghanistan’s adult population. A 2022 USAGM analytic report on its counternarcotics public awareness campaigns found the audience for TV Ashna and Radio Azadi counternarcotics programming remained “robust” despite Taliban restrictions on media. TV viewers and listeners reported increased awareness of negative effects of narcotics on individuals’ health, a sense of alarm at the growing number of women and children engaged in drug use, and an increased interest in participation in other counternarcotics campaigns. USAGM is planning an updated viewership analysis report for its counternarcotics public awareness programming in Afghanistan, similar to the 2022 analysis. The completed analysis is expected to produce updated viewership counts for the 2023-2024 counternarcotics public awareness campaign.<sup>260</sup>

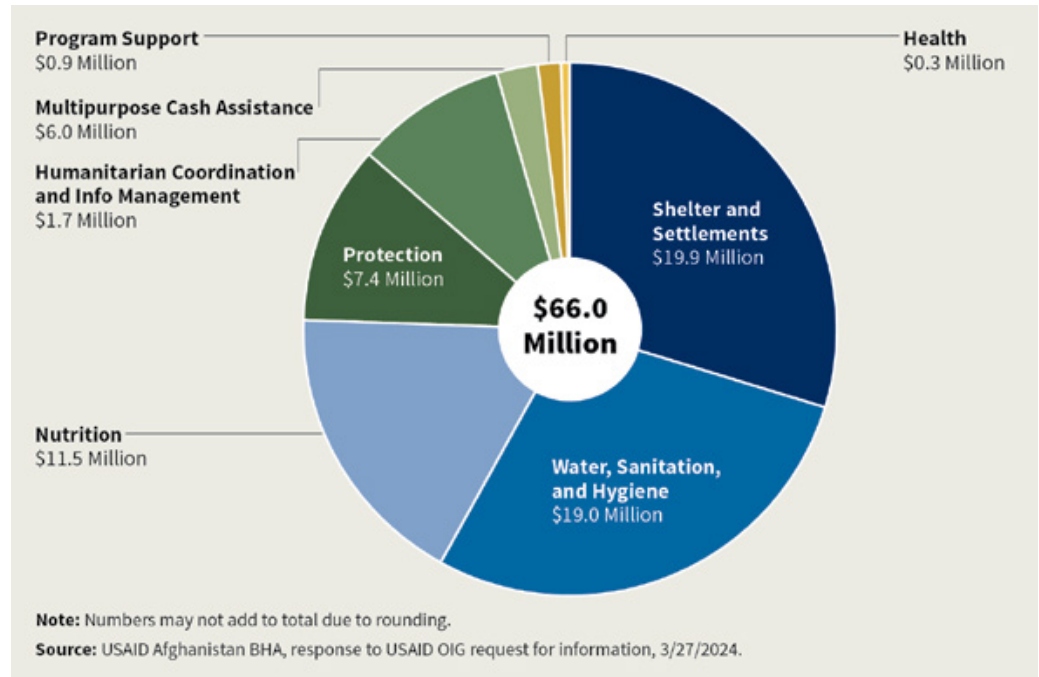
During the quarter, State monitored its counternarcotics programs through regular check-ins with program implementers and receipt of program quarterly reports. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime continued working under a new agreement to continue third-party monitoring and impact assessments of the Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development–Access to Licit Livelihoods program and added new monitoring and evaluation activities for the UN Women program in order to expand and improve oversight of activity in Afghanistan.<sup>261</sup>

**On March 14, State coordinated a high-level meeting with the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to develop goals, objectives, and implementation strategies for quality assurance and quality control site assessment visits to U.S.-funded clearance projects.**



Figure 4.

**USAID Humanitarian Assistance Funding By Sector Obligated in FY 2024, Q1 & Q2**



## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

### United States Remains the Leading Donor of Humanitarian Assistance to the Afghan People

The United States continued to be the leading donor of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, contributing more than \$2 billion since August 2021.<sup>262</sup> The U.S. Government 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>263</sup> According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan, 23.7 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian and protection assistance in 2024.<sup>264</sup> The Taliban’s decision to ban women from working with NGOs and the UN, and its preventing or limiting access to vulnerable women and girls, continued to impact the delivery of humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan. Donors have prioritized programming targeting health care and protection assistance to women and girls in need, State said.<sup>265</sup>

Table 8.

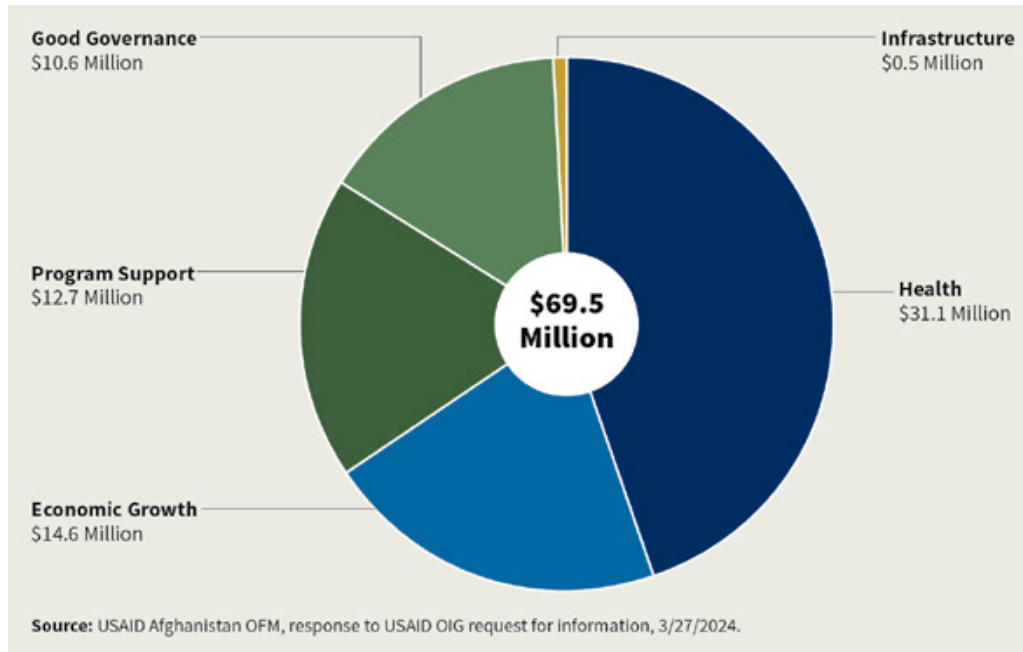
**U.S. Government Humanitarian Funding for the Afghanistan Response in FY 2024**

<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 5.

**USAID Development Funding by Sector Obligated in FY 2024**

The U.S. Government's primary humanitarian objectives in Afghanistan are to promote a principled humanitarian response that advocates for the independence of humanitarian aid organizations in facilitating aid; supports and provides appropriate protection assistance to vulnerable Afghans; and improves protection and living conditions of Afghan internally displaced persons, refugees, and new Afghan arrivals in neighboring countries, particularly Afghan women and girls, State and USAID said.<sup>266</sup>

**Food Security Needs Remain High in Afghanistan**

Food security remained the area of greatest need in Afghanistan. 13.1 million people, or 29 percent of the total Afghan population, experienced moderate or worse levels of acute food insecurity. Of that number, more than 2.4 million people experienced emergency levels of acute food insecurity. In addition, income available for food purchases continued to decrease due to the decline in available labor opportunities. A third consecutive year of drought conditions has left 30 out of 34 Afghan provinces with severe or extremely poor water quality and lack of food.<sup>267</sup>

A recent surge in returnees from Iran resulted in a decline in remittances from Afghans working in Iran. This deprived households in the central highlands of Afghanistan of an important source of income during the lean season, the period between November and March annually when food needs are higher.<sup>268</sup> Food insecurity is especially severe among recent returnees from Iran and Pakistan who reside in temporary shelters upon arrival in Afghanistan before moving on to their final destinations.<sup>269</sup> Humanitarian aid assists rural and urban households to meet their food needs during the lean season.<sup>270</sup>

**Food insecurity is especially severe among recent returnees from Iran and Pakistan who reside in temporary shelters upon arrival in Afghanistan before moving on to their final destinations.**

Offsetting low levels of precipitation between October and January, increased precipitation in February and March resulted in a near average October-to-March wet season cumulative precipitation total, Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) reports.<sup>271</sup> Increased rainfall in February and March was projected to support an average to above-average wheat harvest and increase agricultural labor opportunities, resulting in increased access to food and income for many households, particularly in northern and northeastern Afghanistan, according to FEWS NET.<sup>272</sup>

Sufficient rainfall and the start of the harvest in June may increase income-earning opportunities and household access to food, according to FEWS NET projections.<sup>273</sup> However, food insecurity is expected to persist in higher elevation areas, where the harvest does not occur until October. Households may continue to have limited income-earning opportunities to purchase food.<sup>274</sup> Additionally, projected above-average high temperatures from March to August and a below-average snowpack may reduce the availability of water for irrigation in the summer and lead to decreased harvest yields.<sup>275</sup>

WFP continues to provide higher levels of assistance through the lean season, and plans to scale down assistance over the summer period when harvests and market availability are better.<sup>276</sup> WFP has received \$150 million in funding from USAID during this quarter.<sup>277</sup> Since March 2023, WFP funding shortfalls have reduced rations for certain populations.<sup>278</sup> It remains unclear how WFP's ration cut will impact the food and nutrition indicators in the long-term.<sup>279</sup> However, WFP can direct contingency responses to address at-risk areas/populations facing catastrophic food insecurity.<sup>280</sup> WFP has noted the need to concentrate assistance in areas of high need and plans to stop general food assistance in the summer of 2024, opting for rapid assessments and hotspot analysis to identify pockets of high need and assist with full rations.<sup>281</sup>

## Natural Disasters Continue to Displace People from Their Homes

Heavy rainfall across Afghanistan on March 29 and 30 destroyed more than 1,500 acres of agricultural land and severely damaged more than 540 homes. Weather damaged other critical infrastructure across seven provinces, including six bridges and 450 km of road.<sup>282</sup> Based on initial reports and assessments, Faryab province in the northern region, Nangarhar province in the Eastern region, and Daikundi province in the Central Highlands region received the most damage.<sup>283</sup>

Heavy precipitation triggered an avalanche in a remote area of Nuristan province overnight on February 18, resulting in at least 25 deaths and injuries to several others, as well as damaging or destroying as many as 50 houses.<sup>284</sup> USAID partners operating in Nuristan province reported that households affected by the avalanche required food and other emergency supplies, as well as health, shelter, sanitation, and winterization assistance.<sup>285</sup> The WFP conducted rapid needs assessments in the area and provided food assistance to more than 200 avalanche-affected households, and UN IOM provided shelter assistance and winterization kits to nearly 50 households.<sup>286</sup>

This was the third time that the northern region experienced flooding in less than a month, as heavy rains occurred on March 21 and 26-27. As of the end of the quarter, there were no reports of displacement due to the floods.<sup>287</sup> OCHA continued to coordinate emergency

response and humanitarian needs assessments on behalf of humanitarian partners.<sup>288</sup> Seven assessment teams had been deployed to assess humanitarian needs in the most affected areas.<sup>289</sup>

USAID implementers continued to respond to populations impacted by the earthquakes in Herat province in October of last year.<sup>290</sup> Gaps in funding have increased needs amongst this population for winterization assistance, especially for those that continue to live outside.<sup>291</sup>

## Taliban Restrictions on Women Continue to Challenge Aid Organizations

The Taliban continued to limit the effectiveness and scope of humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, through various interferences, extensive timelines for approvals of agreements, restrictions on the participation of women in humanitarian assistance activities, and new regulations regarding NGO registration and hiring of staff.<sup>292</sup>

In December 2022, the Taliban issued an edict that banned Afghan women from working with NGOs, and another in April 2023 extending the ban to women working with UN programs. State and USAID's NGO and UN partners partially or fully resumed operations inside Afghanistan as of early summer 2023.<sup>293</sup>

At the beginning of the quarter, representatives of the Taliban Ministry of Economy informed humanitarian actors that the Taliban planned to stop requiring NGOs to distinguish between male and female staff during the registration process for new humanitarian activities.<sup>294</sup> The announcement, which followed sustained NGO engagement with the Taliban, was expected to enhance the ability of female staff to deliver aid and increase Taliban approval of official agreements, which are frequently denied to organizations that have female staff.<sup>295</sup> However, despite this announcement, Taliban interference has continued to limit the effectiveness and scope of aid operations in Afghanistan, particularly women's ability to access and deliver assistance, USAID said.<sup>296</sup>

During the quarter, new Taliban decrees interfered with processes used to select implementing partners. The Taliban's ban on women working with NGOs limited the ability to provide services to affected women and girls, State said.<sup>297</sup> Female humanitarian workers continued to work from home, via telephone, or in other home-work situations, which limited face-to-face interactions with program participants. Community engagement, protection activities, and related services for women including survivors of gender-based violence remained severely affected by the ban. State said its implementing partners continued to negotiate with Taliban personnel and to modify project activities to ensure that the most vulnerable Afghans received humanitarian assistance.<sup>298</sup>

The Taliban allowed recent female high school graduates to enroll in state-run medical institutes for the new academic year that began in March. However the current ban on girl's education beyond the sixth grade prevents this opportunity for women in the future.<sup>299</sup> This directive from the Ministry of Public Health could create a positive enabling environment for USAID's current activities if there are more comprehensive reforms for women's education, particularly activities that support young women to enroll in and complete post-secondary certificate programs in allied health fields.<sup>300</sup> USAID has four activities (total award amount of \$171 million) that support girls' education in Afghanistan, including three activities that focus on higher education.<sup>301</sup>

**The Taliban allowed recent female high school graduates to enroll in state-run medical institutes for the new academic year that began in March. However, the current ban on girl's education beyond the sixth grade prevents this opportunity for women in the future.**



While the extent of women’s involvement in relief activities continues to vary by location, Taliban restrictions on women remain an impediment for humanitarian programming across the country.<sup>302</sup> In some cases, female volunteers have been allowed to be present at cash-for-food distribution sites or available virtually for female beneficiaries with complaints or feedback regarding assistance.<sup>303</sup> In others, women have been permitted to work based on the severity of the need and the demographics of the beneficiary population.<sup>304</sup> However, reports indicate that Taliban representatives are more likely to tighten restrictions in response to publicized instances in which relief actors have received individual exemptions from Taliban edicts.<sup>305</sup> In addition, the Taliban’s Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has intensified the enforcement of the mahram, or male guardian, requirement for female aid workers and detentions of women for non-compliance with the Taliban-imposed dress code, resulting in some female applicants declining job offers at implementer organizations, out of fear for their safety in public.<sup>306</sup> Relief actors have also reported increased scrutiny at Taliban checkpoints and heightened harassment of female staff.<sup>307</sup>

## USAID Implementers Adjust to Continue Work Under Taliban Decrees

Overall, Taliban interference in humanitarian assistance activities continued to be limited, particularly for USAID implementing partners that have registered with the respective ministries and have letters of authorization.<sup>308</sup>

All suspensions/partial suspensions of implementer activities were initiated by USAID implementers in response to the situation on the ground.<sup>309</sup> USAID implementers have used a variety of workarounds in order to maintain female staff, including but not limited to: separate staff days for men and women, separate offices for men and women, telework for women uncomfortable with coming to the office or who are at risk for doing so, and funding to hire male relatives of female employees at their workplaces to function as mahrams.<sup>310</sup> Livelihood activities that focus on women are only done with the implementer’s coordination with and authorization of local authorities.<sup>311</sup>

Humanitarian assistance providers, including USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) implementing partners, continue to negotiate with Taliban personnel to secure exemptions aimed at allowing female staff to participate in the delivery of assistance and adapt their activities to ensure that delivery of aid can continue.<sup>312</sup>

Transparency of implementing partner operations seems to be the most significant factor in the decrease in Taliban interference, USAID said.<sup>313</sup> When the Taliban know what an NGO or public international organization is executing it removes much of their suspicion, according to USAID.<sup>314</sup> In addition, authorization letters issued by ministries in Kabul provide the clearance and higher-level cover for organizations operating in Afghanistan and are respected at the provincial and local level.<sup>315</sup> Most cases of interference have been with organizations that have not operated under a letter of authorization issued by a ministry in Kabul.<sup>316</sup>

Through proactive communication with the district-level government, incidents where Taliban restrictions on women from working in NGOs impact USAID programs during the quarter have been successfully managed, according to USAID.<sup>317</sup> Media and civil society

organizations overall are experiencing increased scrutiny, which is not directly linked to the ban on women working in NGOs but does further constrain how women are able to work in media and with civil society organizations.<sup>318</sup>

USAID said that it cannot ascertain the extent to which discussions with the Taliban have impacted restrictions on women working in NGOs and UN organizations.<sup>319</sup> UN organizations have engaged with de facto authorities representing the Taliban and there are examples when the de facto Ministry of Economy has modified their more severe gender-based employment requirements.<sup>320</sup> For example, the Ministry removed the requirement for the gender of staff members to be indicated in the registration portal for project operators.<sup>321</sup> Since July 2023, implementers have been facing challenges in registering women staff in the portal, thereby risking that women staff would be unable to continue in their jobs, as they could not be paid if they were not officially registered as part of the project.<sup>322</sup> The removal of this requirement has enabled organizations to continue to register projects involving Afghan women staff.<sup>323</sup>

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), funded by USAID, engaged extensively with the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock to secure a sectoral carve-out/exemption from restrictions on women for the agricultural sector.<sup>324</sup> While an exemption was not provided formally by the Taliban leadership in Kandahar, the Ministry leadership actively supported the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's efforts to put in place local solutions across the country at both provincial and district levels.<sup>325</sup>

## Humanitarian Assistance Provided 6 Million People With Health and Other Services

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided health, nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance throughout Afghanistan in February, with support from the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and other donors.<sup>326</sup> (See Table 9.)

During FY 2023, USAID continued to work toward reducing under-nutrition among women and children through two bilateral awards: Assistance for Families and Indigent Afghans to Thrive and the Urban Health Initiative.<sup>327</sup> In 249 USAID-supported rural health facilities and 910 health posts (across 14 provinces), 1,323,214 children reportedly received growth monitoring/infant and young child feeding services. This is a 10 percent increase over the number of children served in FY 2022.<sup>328</sup> In 76 USAID-supported urban public and private health facilities, 650,431 children under five were screened for malnutrition, of which 70,173 were diagnosed and referred for acute malnutrition and an additional 31,649 were diagnosed and referred for severe acute malnutrition.<sup>329</sup> USAID also provided nutrition and home care information for pregnant/lactating mothers, and complementary feeding for young children.<sup>330</sup>

Through the Local Health Systems Sustainability project, USAID works to strengthen private sector capacity to serve the urban poor (with a focus on women and children) by expanding the scale, quality, availability, and affordability of priority health products and services.<sup>331</sup> In FY 2023, the project sold 654,180 packets of micronutrient powder to fortify children's diets and prevent malnutrition, and 1,377,060 tabs of iron folate to support healthy pregnancies.<sup>332</sup>

Table 9.

**UNICEF Activities in February 2024**

Reached approximately 6 million people with health care services at its more than 2,400 static health facilities.

Delivered health care services to communities in remote areas through 16 mobile health and nutrition teams, reaching more than 19,000 people.

Provided routine immunizations, reaching more than 107,000 children with measles vaccinations in February.

Screened more than 1 million children aged five and younger for acute malnutrition and subsequently provided treatment to an estimated 43,000 children experiencing severe acute malnutrition.

Provided safe drinking water to approximately 60,000 people in eight provinces through constructing and repairing boreholes, connecting households to water systems, and rehabilitating and installing solar-powered water supply systems.

Delivered hygiene kits—containing antiseptic soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other personal sanitary items—to nearly 690 households and provided awareness raising sessions on handwashing, household water treatment options, and latrine usage to nearly 12,000 people.

**Source:** USAID, “Afghanistan–Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #2,” 3/8/2024.

The increase in measles cases continued throughout the quarter, likely exacerbated by winter weather conditions and low immunization coverage.<sup>333</sup> As of March 8, 2024, nearly 9,900 suspected measles cases had been reported—of which 80 percent were among children under five years of age—resulting in 46 deaths.<sup>334</sup> Despite prevention efforts, the number of measles cases in Afghanistan has not yet declined to the endemic levels seen in 2019 and 2020.<sup>335</sup> World Health Organization and other relief actors, and other U.S. Government-funded implementers, continue to provide immunization and treatment for measles and other diseases across Afghanistan.<sup>336</sup>

## **Oversight of U.S. Government Humanitarian Programs in Afghanistan Continues**

The U.S. Government continued to oversee and monitor the implementation of U.S.-funded humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>337</sup> Monitors continually assessed activities to ensure that assistance reached intended beneficiaries and ensured that implementing partners had appropriate mitigation measures in place to safeguard against diversion, according to State.<sup>338</sup>

According to USAID, WFP reported incidents of aid redistribution in Afghanistan, some of which appears to be forced (diverted from its intended distribution), rather than voluntary.<sup>339</sup> According to WFP, the forced redistribution is being carried out by community leaders, who have used their authority to spread WFP rations across a wider set of the population, influencing the beneficiary selection process.<sup>340</sup> While available information does not indicate widespread systemic diversion of food aid, it is difficult to determine the full impact on BHA funded programs and beneficiaries until more information is obtained from WFP.<sup>341</sup>

During the quarter, USAID also received from its implementers reports of fraud allegations, interference with monitoring, and interference with cash distributions.<sup>342</sup> In March, an international NGO implementer submitted a notification to the USAID OIG related to allegation of fraud.<sup>343</sup>

In March, BHA received reports from its third party monitor that field monitors were followed, photographed and then arrested by local authorities for monitoring a program.<sup>344</sup> According to the report, because the monitors did not have a permit letter to monitor the program in question, local staff at the site reported them to the local authorities, who later detained them and asked them to delete any photos of videos obtained during the visit. The monitors were released the following day, after interventions from third party monitor managers, and were not harmed.<sup>345</sup> BHA reported that its third party monitor is following up on the incident.

One USAID-funded NGO reported 11 incidents of interference in cash distributions throughout January and March.<sup>346</sup> The interference included local community leaders asking beneficiaries to share their cash with others in the community and trying to add additional beneficiaries to the beneficiary lists.<sup>347</sup> BHA reported that the implementer is looking into the allegations and will report back once the investigation has been finalized.

During the quarter, State's PRM reviewed last quarter's monitoring reports and met with NGO partners to discuss progress towards objectives and indicators. AAU staff met regularly with implementing partners and participated in the Afghanistan Coordination Group meetings in Istanbul in early March. State PRM focused on monitoring the increasingly restrictive environment to accurately assess partner performance without incentivizing the adoption of high-risk practices to meet program objectives, such as deploying female staff to meet beneficiaries in unsafe conditions. State PRM also leveraged desk monitoring and site visit feedback by PRM's third-party monitor to track program progress and compare performance over time. State PRM monitored partners' compliance with international standards and enhanced monitoring mechanisms the UN Humanitarian Country Team developed following UN leadership missions to Afghanistan in January 2023. State PRM will continue to advise partners to avoid practices that normalize lower-quality working conditions and assistance, State said.<sup>348</sup>

With the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and restrictions on female humanitarian staff, third-party monitoring is vital to enhance the desk review and remote monitoring used by the Afghanistan Refugee Coordinator now located in Doha and State PRM staff in Washington D.C., State said. Site visits by third-party monitors confirm female participation in the delivery and receipt of humanitarian assistance. The monitors use quantitative and qualitative questionnaires when speaking with staff and beneficiaries to assess the quality of service delivery and beneficiaries' satisfaction with the services provided. Their reports include photos of State-supported facilities and activities in site visit reports to confirm activities took place in accordance with the project appeal/proposal, State said.<sup>349</sup>



According to Border Consortium data, approximately 182,500 Afghans returned from Iran in January and February, and approximately 50,800 Afghans returned from Pakistan between January 1 and March 23.

## Afghan Returnees from Pakistan Increase

Afghan returnees from Pakistan continued to experience high levels of need during the quarter, both en route to and after reaching their destinations.<sup>350</sup> According to Border Consortium data, approximately 182,500 Afghans returned from Iran in January and February, and approximately 50,800 Afghans returned from Pakistan between January 1 and March 23.<sup>351</sup>

Many returnees have limited connections within Afghanistan, and Pakistani authorities reportedly seized possessions and money from returning populations.<sup>352</sup> As such, not all returned to their places of origin and many continue to reside in temporary settlements.<sup>353</sup>

USAID and State PRM implementers and other relief actors have been incorporating returnees into existing assistance programs (health, shelter, sanitation, protection, and food assistance).<sup>354</sup> Implementers have not yet expanded programs into new areas that may be experiencing large influxes of returnees, including parts of Kabul and Kandahar.<sup>355</sup> Additionally, Taliban threats to evict residents of informal settlements continue to heighten humanitarian concerns for at-risk populations without access to alternative shelter or sufficient basic resources.<sup>356</sup>

The decline in total border crossings has allowed relief actors to focus their assistance on the destinations of returnees and incorporate returnees into existing programs in these areas.<sup>357</sup> As of February, USAID implementers reported that returnees' needs in destinations largely remained within relief actors' capacity to respond. However, capacity was limited in districts with large returnee populations, particularly in Kabul, Kunar, and Nangarhar provinces.<sup>358</sup>

## USAID Provides Clothing, Fuel, and other Winterization Support

Severe winter weather, including heavy precipitation, resulted in at least 39 deaths in late February and early March.<sup>359</sup> Harsh winter weather conditions, including heavy snow and rain following a relatively dry winter, resulted in landslides and flooding, impacting beneficiaries as well as the ability of humanitarian assistance actors to access vulnerable populations.<sup>360</sup> Many major roads were also closed due to flooding, landslides, or snowfall, impacting the provision of humanitarian assistance.<sup>361</sup>

Many households recovering in earthquake-ravaged areas also remained in need of shelter assistance and emergency relief commodities during the quarter.<sup>362</sup> As of early January, more than 13,300 earthquake-affected households were sleeping in the open or in makeshift or damaged structures and more than 43,000 households required repairs to maintain basic shelter standards.<sup>363</sup> Additionally, more than 26,100 households required assistance to fortify and warm their shelters during the winter, and more than 24,000 households were without emergency winter supplies.<sup>364</sup> While above-average temperatures in Herat somewhat lessened the impact of these gaps in aid, temperatures remained below freezing during the night.<sup>365</sup>

USAID's Emergency Shelter-Non Food Items Cluster reached nearly 16,700 earthquake-affected households with shelter assistance and provided more than 21,000 households with emergency relief supplies such as blankets and winter clothing, as well as heating and fuel support in January.<sup>366</sup> USAID partners continue to monitor the situation to identify any emerging humanitarian needs in Herat and other provinces affected by recent weather conditions.<sup>367</sup>

# 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 and of the Intelligence Community. Additionally, the DHS OIG hosted 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. The group held its last meeting on March 5, though participants will continue to coordinate oversight work through the overseas contingency operations Joint Planning Group.

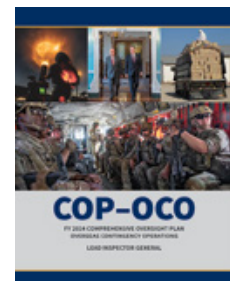
Pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for Operation Enduring Sentinel*, issued 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 projects and 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 OIG Asia Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand, and from Washington, D.C.



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

## COMPLETED PROJECTS

Between January 1 and March 31, 2024, the Lead IG and partner agencies issued five oversight reports related to OES, as detailed below. Completed reports by the Lead IG and partner agencies are available on their respective web pages.

## FINAL REPORTS BY LEAD IG AGENCIES

### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

#### ***Audit of DoD Afghanistan Contingency Contracts Closeout***

DODIG-2024-059; February 22, 2024

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether DoD contracting officials closed out contingency contracts supporting Afghanistan operations in accordance with applicable Federal laws and DoD regulations.

Contract closeout is an important process that ensures that the DoD received what it paid for, and closeout frees up funds held in abeyance for other uses or return to the U.S. Treasury. The Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement requires the heads of contracting activities to assign the highest priority to closing out contingency contracts.

The DoD OIG determined that DoD contracting officials did not consistently close out the contingency contracts as required. Specifically, the audit found that contracting officials did not close out and properly document most of the 30 contracts reviewed. Additionally, the audit determined that contingency contract data reported in the Federal Procurement Data System was unreliable and inaccurate. As a result, DoD contracting personnel did not always verify whether the DoD received what it contracted for or complete administrative requirements in a timely manner. The DoD also missed the opportunity to reprogram at least \$3.7 million in canceled funds to support other requirements.

To address the issues identified in this report, the DoD OIG made five recommendations to the DoD to improve the contract closeout process. Management agreed with four recommendations and did not concur with one recommendation. All five recommendations will remain open until the DoD OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

### USAID OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

#### ***Withdrawal From Afghanistan: USAID Faced Challenges Assisting in the Evacuation and Relocation of Implementer Staff***

Report E-306-24-001-M; March 18, 2024

USAID OIG initiated this evaluation in response to congressional requests that the Inspectors General for USAID, the Departments of State and Defense, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction examine the special immigrant visa process for Afghan refugees. Members of Congress were concerned that processing delays put Afghans working with USAID (i.e., implementing organizations that carry out programming through

USAID grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements) at an increased risk of violent retribution by the Taliban.

USAID OIG determined that USAID lacked a clear role and experienced challenges planning and communicating during the evacuation of implementing organization staff from Afghanistan. The Agency did not have defined evacuation-related roles and responsibilities or a mechanism to accurately track implementing organization staff. USAID was also constrained by insufficient staff and delayed guidance on how to address questions from implementing organizations, which had divided opinions about the Agency's communication efforts.

USAID OIG concluded that USAID's Bureau for Asia did not conduct a comprehensive review of the risks that the USAID Mission in Afghanistan identified before the evacuation. This may have been due to the staff's inadequate knowledge and experience in this area and possibly weakened the Agency's response to the withdrawal.

USAID OIG made seven recommendations to improve the Agency's preparation to support implementing organizations during a withdrawal. USAID agreed with six recommendations and disagreed with one. USAID OIG closed two recommendations upon issuance of this report. The remaining five recommendations will remain open until USAID OIG receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

## FINAL REPORTS BY LEAD IG PARTNER AGENCIES

### SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

#### ***Cash Shipments to Afghanistan: The UN Has Purchased and Transported More than \$2.9 Billion to Afghanistan to Implement Humanitarian Assistance***

SIGAR-24-12-IP; January 26, 2024

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

This report was issued based on a request from Congress that SIGAR examine and report on ongoing U.S. activities in Afghanistan, including the delivery, use, and oversight of U.S. funds provided in response to Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis.

Since 2001, the U.S. Government and other donors have funded development and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan through public international organizations (PIO) and NGOs. Since August 2021, the UN has purchased, transported, and transferred at least \$2.9 billion to Afghanistan using international donor contributions. The United States is the largest international donor, having provided about \$2.6 billion in funding for the UN, other PIOs, and NGOs operating in Afghanistan since August 2021. More than \$1.7 billion of that funding came from State and USAID to support humanitarian activities.

SIGAR determined that donors make contributions to pooled UN accounts, and individual donors—including State and USAID—cannot determine how much of their contributions are used to purchase and transport cash for use in Afghanistan. SIGAR found that the UN is the



only organization purchasing and transporting cash, of any type, for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. Once the cash arrives in Kabul, SIGAR found that UN personnel inspect and count the money before transporting it to a private Afghan bank that the UN uses.

SIGAR determined that the Taliban benefits from the cash shipments because many private banks purchase local currency from the Taliban-controlled Da Afghanistan Bank. This has led Da Afghanistan Bank, and thereby the Taliban, to accumulate a large supply of U.S. dollars through the conversion process of U.S. dollars for local currency. SIGAR did not make any recommendations in this report. SIGAR did receive comments from State and USAID, which were incorporated into the final draft provided to Congress.

***Implementing Partner Vetting in Afghanistan: The USAID Mission to Afghanistan Complied with Vetting Requirements but USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance Did Not***

SIGAR 24-11-AR; January 16, 2024

SIGAR conducted this audit 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.

USAID has awarded grants, cooperative agreements, contracts, and other funding instruments to implement development and humanitarian assistance projects in Afghanistan. Federal laws and regulations require U.S. agencies to ensure that they do not fund or contract with prohibited countries, organizations, individuals, or terrorist groups, including those identified by the Department of the Treasury’s (Treasury) Office of Foreign Assets Control.

SIGAR determined that USAID’s Mission to Afghanistan followed USAID’s partner vetting requirements in Afghanistan for NGOs and PIOs. However, SIGAR determined that from July 2021 through July 2022, USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) did not comply with partner vetting procedures according to USAID procedures.

The Mission and BHA operate separately from one another to fund and implement development and humanitarian activities in Afghanistan. USAID procedures establish different vetting requirements, to include circumstances where exceptions to partner vetting requirements are necessary, as approved and cleared by senior vetting officials at USAID. While some program implementing organizations were confirmed as not requiring additional vetting, SIGAR determined that implementers in a sample of awards active from March 1, 2022, through November 30, 2022, did require vetting by BHA.

Since its return to power in Afghanistan, the Taliban have sought to obtain U.S. funds intended to benefit the Afghan people through the establishment of NGOs. Taliban association with, and establishment of, new NGOs reinforces the need for the USAID to strictly adhere to partner vetting requirements. SIGAR made a recommendation to the USAID Administrator to help improve USAID’s BHA compliance with partner vetting requirements. Management agreed with the recommendation, which will remain open until SIGAR receives documentation that all agreed upon actions have been completed.

***Afghan Fund Inquiry: Response to the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee***

SIGAR-24-07-LL; January 4, 2024

SIGAR conducted this audit to determine the scope and nature of the Afghan fund and potential risks and safeguarding measures. This report was issued based on a request from Congress that SIGAR examine and report on the oversight and management mechanisms of the Fund for the Afghan People (the Afghan Fund, or Fund).

The Afghan Fund is a Swiss-based charitable foundation capitalized with \$3.5 billion of the approximately \$7 billion of Afghan central bank (Da Afghanistan Bank, or DAB) assets deposited in U.S. financial institutions at the time the Afghan government collapsed in August 2021. The purpose of the Fund is to “receive, protect, preserve, and disburse” the assets it holds “for the benefit of the Afghan people.”

SIGAR determined that the Fund has made no disbursements for activities intended to benefit the Afghan people. Treasury and State are not currently willing to support a return of funds to DAB. SIGAR reported that Treasury and State have said they will not support returning money to DAB until DAB implements adequate anti-money laundering and countering-terrorist-financing controls.

Additionally, the Committee asked SIGAR to identify matters for Congress to consider for improving the Fund’s operations and effectiveness. SIGAR suggested Congress may wish to consider requiring Treasury and State to articulate in more detailed terms the criteria DAB must meet in order to be recapitalized. For example, one criterion for recapitalization is that DAB is free from political influence and interference. However, the top three positions at DAB are currently held by Taliban loyalists, and DAB governors are reportedly constrained by government-wide decrees issued by Taliban. Without specifics regarding the U.S. Government’s conditions for recapitalizing DAB, it may be difficult for Congress to assess, when the time comes, whether those conditions have been met.

SIGAR did not make any recommendations in this report but stated it will continue to closely follow and report on developments surrounding the Fund.

## ONGOING AND PLANNED OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of March 31, 2024, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 30 ongoing and planned projects related to OES, including the examples highlighted below. Tables 13, 14, and 15, contained in Appendixes E and F, list the titles and objectives for all ongoing and planned projects.

### Military Operations

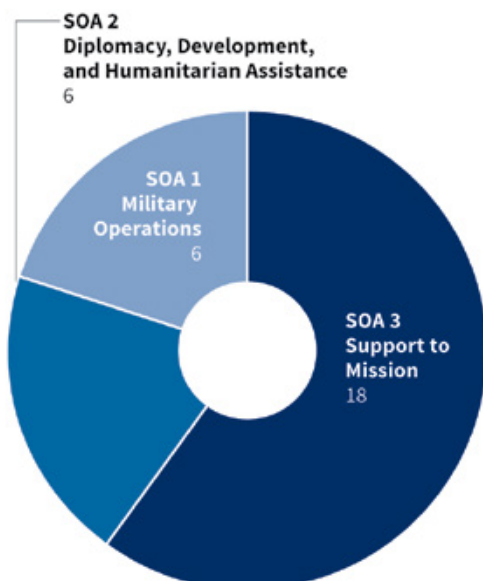
- The **Intelligence Community IG** is conducting a review to determine whether the Intelligence Community's support to screening and vetting of persons from Afghanistan was adequate.

### 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 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 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 on-going activities with other U.S. Government agencies and coordinate their ongoing activities with international donors and organizations.

# HOTLINE AND INVESTIGATIONS

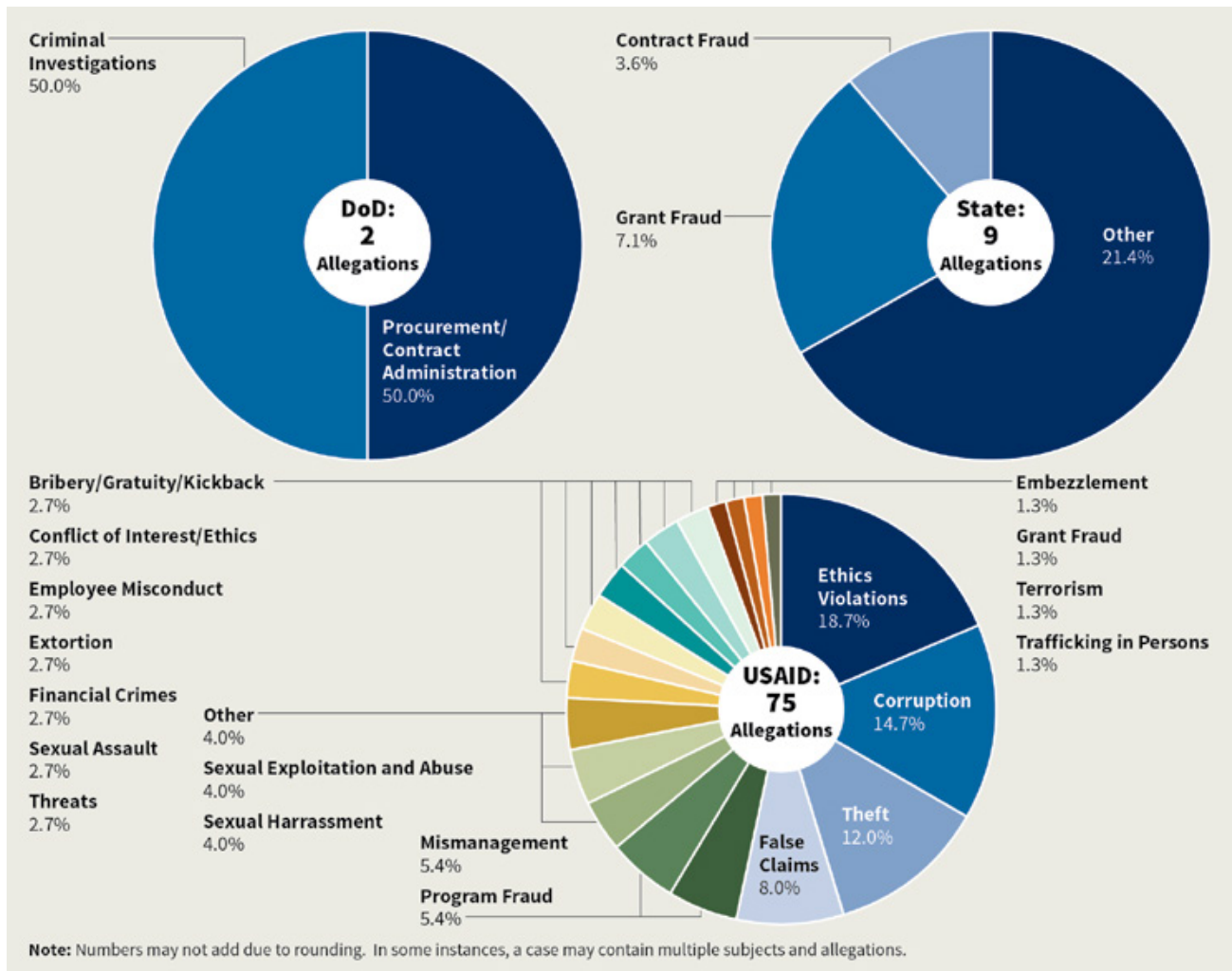
## HOTLINE ACTIVITY

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 two allegations related to OES and referred one case to Lead IG agencies and other investigative organizations. State OIG received nine allegations and referred no cases, and USAID OIG received 41 allegations. In some instances, a case may contain multiple allegations.

Figure 7.

Hotline Activities, January 1–March 31, 2024



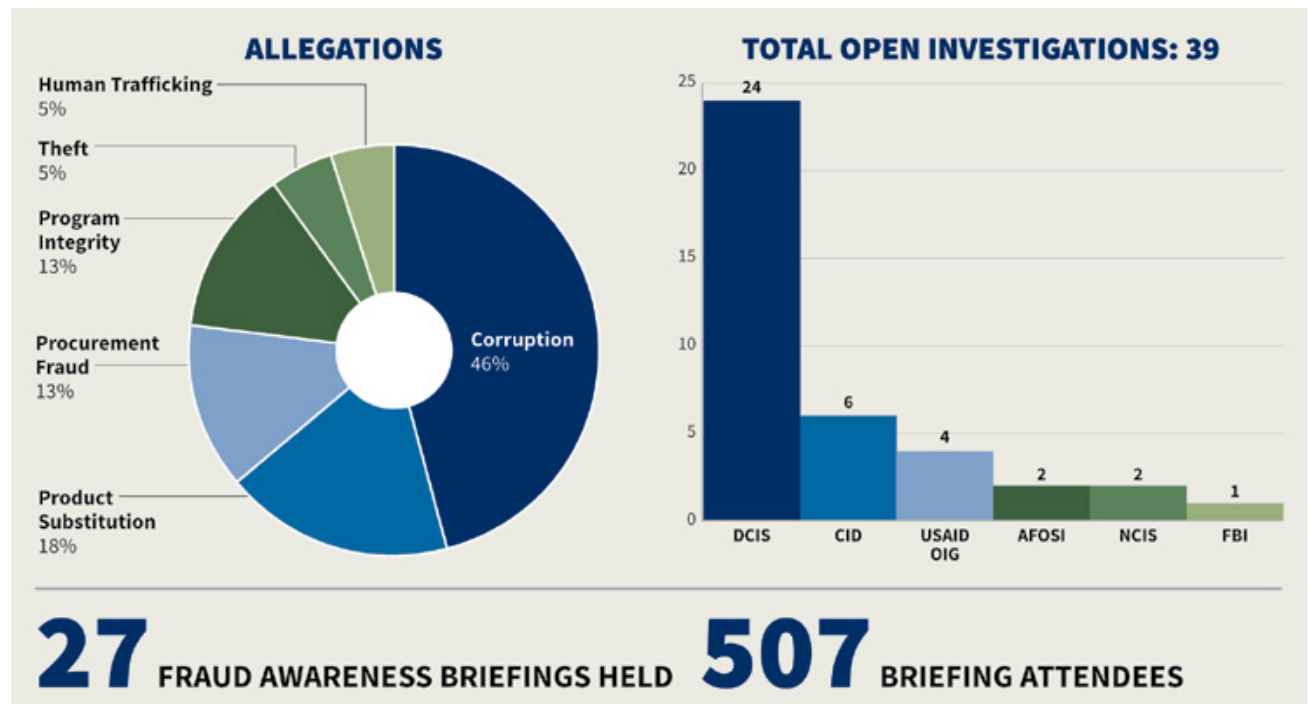
The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OES during the quarter. The DoD OIG’s criminal investigative component, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), and investigative components of other Lead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

### INVESTIGATIONS

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, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 27 fraud awareness briefings for 507 participants.

During the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies initiated 4 investigations and coordinated on 39 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 8 displays a breakout of allegations and other data on investigations related to OES.

Figure 8.  
**OES Related Investigation Activities, January 1–March 31, 2024**





# 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 section 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 January 1 through March 31, 2024. 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 view of the DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.

## APPENDIX D

# State- and USAID-funded Activities During the Quarter

Table 10.

### USAID-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities in Afghanistan During the Quarter

Program/Award Amount	Objective and Activity
<b>Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan’s Recovery (STAR)</b> \$28,338,901	<p>Aims to build household and community resilience in some of the most marginalized and vulnerable parts of Afghanistan.</p> <p>Supports household efforts to enjoy a sustained increase in agricultural productivity and income.</p> <p>Supports individuals to live in more sanitary environments with durable access to safe water for domestic use and to be healthier and more productive.</p>
<b>Inter Agency Agreement (IAA) with USIP “Information, Dialogue and Rights (IDR)”</b> \$14,079,528	<p>The purpose of the IDR activity is to protect Afghans’ access to independent sources of information, facilitate inclusive dialogue, and promote fundamental rights for all Afghan citizens, especially for women, girls, and religious and ethnic minorities.</p>
<b>Huquq: Safeguarding Civic Rights and Media Freedoms in Afghanistan</b> \$25,884,633	<p>USAID will provide technical assistance and \$5 million in grants to support Afghans’ basic rights to access independent sources of information and engage in civic activities.</p> <p>Huquq will empower journalists, civic activists and human rights defenders to defend the basic civil rights and freedoms that underpin civic engagement and free media.</p>
<b>Enabling Essential Services for Afghan Women and Girls</b> \$30,000,000	<p>Responds to the immediate needs of women, girls, and vulnerable populations by providing comprehensive support services in the areas of protection, women’s rights, and livelihoods.</p> <p>Support will be implemented through local NGOs to provide immediate assistance for women’s shelters/protection, grants to women-led civil society organizations, and livelihoods interventions.</p>
<b>Exports, Jobs, and Market Linkages in the Carpet and Jewelry Value Chains</b> \$14,900,000	<p>Supports the Afghan carpet and jewelry sectors as major drivers of broad-based economic growth and sustainable employment in Afghanistan.</p> <p>The goal of the program is to create jobs and exports within the carpet and jewelry sectors, driving \$20 million in direct-to-market sales of finished Afghan carpet and jewelry products (\$19 million in sales of carpets and \$1 million in sales of jewelry), and supporting 5,000 new jobs, particularly for women.</p>
<b>Afghanistan Competitiveness of Export-Oriented Businesses Activity (ACEBA)</b> \$105,722,822	<p>Focuses on addressing current food security crisis and support women in the Agriculture sector.</p>
<b>Strengthening Rural Livelihoods and Food Security (SRL-FS)</b> \$80,000,000	<p>Seeks to improve the food security of crisis and emergency level affected population groups in rural areas of Afghanistan; to help minimize the impacts of economic disruption and instability, drought, and other recent shocks on vulnerable, and at-risk agriculture-based communities and livelihoods; and help to minimize negative effects on productive agricultural assets in targeted provinces and districts of Afghanistan.</p>

Program/Award Amount	Objective and Activity
<b>Engineering Support Program</b> \$125,000,000	<p>Provides quality assurance, monitoring, and other engineering analyses for the implementation of the Mission's construction projects since 2016.</p> <p>Continues to provide engineering support as USAID terminates and winds down its entire infrastructure portfolio in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Support includes the technical review and verification of past work including construction documents, unpaid invoices, and termination costs.</p>
<b>Engineering Services for SEPS Completion and NEPS-SEPS Substations (USACE)</b> \$20,100,000	<p>Continues to provide engineering support as USAID terminates and winds down its entire infrastructure portfolio in Afghanistan. This support includes the technical review and verification of past work including construction documents, unpaid invoices, and termination costs.</p>
<b>Woman's Scholarship Endowment (WSE)</b> \$60,000,000	<p>Assists Afghan women in obtaining a university or graduate education in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) fields of study, better enabling them to overcome barriers to gaining employment, raise their incomes, and help them achieve leadership roles within their families and communities.</p>
<b>Supporting Student Success in Afghanistan (SSSA)</b> \$27,284,620	<p>Aims to improve safe, equitable access to quality learning for primary school-aged girls and boys, and secondary school-aged girls. This will be achieved by delivering four results:</p> <p>Result 1: Improved delivery of quality instruction in foundational skills and delivery of support for student well-being by educators</p> <p>Result 2: Reinforced community school management and family engagement to sustain access to safe public and community-based education</p> <p>Result 3: Increased transition rate of community-based education (CBE) students into public primary schools; and</p> <p>Result 4: Sustained secondary education engagement and learning opportunities for adolescent girls.</p>
<b>Young Women Lead (YWL)</b> \$4,935,797	<p>Aims to expand post-secondary education opportunities and increase access in fields of study where females are allowed at the post-secondary education level such as allied health, education, agriculture, and information technology. Allied health fields include anesthesia, dental prosthesis, medical technology, midwifery, nursing, and pharmacy.</p>
<b>Assistance to Families and Indigent Afghans to Thrive (AFIAT)</b> \$117,000,000	<p>Seeks to improve the quality of primary and secondary health and nutrition services in targeted rural areas; increase access to high-impact and evidence-based health and nutrition services; enhance adoption of optimal health and nutrition behaviors by communities and households; and collaborate with partners to plan, finance, and manage the public health system.</p>
<b>Urban Health Initiative (UHI)</b> \$104,000,000	<p>A 5-year technical assistance project with elements of service delivery that are necessary for filling gaps in access to, and quality of, essential health services in five urban cities.</p> <p>The project focuses on the health of women, children, and other vulnerable populations such as internally-displaced persons and communities living in slums.</p>
<b>Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (Ru-WASH)</b> \$35,841,332	<p>The Ru-WASH activity addresses the following WASH needs in Afghanistan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) acute water and needs in underserved, rural, and peri-urban areas of Afghanistan;</li> <li>2) equal sanitation facilities for girls and boys in schools;</li> <li>3) lack of adequate WASH facilities in health care facilities;</li> <li>4) service delivery and operations support to sustain critical WASH structures, including community-level structures; and</li> <li>5) issues related to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus in schools and their surrounding catchment communities in high-risk COVID-19 areas.</li> </ol>

Program/Award Amount	Objective and Activity
<b>National Disease Surveillance Response (NDSR)/Polio Eradication and Disease Early Warning System (DEWS)</b> \$4,000,000	A sentinel-site based surveillance system operating mainly in the public health space. The system monitors 16 priority epidemic-prone diseases and pregnancy-related deaths under an indicator-based surveillance component.
<b>Local Health System Sustainability (LHSS)</b> \$8,000,000	Provides financial and technical support to the Afghanistan Social Marketing Organization (ASMO) thereby strengthening the organization’s impact and sustainability. ASMO is a local, social marketing organization created with USAID support. It promotes family planning, diarrhea prevention and management, and nutrition by nationally distributing health products at an affordable price and by motivating Afghans to use these products through social and behavior change.
<b>Global Health Supply Chain Management (GHSCM-PSM)</b> \$17,880,692	Serves as the central procurement mechanism for USAID Missions worldwide to purchase high quality contraceptives and other essential public health supplies. This activity implements USAID’s policy of centralized contraceptive procurement by providing a simplified mechanism for the transfer, obligation, and disbursement of all USAID funds designed for procurement.
<b>Afghanistan Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Activity (AMELA)</b> \$44,848,003	Contributes to ensuring that USAID’s development programs in Afghanistan achieve their intended results through strong performance management service provision in an efficient and cost-effective manner, focusing on evaluation technical support services, monitoring and technical support services, learning and adaptive management services, and program support services. AMELA is a nationwide activity and available to offer monitoring, evaluation, learning and program support services across USAID/Afghanistan’s offices.
<b>ARTF</b> \$159,404,114	Includes two projects: Water Emergency Relief Project (WERP), \$50 million Supporting Economic Revitalization in Afghanistan Project (SERAP), \$25 million

Source: USAID/Afghanistan, response to USAID OIG request for information, 3/27/2024.

Table 11.  
State-funded Humanitarian Assistance Activities During the Quarter

Award Amount	Activity
<b>\$5,000,000</b>	To UNHCR for activities to support Afghan returnees from Pakistan at border transit and reception sites
<b>\$4,400,000</b>	To a State implementer for health care, rehabilitation support, and vocational training
<b>\$3,430,000</b>	To a State implementer to support efforts at border transit and reception sites
<b>\$1,000,000</b>	To a State implementer to provide critical services in high-refugee return areas
<b>\$230,000</b>	To a State implementer for lifesaving maternal and reproductive health and gender-based violence services to Afghan women and girls returning from Pakistan at border reception and transit centers.

Source: Source: State PRM, response to State OIG request for information, 4/15/2024.



Table 12.

**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> \$1,802,776	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)	
<b>Support to Humanitarian Mine Action Coordination in Afghanistan</b> \$2,255,975	
<b>Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation of Mine Action Projects in Afghanistan</b> \$5,000,000	
<b>Humanitarian De-mining, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (Demobilization, Disarmament and Rehabilitation Project) Programs in Afghanistan</b> \$3,000,000	
<b>Conventional Weapons Destruction Teams</b> \$2,250,000	
<b>Weapons and Ammunition Disposal Teams</b> \$2,500,000	
<b>Mine Clearance, Survey, and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in Kunduz and Badakhshan Provinces</b> \$3,600,000	
<b>Non-technical Survey and Land Release in 26 districts</b> \$1,500,000	
<b>Employing Former Combatants as Deminers in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan</b> \$3,455,000	
<b>Demining, Risk Education, and Re-Integration Project in Maydan Wardak Province</b> \$3,282,000	
<b>Survey and Clearance of Abandoned Improvised Munitions in Helmand</b> \$3,953,780	

**Demining and Victim Assistance**

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

**Victim Assistance in Afghanistan—Emergency mobile physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education sessions across Kabul, Kandahar, and Nimroz provinces**

\$1,606,000

**Victims Assistance and Physical Rehabilitation Project in Paktika Province**

\$500,000

**Rule of Law**

International Narcotics Law Enforcement and Assistance/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 Law Enforcement and Assistance (INL/EA )

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

\$28,427,158

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 Opiate Trade Project**

\$3,272,548

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

**Afghanistan Opium Survey**

\$7,310,465

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**

\$4,097,041

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

**Counternarcotics Public Information**

\$ 4,029,264

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 and 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, 4/15/2024.

## APPENDIX E

# Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 13 and 14 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OES.

Table 13.

### Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Agencies, as of March 31, 2024

#### 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 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 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 Embassies Kabul and Kyiv 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 and what challenges were encountered upon reopening Embassy Kyiv.

##### ***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.

##### ***Management Assistance Report: Applying Lessons Learned from Previous Evacuations***

To determine the extent to which State has aggregated lessons learned from past evacuations and included such lessons learned in formal guidance and instructions to aid in safeguarding, managing, or disposing of defensive equipment and armored vehicles at overseas posts.

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

##### ***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 14.

**Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of March 31, 2024****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 Operation Allies Welcome members with potentially derogatory records.

***Review of Asylum Application Adjudication Processing in Response to Ahmed vs. DHS***

To determine whether missed aliases or incomplete resolution of potential matches to derogatory records have increased following the Ahmed vs. DHS settlement agreement.

***Evaluation of DHS' Monitoring of the End of Immigration Parole***

To assess whether DHS has processes, procedures, and resources to monitor the end of immigration parole to ensure parolees are lawfully present in the United States and determine what enforcement consequences exist for parolees who stay in the United States after parole expiration or revocation.

**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.

***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 Public International Organizations 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.

**To Assess the Extent to which U.S. Agencies and PIOs Conduct Oversight of U.S. funds Provided for Assistance to Afghanistan.**

To determine the extent to which 1) 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; 2) State developed measurable award agreement targets and objectives and connected them to higher level goals; and 3) 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.

**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 1) 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; 2) identify the ways in which the U.S. Government attempted to overcome those challenges, 3) determine whether those measures were effective; and 4) 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 15 lists the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OES.

Table 15.

### Planned Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of March 31, 2024

#### 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 Efforts in Afghanistan Since 2021**

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

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

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

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

To determine the extent to which 1) USAID has performed the required oversight of Strengthening Rural Livelihoods and Food Security, 2) Strengthening Rural Livelihoods and Food Security has achieved, or is achieving, its intended outcomes; and 3) Taliban governance has affected program implementation.

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

To update SIGAR's 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 and United Nations International Organization for Migration for Internally Displaced Persons are meeting their intended goals and objectives; and whether 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 1) measured Afghanistan Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Activity's (AMELA) progress in meeting its goal of providing meaningful external evaluations of project performance; 2) measured third-party monitoring of development and humanitarian programming; 3) obtained and used reliable data collection and analysis, and aligning interventions with the mission's strategic goals; 4) determined whether the program is meeting its performance targets outlined in the contract; and 5) 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 ongoing activities with other agencies within the U.S. Government and 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 1) U.S. activities to assist the people of Afghanistan; 2) previous U.S. assistance and projects to improve Afghanistan's financial sector have been sustained; and 3) 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	
AAU	Afghanistan Affairs Unit
AQIS	al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
AWER	Alliance for Afghan Women’s Economic Resilience
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CARE	State Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts
CAS	Camp as-Sayliyah
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DAB	Da Afghanistan Bank
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
EW	Enduring Welcome
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FY	fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
INL	State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS-K	ISIS-Khorasan
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	DoD, State, and USAID OIGs
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OAW	Operation Allies Welcome

Acronym	
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OES	Operation Enduring Sentinel
OHDACA	Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OUSD(P)	Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
PIO	public international organization
PRC	People’s Republic of China
PRM	State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PTV+	pre-travel vetting plus
SCA	State Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
State	Department of State
Treasury	Department of the Treasury
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UHI	Urban Health Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNMAS	UN Mine Action Service
UNICEF	UN Children’s Fund
USAGM	U.S. Agency for Global Media
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
VEO	violent extremist organization
WFP	World Food Programme



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