



# **OPERATION ENDURING SENTINEL**

**AND OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO**

# **AFGHANISTAN**



JULY 1, 2023–SEPTEMBER 30, 2023



**On the cover:** One of more than 2,755 World Food Programme nutrition clinics in Afghanistan supporting women and children.  
(WFP photo)



We are pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to Congress on Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES). This report discharges our quarterly reporting responsibilities pursuant to 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 foster counterterrorism partnerships.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OES, as well as the work of the DoD, the Department of State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to further the U.S. Government's policy goals in Afghanistan during the period of July 1 through September 30, 2023. This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies—the DoD, State, and USAID OIGs—and our partner oversight agencies.

Handwritten signature of Robert P. Storch in black ink.

**Robert P. Storch**  
Lead Inspector General  
for OES  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense

Handwritten signature of Diana R. Shaw in black ink.

**Diana R. Shaw**  
Associate Inspector General  
for OES  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of State

Handwritten signature of Nicole L. Angarella in black ink.

**Nicole L. Angarella**  
Acting Deputy Inspector General,  
Performing the Duties of the  
Inspector General  
U.S. Agency for International  
Development









Woch Tangi settlement in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. (WFP photo)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**As of September, Al-Qaeda is at an historical low point in Afghanistan and Pakistan** with the loss of target access, leadership talent, group cohesion, and rank-and-file commitment, and the group is unlikely to recover, according to a new intelligence assessment.<sup>1</sup> Al-Qaeda leaders have maintained a low profile, in compliance with the Taliban's directive not to use Afghanistan as a base for transnational attacks.<sup>2</sup> These restrictions have likely hindered al-Qaeda's recruitment and retention efforts.<sup>3</sup>

**Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) posed the gravest threat to the stability of the region, according to the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan.**<sup>4</sup> During the quarter, TTP attacks directed at Pakistan increased significantly and the apparent ability of the TTP to operate from Afghanistan was a major source of tension between the Taliban and Pakistan, especially following the Taliban's public statements in July that the commitments made in the Doha Agreement do not apply to Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Government continued to state that the Taliban has the responsibility to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for launching terrorist attacks.<sup>6</sup> The TTP considers the Pakistani state its sole target and seeks to avoid civilian casualties, directing its attacks against Pakistani security forces.<sup>7</sup>

**A Jalalabad woman carries the family's last food ration. Due to funding shortfalls, WFP has suspended future rations. (WFP photo)**





## Lead IG Oversight Activities

The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies published six reports related to OES during the quarter, including on State's evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in August 2021, and State's termination of contracts after the fall of the Afghan government. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) OIG determined that a surge of applications from Afghan evacuees for long-term legal status may strain DHS' ability to effectively process them. As of September 30, 2023, the Lead IG agencies had 22 projects ongoing and 11 projects planned.

During the quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies initiated 2 new investigations and coordinated on 35 open investigations. The investigations involve a variety of alleged crimes, including procurement fraud, corruption, grant fraud, theft, program irregularities, computer intrusions, and human trafficking.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; and abuse of authority. During the quarter, the DoD OIG hotline investigator referred one case to Lead IG agencies or other investigative organizations.

**The Taliban focused its counterterrorism activity against ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), which it views as an existential threat.**<sup>8</sup> The Taliban's offensives have degraded ISIS-K capability and eliminated at least eight ISIS-K leaders.<sup>9</sup> ISIS-K claimed three attacks in July and August, a significant decrease from 33 attacks over the same period in 2022.<sup>10</sup> In July, the Taliban's security measures prevented ISIS-K from conducting attacks during the Shia observance of Ashura, a period during which ISIS-K killed more than 100 Shia in 2022. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) said this indicated that the Taliban is moderately able to provide security against ISIS-K.<sup>11</sup>

**Senior U.S. and Taliban representatives met in Doha, Qatar, in late July.**<sup>12</sup> During the meeting, the U.S. delegates called on the Taliban to fulfill its counterterrorism commitments; pressed for the immediate and unconditional release of detained U.S. citizens; and expressed concern regarding Taliban detentions, media crackdowns, and limits on religious practice.<sup>13</sup> Women's rights, particularly education and access to employment, were integrated into all the discussions.<sup>14</sup> The Taliban requested—and U.S. officials denied—an easing of sanctions according to State and media reporting.<sup>15</sup> During the talks, participants identified the economy and counternarcotics as potential areas for confidence building.<sup>16</sup>

**Afghans continue to struggle from unmet humanitarian needs.** Funding gaps in international assistance identified by the United Nations include protection assistance for more than 2.1 million children and 1 million women and girls having not received water, sanitation and hygiene supplies.<sup>17</sup> These vulnerabilities were compounded by economic decline; the Taliban's decision to ban women from working with NGOs and the United Nations, preventing or limiting access to vulnerable women and girls; and recurring natural disasters.<sup>18</sup> Heavy rains across many parts of Afghanistan intensified in July, causing flash flooding and landslides that killed at least 61 people, destroyed 121 houses, and damaged at least 551 houses across 8 provinces.<sup>19</sup>





A widowed mother of 5 children in a Kabul settlement. (WFP photo)

# OPERATION ENDURING SENTINEL

*This section describes U.S. activity under the OES mission and related activities that affect 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 DoD did not provide publicly releasable information about U.S. military activity related to OES during the quarter. All DoD information on this topic from this quarter can be found in the classified appendix.

The United States’ enduring national interest in Afghanistan is to ensure that it never again becomes a safe haven for those who wish the United States or its allies harm, according to State.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. Government continues to call publicly and privately on the Taliban to fulfill its counterterrorism agreements under the 2020 U.S.-Taliban agreement, also known as the Doha Agreement. Under the Doha Agreement, the Taliban committed to preventing any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) did not report any high profile attacks in Afghanistan this quarter.<sup>22</sup>

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

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

State said that while the Taliban has taken some steps to counter terrorist threats, including fighting ISIS-K, it has not fully upheld its counterterrorism commitments and public assurances, as evidenced by the Taliban's decision to shelter al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in Kabul in 2022.<sup>23</sup> State said that the United States and the Taliban do not coordinate on counterterrorism operations.<sup>24</sup>

## VIOLENT EXTREMIST ACTIVITY

Violent extremists remain a security threat in Afghanistan. The DIA estimated that overall numbers of fighters probably remained roughly consistent with data from last quarter. (See Table 1.) The DIA said that Taliban restrictions on al-Qaeda activity, including a ban on conducting terrorist attacks from Afghan territory, have likely hindered al-Qaeda's recruitment and retention efforts.<sup>25</sup>

According to State, while ISIS-K has reportedly drawn recruits from the ranks of the TTP, the TTP's relationship with ISIS-K has generally been one of co-existence rather than active collaboration.<sup>26</sup> The TTP and al-Qaeda have longstanding ties and a collaborative history. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has a small presence in the region, State said. In addition, the Haqqani Network continues to have a longstanding relationship with Pakistani intelligence services, making them a less conducive ally for the TTP. However, reports indicated that a Haqqani network commander joined the TTP in July 2022, State said.<sup>27</sup>

The DIA said that it did not observe ISIS-K receive direct support from ISIS-Core or other ISIS branches, foreign actors, or other violent extremist groups this quarter. ISIS-K is probably relying on some Afghans' dissatisfaction with the Taliban regime and the regime's inability to provide for its citizens to attract new recruits, according to the DIA.<sup>28</sup>

## Al-Qaeda Reaches Historic Low Point

U.S. National Counterterrorism Center Director Christy Abizaid reported in September that, according to a new intelligence assessment, al-Qaeda was at an historical low point in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and its revival was unlikely. Al-Qaeda had lost target access, leadership talent, group cohesion, rank-and-file commitment, and an accommodating local environment.<sup>29</sup> Al-Qaeda and its regional affiliate AQIS kept a low profile during the quarter, presumably in accordance with Taliban directives, State said.<sup>30</sup>

After the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, al-Qaeda leaders probably decided to comply with the Taliban's policy that Afghanistan would not serve as a base for transnational attacks, according to the DIA. AQIS leaders almost certainly are abiding by the Taliban's restrictions and al-Qaeda leaders' decisions regarding attacks from Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> According to the DIA, al-Qaeda leaders have chosen to comply with the Taliban's directives against trans-national attacks from Afghanistan to maintain their relationship with the Taliban and thus preserve a safe haven for their organization in Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> The DIA did not observe a change in the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda or AQIS this quarter.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1.

### Estimated Number of Violent Extremist Organization Fighters in Afghanistan

<b>Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan</b>	4,000–6,000
<b>ISIS-Khorasan</b>	2,000
<b>Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent</b>	200
<b>Al-Qaeda</b>	Fewer than a dozen core members

**Source:** DIA, response to DoD OIG request for information, 23.4 OES 031, 9/27/2023.

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 during this quarter or that they are attempting to rebuild such a capacity there. However, AQIS has published inflammatory media, probably to inspire attacks in or against the West, the DIA said. On June 30, AQIS published a statement denouncing a recent Qu’ran burning and called for the decapitation of anyone who burns the Qu’ran.<sup>34</sup>

The DIA said that it observed no indication that al-Qaeda senior leaders provided guidance, funding, or propaganda support to AQIS or its other global affiliates. Al-Qaeda senior leaders have not exercised meaningful control over AQIS and provided little to no support to it, and AQIS’s media affairs largely operate independently of al-Qaeda senior leadership.<sup>35</sup>

### TTP Threatens Regional Stability

According to U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, the TTP poses the gravest threat to the stability of the region.<sup>36</sup> During the quarter, TTP attacks directed at Pakistan increased significantly and the apparent ability of the TTP to operate from Afghanistan was a major source of tension between the Taliban and Pakistan, especially following the Taliban’s public statements in July that the commitments made in the Doha Agreement do not apply to Pakistan, State said.<sup>37</sup>

Pakistan’s Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, visited Kabul in July where he met with high-level Taliban representatives to discuss security, inclusive government, and the threat of terrorism emanating from the Afghan soil. In August, the Taliban’s leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, reportedly told Taliban security forces that external attacks were forbidden and did not qualify as legitimate jihad. However, he stopped short of issuing the decree publicly, State said.<sup>38</sup>

The U.S. Government continued to publicly and privately state that the Taliban has the responsibility to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for launching terrorist attacks, State said.<sup>39</sup> Although the TTP is not currently targeting U.S. interests, there is potential for collateral damage to U.S. persons or facilities in Pakistan. The United States supports assistance programs to strengthen Pakistani civilian institutions’ ability to counter terrorism, according to State.<sup>40</sup>

**According to U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, the TTP poses the gravest threat to the stability of the region.**

This quarter, the DIA said it observed no changes in the TTP’s strategies and targets. The TTP continued to attack Pakistani security targets from the group’s safe haven in Afghanistan. According to the DIA, the TTP almost certainly considers the Pakistani state as its sole target and seeks to avoid civilian casualties. For that reason, it said, the TTP probably does not have a strategy to launch attacks elsewhere in the world.<sup>41</sup>

This quarter the TTP conducted attacks against Pakistan security forces, which may have presented an indirect, collateral risk to U.S. interests in Pakistan, according to the DIA. The TTP has attacked Pakistani security targets, including the military, and Pakistani security forces have killed TTP militants in response. The TTP attacks Pakistani security forces largely in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and as of September, attacks continued, according to the DIA. In August, the DIA tracked the largest number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan carried out by violent extremist organizations in any month since November 2014.<sup>42</sup>



## Taliban Focuses Counterterrorism Activity on ISIS-K and Opposition Groups

This quarter, the Taliban continued to fight ISIS-K, which it views as an existential threat, according to State.<sup>43</sup> Since early 2023, the Taliban's offensives have significantly degraded ISIS-K capability, and raids eliminated at least eight key ISIS-K leaders—some responsible for external plotting—and spurred many others to relocate outside of Kabul or to neighboring countries.<sup>44</sup> Although large-scale terrorist attacks against Afghan civilians decreased since last year, ISIS-K maintained the ability to execute high-profile attacks targeting the Taliban and Afghan civilians, as well as conduct attacks in neighboring countries, State said.<sup>45</sup>

This quarter, the Taliban very likely maintained its high capacity to disrupt ISIS-K, according to the DIA. ISIS-K claimed 3 attacks in July and August, a significant decrease from 33 attacks over the same period in 2022. In late August, the Taliban's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared victory over ISIS-K, though the group continues to operate in Afghanistan, and the Taliban's ability to limit ISIS-K recruitment remains unclear.<sup>46</sup>

In late July, according to the DIA, the Taliban suspended telecommunications networks in Kabul during the Shia observance of Ashura, among other security measures it took to protect minorities from ISIS-K attacks. The DIA interpreted ISIS-K's failure to conduct a single attack during Ashura—compared to the fact that it killed more than 100 Shiites during the observance in 2022—as an indicator that the Taliban is moderately able to provide security against ISIS-K.<sup>47</sup>

During the quarter, the UN Secretary-General's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring team assessed ISIS-K as the most serious terrorist threat in Afghanistan and the wider region. The team's report mentioned member state concern about proliferation of weapons and other military equipment within Afghanistan and neighboring states as well as potential links between ISIS-K and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.<sup>48</sup>

During the quarter, the Afghanistan Freedom Front—an armed anti-Taliban group—claimed responsibility for deadly attacks on the Fayzabad Airport in Badakhshan province and at a security checkpoint in Kabul, according to local media reports.<sup>49</sup> The National Resistance Front, another anti-Taliban group, claimed responsibility for two attacks in Kabul and Takhar province.<sup>50</sup> State was not aware of outside support to resistance fighters fighting the Taliban.<sup>51</sup>

In August, Taliban forces attacked anti-Taliban resistance positions in Badakhshan from helicopters but caused no casualties. The DIA said that it lacked reporting on the Taliban's employment of U.S.-origin equipment in counterterrorism operations.<sup>52</sup>

Although large-scale terrorist attacks against Afghan civilians decreased since last year, ISIS-K maintained the ability to execute high-profile attacks targeting the Taliban and Afghan civilians, as well as conduct attacks in neighboring countries, State said.



**U.S. President Joe Biden hosts a meeting with Central Asian presidents for the C5+1 Summit at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York City, September 19. (White House photo)**

## U.S. POLICY OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN

Enduring U.S. interests in Afghanistan include pressing the Taliban to ensure the safety of Americans in Afghanistan (including releasing detainees); holding the Taliban to its counterterrorism commitments; ensuring safe passage for those who wish to leave Afghanistan; pressing the Taliban to respect the human rights of all Afghans; establishing a credible process to deliver representative governance for the people of Afghanistan; and providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people—assistance that is channeled through the United Nations and NGOs, not the Taliban.<sup>53</sup>

### DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

#### U.S. ACTIVITIES

##### U.S. and Taliban Delegations Discuss Counterterrorism and Confidence Building Measures

On July 30 and 31, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West, U.S. Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights Rina Amiri, and Chargé d’Affaires of the U.S. Mission to Afghanistan, Karen Decker, led a delegation to discuss critical interests with senior Taliban representatives and technocratic professionals in Doha, Qatar.<sup>54</sup> During the meeting, Special Representative West called on the Taliban to fulfill its counterterrorism commitments and acknowledged a decrease in large-scale terrorist attacks against Afghan civilians. Special Envoy Amiri also pressed for the immediate and unconditional release of detained U.S. citizens and expressed concern regarding Taliban detentions, media

crackdowns, and limits on religious practice.<sup>55</sup> Women’s rights, particularly education and access to employment, were integrated into all the discussions, State said.<sup>56</sup> The Taliban requested, and U.S. officials denied, an easing of sanctions, according to State and media reporting.<sup>57</sup>

During the talks, participants identified the economy and counternarcotics as potential areas for confidence building. The U.S. delegation met with representatives of the Afghan Central Bank and the Afghan Ministry of Finance to discuss declining economic indicators in Afghanistan and challenges facing the banking sector. Both sides expressed openness to a follow-on technical dialogue on economic stabilization which is scheduled for mid-October.

The U.S. delegation agreed to continued dialogue with the Taliban on counternarcotics, acknowledging reports indicating that the Taliban’s ban on poppy cultivation resulted in a significant decrease in cultivation during the most recent growing season.<sup>58</sup> Chargé d’Affaires Decker and subject matter experts held a follow-on counternarcotics technical discussion on September 19 in Doha with their counterparts. The two sides discussed drug eradication, interdiction, addiction treatment, and alternative livelihoods.<sup>59</sup>

After the talks, a Taliban spokesman welcomed the international community to visit areas in Afghanistan where poppy cultivation has been eradicated, according to media reporting.<sup>60</sup> Although opium poppy cultivation decreased as much as 80 percent in the past year, trade in narcotics continues, and Taliban-led alternative livelihood development has been virtually nonexistent, resulting in the further degradation of Afghanistan’s economy, State said.<sup>61</sup> The Taliban’s 2022 opium ban resulted in negative economic effects related to downstream processing, trade, and exports, one analyst said. In addition, Afghanistan’s farm-level rural economy lost more than \$1 billion a year worth of economic activity with many farmers, already at the margin of subsistence and lacking other job opportunities in Afghanistan’s weak economy, at risk of hunger and malnutrition.<sup>62</sup> A September UN Secretary-General report said that the lack of licit economic opportunities (including market access) was a driver of continued illicit crop cultivation.<sup>63</sup> According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, drug use in Afghanistan is rampant—with about one million Afghans suffering from drug addiction, a percentage of the population roughly twice the global average—and drug treatment options are limited.<sup>64</sup>

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## **Qatari Government Supports U.S. Interests in Afghanistan**

Since January 2022, the Qatari government has served as the protecting power for the United States in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>65</sup> In this capacity, Qatar facilitated support to U.S. citizens and provided diplomatic and security support to sensitive operations, such as freeing wrongfully imprisoned citizens in Afghanistan. As part of its protecting power duties, the Qatari government has played an important role in the U.S. Government’s Afghan relocation operations issuing Afghans Qatari visas and working with the United States to arrange the travelers’ logistics from Kabul to Doha and on to Camp as-Saliyah, State said.<sup>66</sup>



**In their first head-of-state-summit, President Biden and the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan set an agenda for future U.S. relations with the region including efforts to address threats emanating from Afghanistan.**

## President Biden Meets with Central Asian Leaders

Countries in South and Central Asia remain concerned about terrorism, refugees, and humanitarian crisis near their borders. According to media reporting, the Central Asian countries' primary concern is security, given the region's history with transnational extremist groups.<sup>67</sup>

In September, President Biden met with his Central Asian counterparts for a "C5+1" summit on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. In their first head-of-state-summit, President Biden and the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan set an agenda for future U.S. relations with the region. This includes efforts to stabilize and address threats emanating from Afghanistan, reduce drug trafficking, and share water resources in a region impacted by climate change, according to the White House.<sup>68</sup> Earlier in the quarter, Special Representatives and Special Envoys for Afghanistan from the United States and the C5 countries met in Astana, Kazakhstan, to discuss cooperation between the U.S. and Central Asia in support of the Afghan people as well as security and resilience in the region, State said.<sup>69</sup>

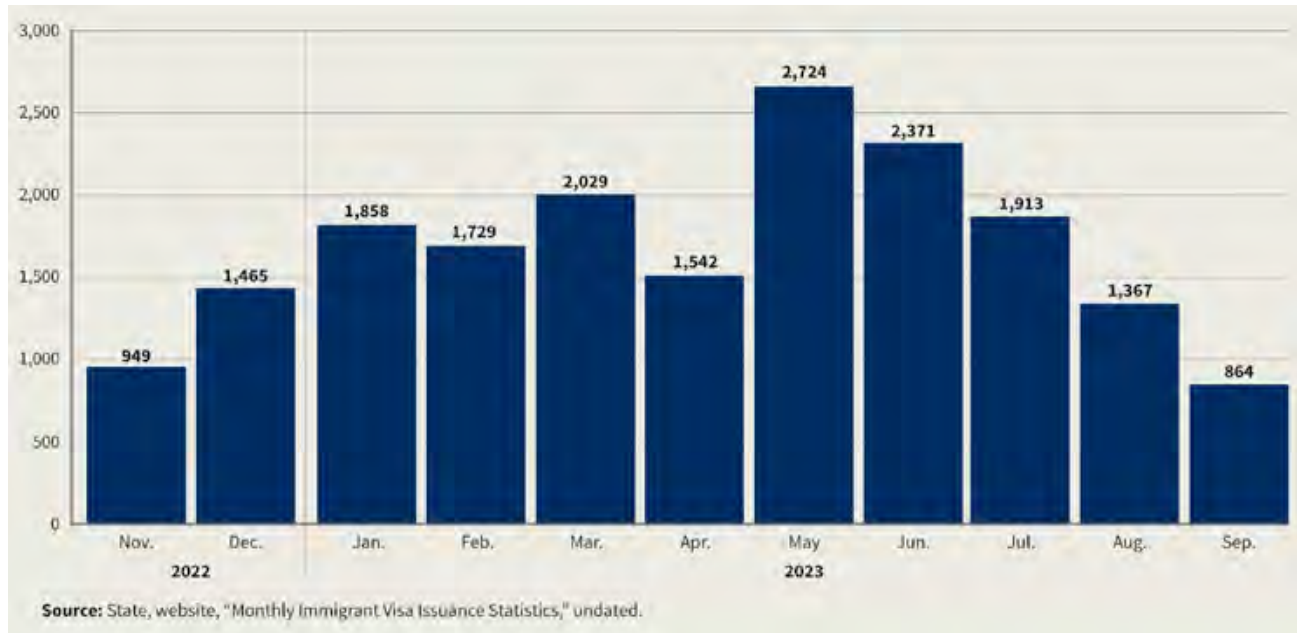
As previously reported, former Afghan government aircraft that Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing pilots evacuated to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in August 2021 remain secured in those countries, according to the DoD.<sup>70</sup> The governments of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have both acknowledged U.S. Government ownership of the aircraft and rejected ownership claims made by the Taliban. According to the DoD, the governments of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have been helpful in facilitating DoD access to assess the condition and physical security of the aircraft. The DoD reported that Congress has approved the transfer of aircraft to Uzbekistan while the DoD and State works with Congress to resolve the hold on any transfer of aircraft to Tajikistan. The DoD said it will begin implementing a security cooperation program funded under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 for the aircraft whose transfer to Uzbekistan has been approved.<sup>71</sup>

## U.S. Continues Processing Special Immigrant Visas but Challenges Remain

During the quarter, the U.S. Government continued efforts to process Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applications. (See Figure 1.) Since the United States withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, State has issued nearly 34,000 SIVs to principal applicants and their immediate family members, enabling them to immigrate to the United States.<sup>72</sup> In the first 6 months of calendar year 2023, State issued more than 15,500 Afghan SIVs to principal applicants and their immediate family members, compared to approximately 9,000 during the same time period in 2022.<sup>73</sup>

State's ability to issue Afghan SIVs is tied to efforts to relocate Afghan SIV applicants, State said. Applicants must depart Afghanistan and travel to a third country where State has a consular presence. Beginning in June 2023, there was a 14-week pause in relocation flights due to Taliban restrictions. The reduction in SIV issuances during the quarter was due to a downstream effect of the relocation flight pause, according to State. However, there were still SIV issuances because posts were adjudicating applicants who were relocated before the flight pause, self-relocated, or were relocated in smaller numbers overland, State said.<sup>74</sup> At the end of the third quarter, State estimated there were 13,187 remaining principal Afghan applicants.<sup>75</sup>

Figure 1.

**Special Immigrant Visa Issuances, November 2022–September 2023**

During the quarter, State OIG issued a report evaluating adjustments to the Afghan SIV program.<sup>76</sup> The report evaluated State's efforts to streamline the Afghan SIV process from 2018 through 2022, the impact of COVID-19 on the application process, and the future of the Afghan SIV program. State OIG found that State took actions in early 2021 to streamline Afghan SIV applicant processing and mitigate processing issues. However, by December 2022, there was still significant applicant backlog because of the surge in the number of applicants following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. In addition, COVID-19 stalled the Afghan SIV application process because required applicant in-person interviews could not be conducted, further increasing the number of SIV applicants waiting for interviews. Moreover, State's reliance on Taliban cooperation for SIV applicant relocation from Afghanistan continues to remain a challenge to SIV application processing.<sup>77</sup>

During the quarter, in order to prioritize the reunification of Afghan children who remain separated from their parents abroad, State announced an updated version of the Family Reunification Form, which allows Afghan minors who entered the United States without their parents as part of Operation Allies Welcome to apply for relocation of their parents and eligible siblings still living overseas.<sup>78</sup> State said that family reunification was an extremely high priority.<sup>79</sup>

On September 21, the U.S. Government announced the extension and redesignation of Afghanistan as a Temporary Protected Status country due to ongoing armed conflict and conditions in Afghanistan that prevent individuals from safely returning.<sup>80</sup> The protected status applies to more than 14,500 Afghan migrants who arrived after March 15, 2022, and

before September 20, 2023, and is valid until 2025.<sup>81</sup> However, it does not give Afghans a long-term right to stay in the United States or a path to citizenship, according to news reporting.<sup>82</sup> On September 21, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said that the Department of Homeland Security will continue to support Afghan nationals through this temporary form of humanitarian relief.<sup>83</sup>

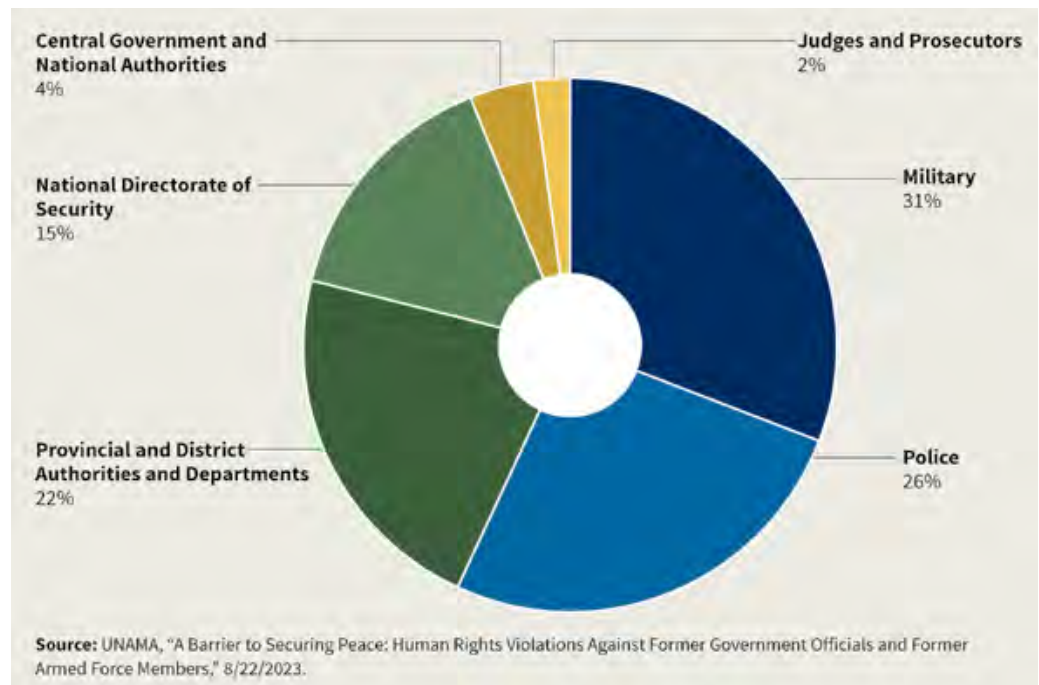
## TALIBAN ACTIVITY

### UN: Former Afghan Government and Security Personnel Face Abuse Despite Taliban Amnesty Pledge

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released a report in August which detailed instances of continued human rights abuses since the Taliban takeover – including targeted killings, detentions and mistreatment of former government officials and former armed forces members in the period between August 15, 2021, and June 30, 2023.<sup>84</sup> In the report, UNAMA recorded at least 218 extrajudicial killings, 424 arbitrary arrests and detentions, 144 instances of torture and ill-treatment, and 14 instances of enforced disappearance carried out against individuals affiliated with the former Afghan government and its security forces.<sup>85</sup> (See Figure 2.) The report noted that the arrests and detentions occurred despite the Taliban’s stated commitment to a general amnesty policy for former government officials and security forces.<sup>86</sup>

Figure 2.

#### Taliban Attacks Against Former Government & Security Personnel, August 15, 2021–June 30, 2023





**Roza Isakovna Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the UNAMA, briefs journalists after a Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan, September 26. (UN photo)**



According to media accounts, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that the report’s findings were a sobering picture of the treatment individuals affiliated with Afghanistan’s former government and security forces. UN experts called for transparent criminal investigations of the alleged human rights abuses.<sup>87</sup> In September, UNAMA published an additional report on the treatment of detainees, saying that it had documentation of more than 1,600 human rights violations relating to the detention of individuals from January 1, 2022 to July 31, 2023, of which 11 percent involved women.<sup>88</sup> On September 29, UNAMA called on the Taliban to cease arbitrary arrests and detentions, highlighting the recent detention of two women’s rights activists in Kabul.<sup>89</sup>

During the quarter, according to media reporting, the Taliban detained 18 members of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) for “propagating and promoting Christianity” in Ghor province.<sup>90</sup> A Taliban spokesman told reporters that one of the individuals detained was a U.S. citizen.<sup>91</sup> The detained staff members, including several women, were transferred to Kabul, according to a spokesperson for the NGO.<sup>92</sup>

## **Taliban Abolishes Political Parties, Citing Islamic Law**

In August, 2 years after taking power in Afghanistan, the Taliban formally abolished political parties on the grounds that their existence was incompatible with the Taliban’s interpretation of Islamic law. This development further complicated reconciliation efforts among Afghans seeking dialogue between political factions, according to media reporting.<sup>93</sup> The international community continued to encourage the Taliban to establish an inclusive government that includes women and individuals unaffiliated with the Taliban.<sup>94</sup> However, according to State, the Taliban did not take any steps toward inclusivity this quarter.<sup>95</sup>

In response to recent calls for inclusivity during regional talks in Kazan, Russia, the Taliban’s Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said that other countries should stop telling them what to do, according to media reporting.<sup>96</sup> In September, UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative to Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva told the UN Security Council that, despite

insistence by Taliban that their institutions are inclusive, the Afghan people questioned the leadership's legitimacy and ability to govern due to limited representation, accountability, human rights, and access to justice.<sup>97</sup>

## UN Officials Condemn Taliban Gender Discrimination

This quarter, the Taliban's edicts and policies regarding women and girls were again met with widespread international criticism. Since gaining power in 2021, the Taliban has issued more than 50 decrees limiting women's participation in public life, according to media reporting.<sup>98</sup> In August, UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous labeled the Taliban's system of women's oppression "gender apartheid" and called for UN Security Council support for a process to codify gender apartheid in international law.<sup>99</sup> Other UN officials, including UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, and UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett also used the term "gender apartheid" in referring to the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>100</sup>

In a September brief, Human Rights Watch concluded that many of the Taliban's abuses against women and girls amount to crimes against humanity, that is, persecution based on gender, and urged the International Criminal Court to provide a path toward accountability.<sup>101</sup> According to State, the United States has not taken a position on these claims but has consistently expressed strong concerns regarding systematic discrimination based on gender.<sup>102</sup> This quarter, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said the United States continues to be clear with the Taliban that the "path to a normal relationship will be blocked" unless and until the rights of women and girls, among other things, are actually supported.<sup>103</sup> However, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative to Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, reminded the international community of the importance of continuing diplomatic engagement with the Taliban noting that "dialogue is not recognition" and that dialogue and engagement can help change the policies.<sup>104</sup>

During the September UN General Assembly, four side events focused on Afghan women and girls, State said.<sup>105</sup> On the margins of the September 26 UN Security Council briefing on Afghanistan, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, met with the other four women permanent representatives on the UN Security Council (known as the "W5") to voice support for advancing the rights of Afghan women and girls.<sup>106</sup>

## Taliban's Ban on Beauty Salons Hurts Women and the Afghan Economy

The Taliban ordered the closing of beauty salons in July, claiming that they offered services forbidden by Islam and caused economic hardship for the grooms' families during wedding festivities.<sup>107</sup> Women ran, staffed, and frequented the salons, which were one of the few remaining public spaces for women to congregate. They represented a large amount of business activity for Afghan women. Approximately 60,000 women lost jobs and 12,000 beauty businesses were shuttered, according to industry estimates, putting further strain on an economy already in crisis, State said.<sup>108</sup>

**Approximately 60,000 women lost jobs and 12,000 beauty businesses were shuttered, according to industry estimates, putting further strain on an economy already in crisis, State said.**

## Taliban Continues to Seek International Recognition

This quarter, the Taliban continued to call for international recognition in public messaging and sought opportunities to represent the people of Afghanistan in official capacities, State said.<sup>109</sup> Taliban leaders met with foreign delegations, participated in international and regional forums, and worked to oversee Afghanistan’s diplomatic efforts in countries around the world, according to media reporting.<sup>110</sup> The United States and its partners continued to work collectively to help ensure that there were no unearned steps toward normalization with the Taliban, State said.<sup>111</sup>

**No country formally recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan this quarter.**

No country formally recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan this quarter. However, in September, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) named a new ambassador to Afghanistan. According to news reports, the Taliban welcomed the PRC’s new ambassador with a public ceremony at the presidential palace.<sup>112</sup> Media also reported that although the PRC foreign ministry said the appointment was a normal rotation, the Taliban worked to leverage the public nature of the ceremony to legitimize their rule.<sup>113</sup>

## Taliban Considers Installing CCTV Cameras in Every Province

According to news reports, a PRC state-owned telecom company met with senior Taliban officials to discuss an agreement to install closed-circuit television cameras across the country—raising alarms from the international community. Media reported that the cameras would be used to identify and target insurgents or terrorist groups, including ISIS-K.<sup>114</sup> However, human rights groups expressed concern that the surveillance system could be used by the Taliban to profile the Afghan people, including women and other groups, media reported.<sup>115</sup>

## ECONOMY

### Afghan Economy Plateaus

State assessed that the Afghan economy plateaued during the quarter: any benefits from reduced corruption in the public sector or improved security have already been realized and will probably not generate further macroeconomic improvement.<sup>116</sup> Afghanistan’s economy requires investment and growth to avoid a cycle of deflation, reduction in money supply, and reduced public spending, State said.<sup>117</sup> The multilateral development banks can play an important role, according to State. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank have helped address human suffering and meet basic needs.<sup>118</sup> A recent welfare monitoring survey by the World Bank reported that the situation of Afghan households is one of high deprivation and extreme vulnerability.<sup>119</sup>

In September, UNAMA, UN Women, and the IOM jointly reported on April-June interviews with 592 Afghan women from 22 provinces. The interviews revealed that many Afghan women lost their jobs or were forced to end their education due to decrees or social pressures, leaving them unable to meet basic household needs. The report authors warned that early marriage of girls is inhibiting Afghanistan’s long-term development.<sup>120</sup>



**According to media reports, a USAID-funded assessment of Afghanistan’s central bank found that it lacks independence from the Taliban as well as safeguards against money laundering and terrorism financing.**

According to media accounts, a private sector delegation representing the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce traveled to Kabul in September to co-host a business conference with Taliban leaders and discuss Afghanistan’s ailing economy, infrastructure needs, and address poverty in light of declining international aid levels.<sup>121</sup> A high-level Taliban representative urged the American business representatives to tap into Afghanistan’s mineral resources, including lithium, media reported. In his public remarks, Jeffrey Grieco, President of the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce, credited Taliban leadership for establishing peace and for having “greatly eliminated” corruption.<sup>122</sup> State was aware of the Afghan-American business group’s visit to Kabul and advised caution prior to the group’s trip, consistent with existing travel warnings.<sup>123</sup>

### **Afghan Fund Marks First Anniversary with No Funds Yet Disbursed**

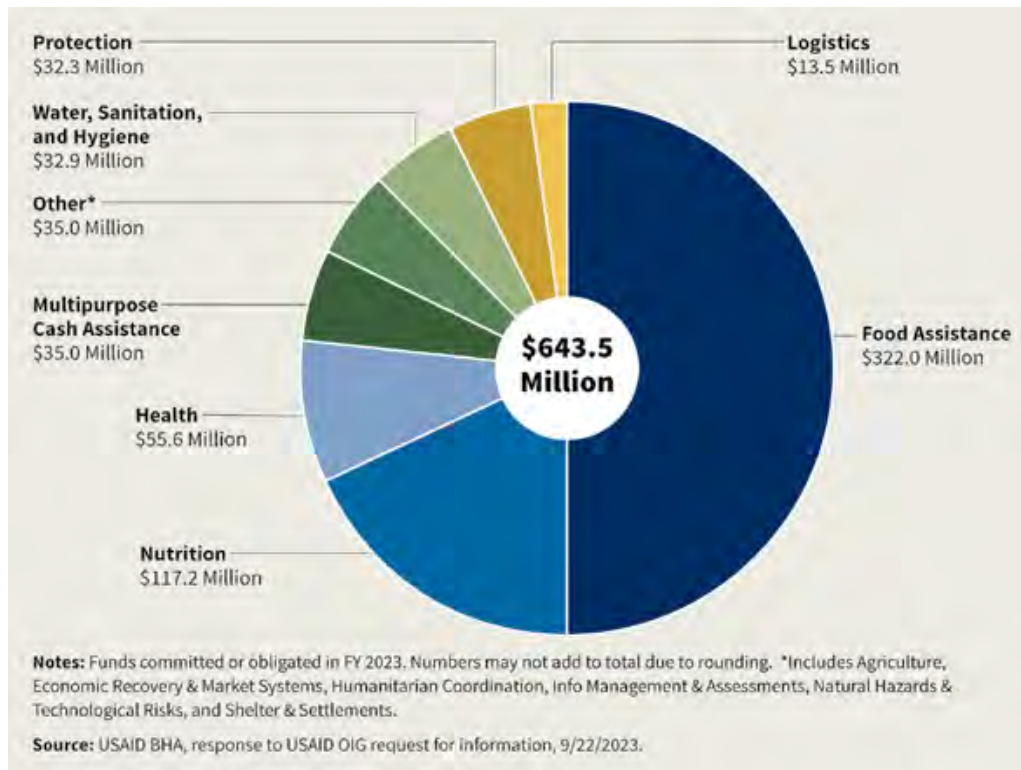
The board of the Swiss-based Afghan Fund was scheduled to meet for a fourth time on October 2 in Geneva, State said.<sup>124</sup> During the quarter, State underscored with all levels of Taliban leadership that the United States will not support any potential provision of Afghan Fund assets to the Afghan central bank until the bank can demonstrate, at a minimum, that it is free from political interference and has appropriate anti-money laundering monitoring and countering the financing of terrorism controls in place.<sup>125</sup>

According to media reports, a USAID-funded assessment of Afghanistan’s central bank found that it lacks independence from the Taliban as well as safeguards against money laundering and terrorism financing.<sup>126</sup> Both Treasury and State suggested that the Taliban can demonstrate the central bank’s freedom from political interference by appointing qualified technocrats to central bank leadership positions.<sup>127</sup> The Afghan Fund was established in September 2022 to manage \$3.5 billion in frozen Afghan central bank assets. The board of trustees is made up of representatives from the U.S. Government, the Swiss government, and two Afghan economic experts.<sup>128</sup>

### **Pakistan Announces Plans to Repatriate More Than One Million Afghans**

On September 28, the Pakistani government announced plans to repatriate more than one million Afghan nationals living illegally in Pakistan back to Afghanistan, according to media reporting.<sup>129</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the IOM called on the Pakistani government to continue to protect all vulnerable Afghans who have sought safety on its territory and warned that the forced repatriation of Afghan nationals could result in severe human rights violations.<sup>130</sup> During the quarter, the increase in TTP attacks and other border security incidents resulted in a large number of arrests of both documented and undocumented Afghans, State said.<sup>131</sup>

Figure 3.

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

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The U.S. Government’s humanitarian objectives in Afghanistan are to promote a principled humanitarian response that advocates for the independence of humanitarian partners in facilitating aid; support and provide appropriate protection assistance to vulnerable Afghans; and improve protection and living conditions of Afghan internally displaced persons, refugees, and new Afghan arrivals in neighboring host countries, according to State.<sup>132</sup>

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

The United States remains the leading donor of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people providing approximately \$1.9 billion since August 2021, State said.<sup>133</sup> However, the 2023 UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan is only 27-percent funded as a result of the Taliban’s restrictive edicts, and a growing number of competing global crises that have further reduced available funding for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>134</sup> The World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that 29.2 million Afghans—two-thirds of country’s population—were in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>135</sup>

Table 2.

**U.S. Government Humanitarian Funding for the Afghanistan Response in FY 2023**

<b>USAID BHA</b>	\$643,463,264
<b>State PRM</b>	\$182,551,029
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$826,014,293</b>

**Note:** Funds committed or obligated in FY 2023. State PRM funding as of August 29, 2023; USAID funding as of September 30, 2023

**Source:** USAID, “Afghanistan–Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3,” 8/29/2023; USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/22/2023.

USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) said that its programming during FY 2023 continued to prioritize food security, health, nutrition, and protection assistance.<sup>136</sup>

USAID covers Afghanistan from outside Afghanistan. USAID’s Afghanistan mission reported that, as of September 2023, it had 11 staff in Astana, Kazakhstan (an increase from six staff reported last quarter) and three staff in Doha, Qatar.<sup>137</sup> USAID Afghanistan has five vacant positions, and is awaiting the arrival of two assigned staff and the U.S. Embassy in Astana’s approval to create two personal services contractor positions.<sup>138</sup>

**Funding Gaps in Afghanistan Compounded by Emerging Shocks**

The UN 2023 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response plan continued to face critical funding gaps in key sectors, including protection assistance with more than 2.1 million children in need and 1 million women and girls having not received water, sanitation and hygiene supplies due to underfunding, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).<sup>139</sup> Acute vulnerabilities were compounded by emerging shocks including economic decline, the Taliban’s decision to ban women from working with NGOs and the United Nations, preventing or limiting access to vulnerable women and girls, and recurring natural disasters, State said.<sup>140</sup>

In early October, three 6.3 magnitude earthquakes struck Herat province, near Afghanistan’s third-largest city, killing more than 2,000 people and injuring approximately 1,700, according to the United Nations.<sup>141</sup> The earthquakes were the deadliest to strike Afghanistan in recent years, according to media reporting, and aid agencies expressed concern that relief funding from the international community was inadequate.<sup>142</sup> According to news reports, the Taliban’s global isolation also complicated relief efforts and dampened international support.<sup>143</sup>

**Flash Floods and Landslides Across Afghanistan in July Impact More than 6,000 Afghans**

Heavy rains across many parts of Afghanistan intensified in July, mainly in the last week of the month, resulting in devastating flash flooding and landslides in some areas, killing at least 61 people, according to the WFP.<sup>144</sup> OCHA said that at least 121 houses were destroyed and at least 551 houses were damaged across 8 provinces.<sup>145</sup> The most severely impacted provinces included Kabul, Parwan, and Maidan Wadak in the central region and Badakhshan, Kunar, Nuristan, and Nangarhar in the eastern part of the country.<sup>146</sup> Humanitarian organizations provided assistance to nearly 6,200 flood-affected people, according to OCHA.<sup>147</sup> In addition, the 3 days of rain damaged livestock and agricultural land.<sup>148</sup> The highest number of casualties and damage were reported in Kabul and the Maidan Wardak province.<sup>149</sup>



USAID implementers conducted joint humanitarian assessments in flood-affected provinces and provided multi-sector assistance to affected communities.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, with support from USAID and other donors, International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided emergency relief items to households affected by flooding as well as other natural hazards including fire, heavy rainfall, and riverbank erosion.<sup>151</sup>

## Food Insecurity Remains a Challenge

An estimated 15.3 million Afghans were projected to be acutely food-insecure between May and October 2023, including 2.8 million people with emergency food insecurity.<sup>152</sup> In addition, 4 million people are acutely malnourished, including 3.2 million children under the age of five.<sup>153</sup> Hunger is primarily driven by the economic crisis that has gripped Afghanistan since August 2021, compounded by decades of conflict, climate shocks, and severe restrictions on the rights of women and girls to work and pursue higher education.<sup>154</sup>

According to USAID BHA, national-level food security has improved in 2023, with 7 million fewer Afghans experiencing crisis food insecurity and worse conditions compared with 2021. This trend is expected to continue through early 2024.<sup>155</sup> These improvements are attributed to increased seasonal harvests, which have bolstered agricultural production and casual labor opportunities, increased food imports, declining staple food prices, improved weather conditions and sustained humanitarian assistance—including from USAID partners.<sup>156</sup>

WFP significantly curtailed its humanitarian response, with food assistance reduced from 13 million beneficiaries in March to 3 million in August.<sup>157</sup> WFP maintained what it considers to be a minimum ration of 50 percent for beneficiaries at all levels of food insecurity to prevent the most catastrophic outcomes from occurring. It is unclear how this ration reduction will affect nutrition and food security outcomes in the long-term.<sup>158</sup> USAID provided WFP more than \$422 million for food assistance and other activities in Afghanistan in FY 2023, including \$78.5 million this quarter.<sup>159</sup>

## Winterization Efforts Continue in Preparation for Freezing Temperatures and Heavy Snowfall

In August, the UN Inter-Cluster Coordination team issued a winter prioritization plan to highlight pre-positioning requirements.<sup>160</sup> USAID reported preparations for winter and funding its humanitarian implementers several months in advance—funds for the 2023-2024 winter were allocated by early FY 2023, so that implementers would have time to plan, procure and preposition supplies and make arrangements well ahead of the start of winter.<sup>161</sup> USAID has an ongoing award with the IOM to support shelter and items for winterization, emergency shelter kits, and cash for winterization including heating and fuel.<sup>162</sup> In August, with USAID funding, another implementer provided winterization mapping support to the clusters.<sup>163</sup> On August 31, the OCHA-managed Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund launched a \$117 million allocation to support immediate winter funding priorities, accounting for 21 percent of the funding required for winter prioritization activities from October through December.<sup>164</sup>

**An estimated 15.3 million Afghans were projected to be acutely food-insecure between May and October 2023, including 2.8 million people with emergency food insecurity.**



One of more than 2,755 World Food Programme nutrition clinics in Afghanistan supporting women and children. (WFP photo)

## Control Measures Reportedly Mitigated Effects of Locust Outbreak

The Moroccan Locust is a highly destructive pest that causes substantial economic losses to grain crops, trees, pastures, and other plants.<sup>165</sup> In April, outbreaks of the locust were reported in the northern and northeastern regions of Afghanistan.<sup>166</sup> Crop production, including pea, sesame, and wheat, diminished in eight provinces in northern Afghanistan. The severity of the damage varied across locations during the 2023 harvest season, according to FEWS NET, with approximately 14,500 hectares of land affected in the northeast and 9,300 hectares affected in the north.<sup>167</sup> The impact of the Moroccan Locust affected more than 130,000 households in the hardest-hit areas of Afghanistan.<sup>168</sup>

In response, humanitarian organizations led by the USAID-funded UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) responded to mechanically control the hatching hopper bands.<sup>169</sup> WFP stated that it closely monitored the potential hunger hotspots identified in areas particularly vulnerable to drought conditions and the ongoing locust outbreak.<sup>170</sup> Relief actors, including FAO, treated approximately 150,000 acres of agricultural land with chemical and mechanical control measures across 10 provinces as of late June.<sup>171</sup> The effects of the locust outbreak—which were originally projected to decrease wheat projection as much as 25 percent—were significantly mitigated by control measures, according to USAID.<sup>172</sup>

USAID estimated a full outbreak this year could result in crop losses ranging from 700,000 to 1.2 million metric tons of wheat—up to a quarter of the total annual harvest.<sup>173</sup> According to the FAO, the untreated locust population could increase by 100-fold in the next year. FAO is conducting an egg body laying survey in the north, west, and northeastern regions

of Afghanistan that will be used primarily to identify the scale and scope of locust control operations needed next year along with the necessary equipment and resources required to prepare a comprehensive locust control plan for the following year.<sup>174</sup> The egg body laying survey monitors the number of egg pods and is used to estimate the potential size of the upcoming locust population and map the locust hatching sites.<sup>175</sup>

## U.S. Government Risk Mitigation Efforts Prove Effective in Countering Taliban Interference

During the quarter, State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) partners' risk mitigation efforts demonstrated effectiveness at countering Taliban attempts at interference, according to State. Since December 2015, State PRM has maintained a third-party contract with a monitoring organization to conduct on-site monitoring of program partners that provides valuable information through on-site verifying and monitoring of activities. During the quarter, the monitor conducted site visits for State PRM with female field workers being escorted by male counterparts and did not encounter issues or concerns with its monitoring efforts in Afghanistan, State said.<sup>176</sup> According to State PRM, State met with the monitor to discuss site visit planning and monitoring report improvements for PRM's active programs. State PRM also discussed enhancing monitoring tools and enumerator observations to capture progress changes in the delivery of assistance and assess staffing and involvement of humanitarian personnel over time. State PRM also provided input using on-site monitoring to follow-up with beneficiaries on feedback mechanisms to improve accountability to affected populations.<sup>177</sup>

State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs monitored programs through regular check-ins, quarterly reports, and program impact assessments. According to State, the bureau's third-party monitoring services for counter narcotics programming have transferred to the UN Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.<sup>178</sup>

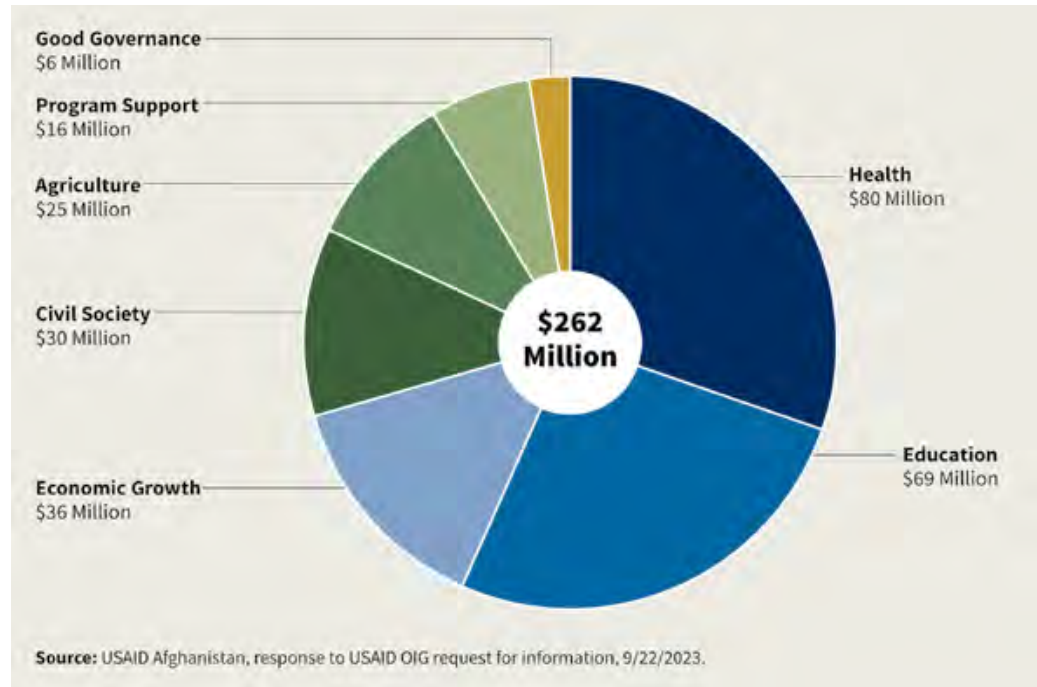
## DEVELOPMENT

USAID supported 22 fully operational activities during the quarter and reported that an additional three activities were in the procurement phase and one was in the design phase.<sup>179</sup> USAID reported that four activities ended during the quarter: Geotechnical Support to GOA, Livelihood Advancement for Marginalized Population, Agricultural Value Chains—Crops, and Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians.<sup>180</sup> To fund these activities, USAID/Afghanistan obligated approximately \$262 million during FY 2023, of which approximately \$102 million were funds that were appropriated for FYs 2012 through 2016.<sup>181</sup> Approximately \$189 million remained unobligated as of the end of the quarter, according to USAID.<sup>182</sup> (See Figure 4.)

USAID funding for the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund—formerly known as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund—totaled \$50 million in FY 2023 and supported the Afghanistan Health Emergency Response, Emergency Education Response in Afghanistan, and the Water Emergency Relief Project.<sup>183</sup> A fourth program funded by USAID, Supporting Economic Revitalization in Afghanistan Project, is planned.<sup>184</sup>

**USAID supported 22 fully operational activities during the quarter and reported that an additional three activities were in the procurement phase and one was in the design phase.**

Figure 4.

**USAID Development Funding by Sector, (obligated in FY 2023)****USAID Plans to Invest \$100 Million Over 3 Years to Support Democracy and Human Rights**

According to USAID, if gains in rights and freedoms, especially for women and girls, are not protected and conflict vulnerabilities and repercussions are not mitigated, then the consequences would be catastrophic, given the punitive policies of the Taliban.<sup>185</sup> The goals of USAID’s democracy, gender, and rights strategy in Afghanistan include protecting and promoting gender rights, preserving civic space and strengthening civil society organizations, strengthening the media sector, protecting human rights and supporting ethnic and religious minorities, and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities.<sup>186</sup> USAID plans to invest over \$100 million in Economic Support Funds over a 3-year period, starting in FY 2023, to support this strategy.<sup>187</sup>

**In FY 2023, USAID provided \$30 million for the civil society sector and \$6 million for good governance.**

In FY 2023, USAID provided \$30 million for the civil society sector and \$6 million for good governance.<sup>188</sup> In addition, USAID is funding four activities through USAID Afghanistan’s Office of Democracy, Gender, and Rights.<sup>189</sup> (See page 39.) A new countering trafficking in persons project that will offer psycho-social support, livelihood skills training, and shelters for trafficking victims is in the procurement process.<sup>190</sup> One additional activity, Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians, a \$50 million award, ended at the end of last quarter.<sup>191</sup> USAID Afghanistan’s Office of Democracy, Gender, and Rights is staffed currently with a foreign service officer director and is recruiting for a foreign service officer deputy director, a democracy analyst, and a senior democracy advisor personal services contractor.<sup>192</sup> The



office is also staffed by two Afghan personal services contractors, an Afghan institutional support contractor, and two former Afghan locally hired staff that are on track to become personal services contractors.<sup>193</sup>

## Taliban Restrictions and Interference Impact USAID and State Supported Activities

According to USAID, the ban on women working in the UN and in civil society organizations (CSO) and the extended edicts create a very restrictive space for women-led organizations to operate.<sup>194</sup> These restrictions have limited USAID gender programs.<sup>195</sup> Afghan women-led CSOs are the main implementers of programs aimed at improving the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan, and the recent bans have delayed project implementation.<sup>196</sup> Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, registration for CSOs has become more complex and is done through the Ministry of Economy.<sup>197</sup> Women-led CSOs have experienced operational challenges and face a greater number of edicts from the Taliban, including—in the Taliban’s ban on women working with NGOs, the ban on women working with UN programs, the bans on women and girls from attending high school and university, and restrictions on the movement and employment of women in public life.<sup>198</sup> As a result, women have had to work remotely in some parts of the country.<sup>199</sup> USAID reported that its programming focused on local capacity development of CSO leadership that has remained in Afghanistan, to mitigate the brain-drain of talented CSO leaders who have fled the country.<sup>200</sup> Community engagement, protection activities, and related services for females including survivors of gender-based violence remain severely affected by the ban, according to State.<sup>201</sup>

The Taliban has inspected and harassed the offices of most of the Huquq activity (Safeguarding Civic Rights and Media Freedoms in Afghanistan) grantees, with USAID reporting that Taliban authorities have forced their way in to check on the separation of male and female employees (if present).<sup>202</sup> Taliban authorities have also demanded to look at NGO files and examine employee cell phones.<sup>203</sup> Most of the grantees operating under this activity have adjusted the way they work to survive under the Taliban decree that banned women from working in NGOs and other restrictions, according to USAID.<sup>204</sup>

Grantees also faced difficulties in opening bank accounts for their NGOs to receive grant funding.<sup>205</sup> In the media sector, a USAID implementer was instructed by the Taliban in some provinces (including Helmand) to remove any women’s voices from radio programming, including women presenters.<sup>206</sup>

For the Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan’s Recovery activity, the ban on women working for NGOs caused some initial delays in project implementation as male and female staff were instructed to work from home for 2-3 months immediately after the decree.<sup>207</sup> Following this 2-3 month period, male and female staff returned to work and all programs resumed that could be implemented without a memorandum of understanding.<sup>208</sup> In some cases, the activity adjusted implementation at some locations to reach both male and female participants by reaching communities via phone or through community volunteers and community health workers.<sup>209</sup>



Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken recognizes the efforts of volunteers in the AfghanEvac Coalition to relocate and resettle Afghan allies and their family members. (State photo)

## OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies' strategic planning efforts; completed, ongoing, and planned oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; investigations; and hotline activities from July 1, 2023, through September 30, 2023.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING

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. This effort includes reviewing and analyzing completed oversight, management, and other relevant reports to identify systemic problems, trends, lessons learned, and best practices to inform future oversight projects. The Lead IG agencies issue an annual joint strategic oversight plan for each operation.

### FY 2024 JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT PLAN ACTIVITIES

In October 2021, upon designation of the DoD IG as the Lead IG for Operation Enduring Sentinel (OES), the Lead IG agencies developed and implemented a joint strategic oversight plan for comprehensive oversight of OES. The Lead IG agencies update the oversight plan annually.

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OES* was published on September 26, 2023, as part of the *FY 2024 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations*.

## Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

### MILITARY OPERATIONS

*Military Operations* focuses on determining the degree to which the contingency operation is accomplishing its security mission. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Conducting unilateral and partnered counterterrorism operations
- Providing security assistance
- Training and equipping regional partner security forces
- Advising, assisting, and enabling regional partner security forces

### DIPLOMACY, DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

*Diplomacy, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance* focuses on countering some of the root causes of violent extremism. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Promoting inclusive and effective democracy, civil participation, and empowerment of women
- Providing emergency relief, assistance, and protection to displaced persons, refugees, and others affected by crisis
- Countering trafficking in persons and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

### SUPPORT TO MISSION

*Support to Mission* focuses on U.S. administrative, logistical, and management efforts that enable military operations and non-military programs. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Ensuring the security of U.S. personnel and property
- Providing for the occupational health and safety of personnel
- Administering U.S. Government programs
- Managing U.S. Government grants and contracts
- Inventorying and accounting for equipment

The *FY 2024 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for OES* is organized by three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations; 2) Diplomacy, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance; and 3) Support to Mission.

The Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group serves as a 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), Social Security Administration (SSA) and



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

of the Intelligence Community. Additionally, the DHS OIG hosts the Afghanistan Project Coordination Group to provide a forum for IG community representatives to coordinate ongoing and planned oversight work stemming from the August 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In August 2023, the Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group held its 63rd meeting. Guest speaker USAID Syria Country Director Sonila “Soni” Hysi spoke from Amman, Jordan, about USAID’s role and the challenges in providing humanitarian and development assistance in conflict zones.

## AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

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

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

The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies published six reports related to OES during the quarter, including on State’s evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in August 2021, State’s termination of contracts after the fall of the Afghan government; and State’s management of the special immigrant visa (SIV) program for Afghans. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) OIG determined that a surge of applications from Afghan evacuees for long-term legal status may strain DHS’ ability to effectively process them. As of September 30, 2023, 22 projects related to OES were ongoing and 11 projects were planned.

## FINAL REPORTS BY LEAD IG AGENCIES

### DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

#### ***Information Brief: OIG’s Review of the Department of State’s Evacuation of U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan***

AUD-MERO-23-33, September 26, 2023

This information brief provides an unclassified summary of a classified report issued by State OIG in May 2023, Review of Emergency Action Planning Guiding the Evacuation of U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan. State OIG conducted the review to determine whether the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, followed established State guidance in preparation for and execution of the evacuation of U.S. Government personnel, private citizens, Afghans at risk, and other individuals from Afghanistan in August 2021. Because of the classified nature of the details included in the May 2023 report, the unclassified information brief



summarizing the classified report does not include all information State OIG reported in May 2023. The complete, unredacted report was provided to State and Congressional committees, as required by law, at the time the report was issued in May.

State OIG found that Embassy Kabul developed its emergency action plan (EAP) in accordance with established guidance. The EAP included all required provisions and was certified and approved annually, as required. Moreover, the Embassy Kabul Emergency Action Committee took emergency preparation seriously. However, State OIG found that despite Embassy Kabul having an approved EAP, it was not adequately prepared for the full scope of challenges it would encounter while executing the evacuation in August 2021. Embassy Kabul was unprepared to account for the individuals evacuated, its evacuation criteria were not clearly defined, it did not establish a plan to evacuate locally employed staff, it was executing the Administration's stated position that diplomatic operations would continue following the withdrawal of U.S. military forces and had concerns that overt evacuation planning would cause panic, and the evacuation from Hamid Karzai International Airport after leaving Embassy Kabul was chaotic.

State OIG made 10 recommendations in the May 2023 report. State concurred with the intent of all 10 recommendations and State OIG considered all 10 recommendations resolved, pending further action, at the time the report was issued. Since the report was issued in May 2023, State has taken action to implement some of the recommendations. Among other actions, the Under Secretary of State for Management has worked in coordination with State's Office of Crisis Management and Strategy to improve the process of obtaining more accurate personnel accountability data.

### ***Audit of the Department of State's Efforts to Identify and Terminate Unneeded Contracts Related to Afghanistan***

AUD-CGI-23-26, September 14, 2023

State OIG conducted this audit to determine whether State identified and terminated contracts impacted by the suspension of U.S. operations in Afghanistan in accordance with Federal and State requirements. As part of the audit, State OIG selected and reviewed eight contracts managed by State's Bureau of Administration on behalf of three State bureaus.

State OIG found that State did not adequately identify contracts that would require termination prior to or after the suspension of operations in Afghanistan, nor did State assess the bona fide need of open obligations related to Afghanistan until requested to do so by State's financial statement auditor at the end of FY 2021. Specifically, State did not perform advance planning to identify contracts that could be impacted by the suspension of operations or take steps to identify and track Afghanistan-specific contracts. This occurred, in part, because State expected embassy operations in Kabul to continue after the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Afghanistan. In addition, the Bureau of Administration did not have a process defined in its policies and procedures to facilitate the identification of unneeded contracts following a suspension of operations. With respect to the eight contracts reviewed during the audit, State OIG found that contracting officers did not terminate these contracts in accordance with Federal and State requirements, nor did they maintain sufficient, required documentation to support the contract actions taken.

State OIG made 12 recommendations to improve internal controls specific to the identification and termination of unneeded contracts and the Bureau of Administration concurred with the intent of all 12 recommendations. At the time the report was issued, State OIG considered nine recommendations resolved, pending further action, and three recommendations unresolved.

***Audit of Selected Cooperative Agreements Supporting Department of State Refugee Resettlement Support Centers***

AUD-SI-23-28, September 14, 2023

State OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the organizations operating selected refugee support centers adhered to the terms and conditions set forth in award agreements, including meeting performance goals, properly expended funds and accurately reported financial performance.

Individuals outside the United States seeking admission as refugees are typically processed through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which is managed by State's PRM. PRM funds organizations to manage overseas refugee Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) that assist in the processing of refugee applications. State OIG conducted this audit to determine whether selected recipients of cooperative agreement funds supporting RSCs adhered to applicable Federal requirements, State policies and guidance, and award terms and conditions. The audit team performed fieldwork at three RSCs, including Istanbul, Türkiye.

State OIG found that the recipients of cooperative agreement funds supporting RSCs did not always adhere to Federal requirements, State guidance, and award terms and conditions. Of the 60 refugee applications reviewed, 39 had deficiencies primarily related to administrative requirements. State OIG found that 12 of 36 cases reviewed had differences between the case management system and the physical case file. State OIG found that none of the 12 RSC caseworkers observed conducted prescreening interviews in accordance with requirements. State OIG found that selected award recipients did not always submit accurate performance reports. Finally, State OIG found that selected award recipients did not always spend funds in accordance with Federal requirements and award terms and conditions. Of the 144 expenditures tested, totaling approximately \$2 million, State OIG found 24 expenditures to be unallowable and State OIG questioned \$759,000 in costs considered unsupported or unallowable.

State OIG made 13 recommendations to address the deficiencies identified and to determine the allowability of costs claimed. PRM concurred with all 13 recommendations and, at the time the report was issued, State OIG considered all 13 recommendations resolved, pending further action.

## ***Evaluation of Adjustments to the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program from 2018 through 2022***

AUD-MERO-23-23, August 29, 2023

State OIG conducted this review to assess the adjustments made to processing Special Immigrant Visa applications between 2018 and 2022. Following State's evacuation and suspension of operations of U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in August 2021, multiple congressional committees requested that State OIG review the processing of Afghan SIVs. State OIG is issuing a series of reports in response to the requests. For this report, State OIG responded to eight congressional questions within several areas: State efforts to streamline the Afghan SIV process from 2018 through 2022, the impact of Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) on the Afghan SIV applicant process, and the future of the Afghan SIV program.

State OIG found that State took actions beginning in February 2021 to streamline Afghan SIV applicant processing and mitigate some processing issues. However, as of December 2022, these actions had not eliminated a significant and growing Afghan SIV applicant backlog. State OIG also found that the COVID-19 pandemic stalled the Afghan SIV application process, which in turn increased the number of SIV applicants awaiting in-person interviews. Finally, State OIG found that State's Afghan SIV program continues to face challenges, including that State relies on Taliban cooperation for SIV applicant relocation from Afghanistan because of a lack of U.S. presence on the ground in Afghanistan.

State OIG made two recommendations in a prior report involving the Afghan SIV program that are relevant to the findings discussed in this report. At the time this report was issued, both of those recommendations were open pending further actions. In this report, State OIG made one new recommendation to further improve the Afghan SIV program. State concurred with the new recommendation, and, at the time the report was issued, State OIG considered the new recommendation to be resolved, pending further action.

## **FINAL REPORTS BY PARTNER AGENCIES**

### **DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

#### ***USCIS Has Generally Met Statutory Requirements to Adjudicate Asylum Applications from Paroled Afghan Evacuees***

OIG-23-40; August 18, 2023

The DHS OIG conducted this evaluation to assess DHS preparations to receive and expedite requests from Afghan evacuees for long-term legal status.

Specifically, the DHS OIG assessed the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) ability to meet statutory timelines for adjudicating asylum applications from Afghans arriving in the United States under Operation Allies Welcome (OAW).

The DHS OIG determined that that members of the OAW population had filed only limited numbers of applications for asylum as of May 31, 2022, although they likely remain eligible to apply into 2024.

USCIS met OAW-specific processing timelines established by the Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2022 for the majority of applications that have been filed and has adjusted its operations to expedite adjudications. However, a surge of applications over a short period of time may strain USCIS operations given the required processing timelines and the preexisting non-OAW application backlog.

The DHS OIG recommended that USCIS continue to evaluate its operations and ensure consistent compliance with statutory timelines for interviewing asylum applicants from the OAW population. USCIS concurred with the recommendation.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

### ***Processing Non-citizens' Original Social Security Numbers Electronically Through Enumeration Programs***

A-08-22-51136; September 20, 2023

The Social Security Administration OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the Social Security Administration's (SSA) policies and procedures prevented it from assigning multiple Social Security numbers (SSN) to non-citizens who applied for original SSNs through the Enumeration at Entry (EAE) and Enumeration Beyond Entry (EBE) processes.

The SSA OIG determined that the SSA correctly processed and assigned SSNs to approximately 587,000 (99.8 percent) non-citizens who applied through EAE and EBE in calendar year 2021. However, SSA technicians improperly processed and assigned multiple SSNs to 1,185 (less than 1 percent) non-citizens who participated in these processes.

The SSA OIG made five recommendations to the SSA to address the 1,185 improperly processed SSN records. The SSA agreed with two of the recommendations, but disagreed with the remaining three, which remain open until the necessary actions are taken.

Part of the scope of this audit included SSN cards for non-citizens the United States admitted under OAW.

In the summer 2021, the United States began admitting non-citizens from Afghanistan as part of Operation Allies Welcome. The SSA processed the SSN applications for these non-citizens through the EBE process. Generally, once an application for an SSN card is processed, the card is mailed to the address the applicant provided. However, under a process unique to Operation Allies Welcome, SSA mailed SSN cards to a centralized address at the IOM, a non-governmental agency that assisted Afghan nationals with resettlement. These non-citizens did not have permanent addresses when they entered the United States.

IOM received the SSN cards from the SSA and the Employment Authorization Documents from DHS and forwarded them to the non-citizens' new locations/addresses once they were established. According to the SSA, it was not involved in the decision-making process to use IOM to receive and distribute the SSN cards. The SSA took possession of about 38,000 SSN cards that IOM could not deliver to the applicants. The SSA worked with DHS' USCIS and IOM to improve the tracking capability, security, and mailing of SSN cards.



## ONGOING OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

As of September 30, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 22 ongoing projects related to OES. Figure 5 describes the ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 5 and 6, contained in Appendix E, list the titles and objectives for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these ongoing projects by strategic oversight area.

### Military Operations

- **SIGAR** is conducting an audit to determine whether State’s implementing partners have entered into agreements with the Taliban to facilitate program implementation, and whether those agreements were completed and reviewed in accordance with applicable requirements.
- 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.

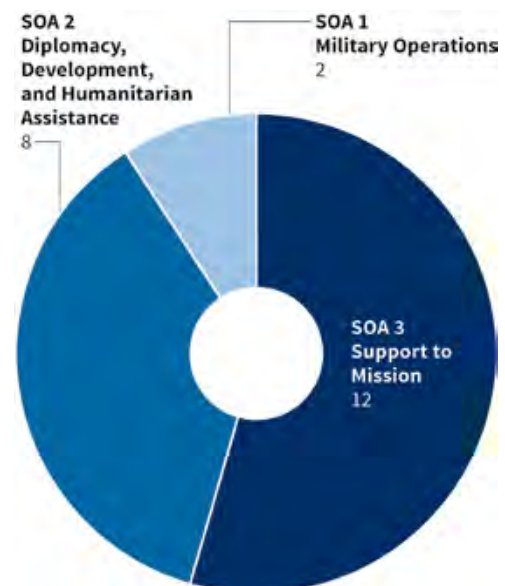
### Diplomacy, Development, and Humanitarian Assistance

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

### Support to Mission

- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an evaluation to determine the extent to which the combatant commands have effectively conducted military deception planning in support of ongoing OES operations.

Figure 5.  
Ongoing Projects by  
Strategic Oversight Area



- The **DoD OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether DoD contracting officials appropriately closed out contingency contracts supporting Afghanistan operations.
- **State OIG** is conducting an audit to determine whether the U.S. embassies in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Kyiv, Ukraine, managed, safeguarded, and disposed of sensitive security assets in advance of the evacuation and suspension of operations at each post in accordance with State guidance.

## PLANNED OVERSIGHT PROJECTS

As of September 30, 2023, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies had 11 planned projects related to OES. Figure 6 describes the planned projects by strategic oversight area.

Tables 7 and 8, contained in Appendix F, lists the titles and objectives for each of these projects. The following sections highlight some of these planned projects by strategic oversight area.

### Military Operations

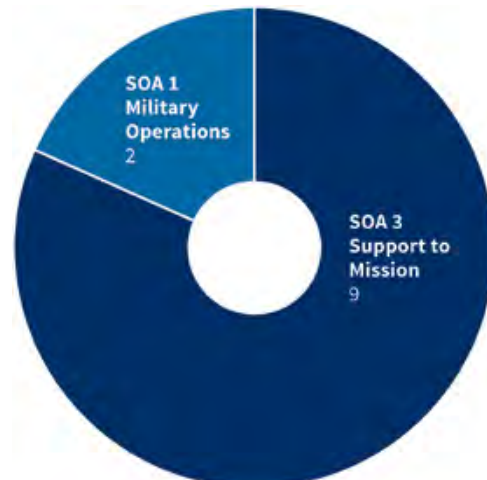
- **SIGAR** intends to conduct an audit to determine the extent to which military equipment and weaponry funded by the DoD was left in Afghanistan, and whether U.S. efforts to track or capture military equipment and weaponry was adequate.

### Support to Mission

- **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 on-going activities with international donors and organizations.

Figure 6.

#### Planned Projects by Strategic Oversight Area



# INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

## INVESTIGATIONS

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

### INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO OES

During the quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies initiated 2 new investigations, closed 4 investigations, and coordinated on 35 open investigations related to OES. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, corruption, theft, computer intrusions, program irregularities, and human trafficking allegations. As noted in Figure 7, the majority of primary offense locations and allegations related to OES originated in Afghanistan.

The Lead IG agencies and partner agencies 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 U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. During the quarter, the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group conducted 22 fraud awareness briefings for 314 attendees. Figure 8 depicts open investigations related to OES and sources of allegations.

Figure 7.

**Types of Allegations and Primary Offense Locations, July 1–September 30, 2023**

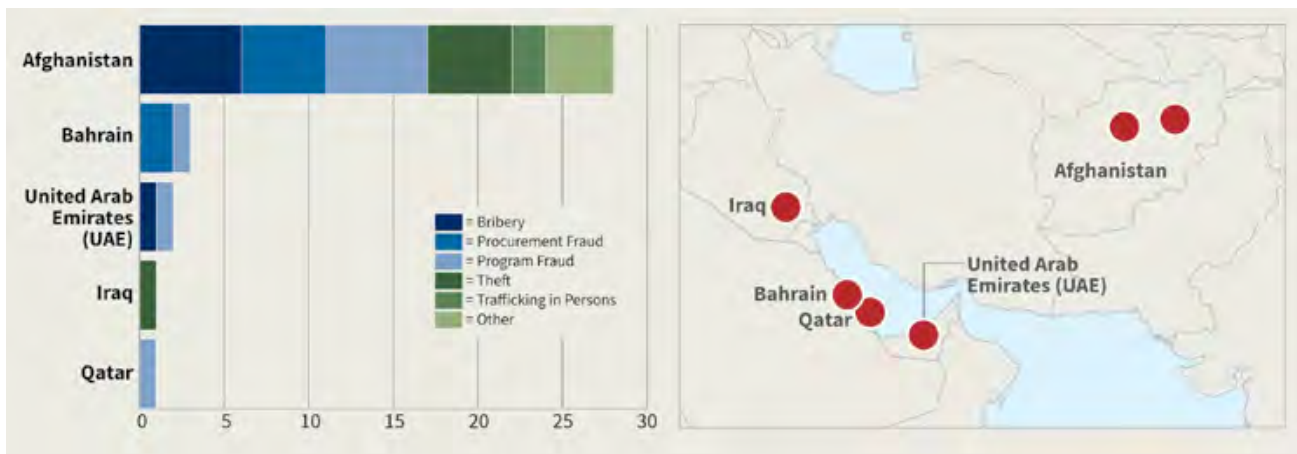
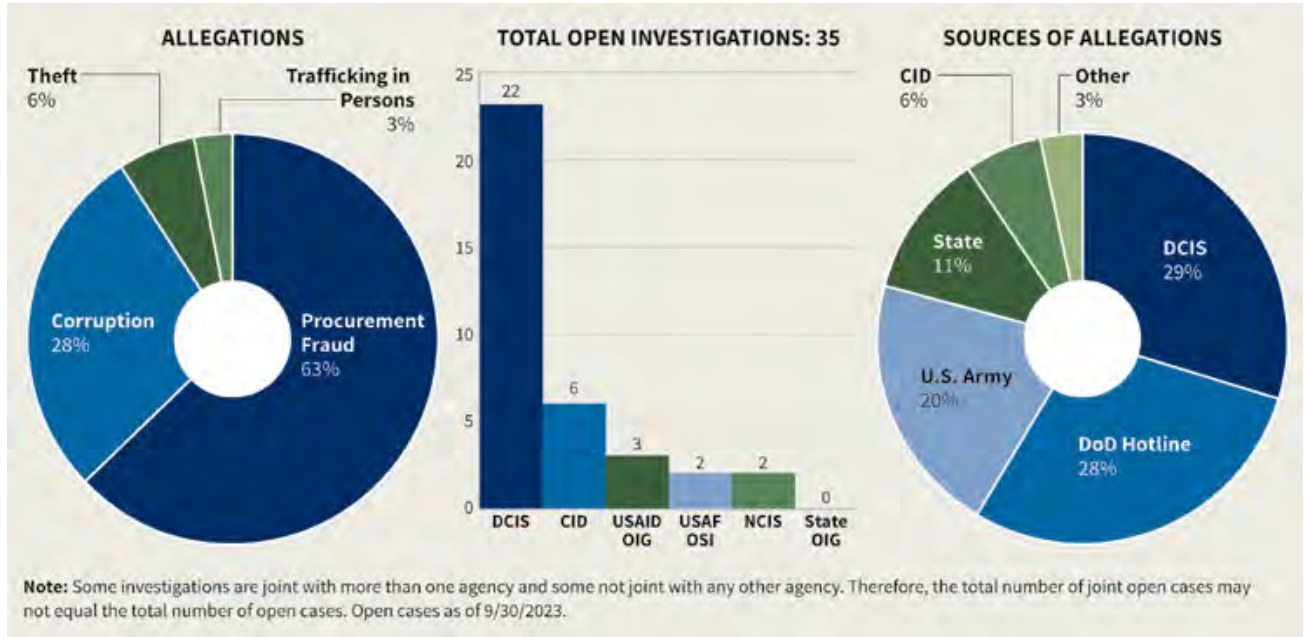


Figure 8.

**Open Investigations and Sources of Allegations, July 1–September 30, 2023**



**INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY RELATED TO LEGACY CASES**

The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies have seven ongoing “legacy” investigations related to crimes involving the OES area of operations that occurred prior to the designation of OES.

**HOTLINE**

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

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



# APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

### Classified Appendix to this Report

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

## APPENDIX B

### About the Lead Inspector General

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

Section 419 requires the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency to appoint a Lead Inspector General 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 covers the period from July 1, 2023, through September 30, 2023. The three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, State OIG, and USAID OIG—and partner oversight agencies contributed the content of this report.

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

### INFORMATION COLLECTION FROM AGENCIES AND OPEN SOURCES

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

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

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

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

### REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD IG, as the Lead IG for OES, 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 the report is assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process 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 3.

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

Program	Activity During the Quarter
<p><b>UN High Commissioner for Refugees</b></p> <p>Provide refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, and IDPs, in Afghanistan with life-saving assistance, work to enhance the protection environment in line with international protection standards and increase access to durable solutions.</p> <p>\$39.3 million</p>	<p>Increased access to education and adequate shelter, community empowerment, gender-based violence prevention, livelihoods support, cash assistance, and water, sanitation and health as part of UNHCR's geographic strategy for services in priority areas of return and reintegration.</p> <p>Supported assistance for reintegration, voluntary repatriation, and targeted protection monitoring and case management.</p>
<p><b>State Implementer</b></p> <p>Support hospitals across Afghanistan, ensuring access to healthcare of up to 20 million people, managing direct payments to hospital staff, administrators, and suppliers. This support includes the provision of much needed medical supplies, physical rehabilitation services, and improvement of water and sanitation services.</p> <p>\$38.3 million</p>	<p>Funding to support activities for Afghanistan.</p>
<p><b>UN Population Fund</b></p> <p>Improve maternal reproductive health, psychosocial support services for women and girls and provide life-saving sexual reproductive health services in Afghanistan.</p> <p>\$20.2 million</p>	<p>Provided key health interventions in maternal and reproductive health, psychosocial support services for women and girls, life-saving sexual reproductive health services, and emergency supplies.</p>
<p><b>IOM's Afghanistan Appeal</b></p> <p>Provide lifesaving, multi-sectoral humanitarian and protection assistance across the country, targeting IDPs and cross border returnees.</p> <p>\$13.5 million</p>	<p>Provided shelter and non-food items; health; protection via cross-border and post-arrival assistance; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and protection monitoring and needs assessment of mobile and displaced populations via the Displacement-Tracking Matrix.</p>
<p><b>IOM</b></p> <p>Program name protected</p> <p>\$4.5 million</p>	<p>Program activity protected</p>

**Source:** State PRM, response to State OIG request for information, 10/3/2023.

Table 4.

**USAID-funded Democracy, Gender, and Rights Activities**

Program	Recent Activities
<p><b>Supporting Transformation for Afghanistan’s Recovery (STAR)</b></p> <p>Aims to build household and community resilience in some of the most marginalized and vulnerable parts of Afghanistan. Livelihood activities support household efforts to enjoy a sustained increase in agricultural productivity and income.</p> <p>\$20 million</p>	<p>USAID/Afghanistan is working on the annual Performance Plan and Report where accomplishments for these activities for FY 2023 will be detailed and will provide it when available.</p>
<p><b>Inter-Agency Agreement (IAA) with USIP “Information, Dialogue, and Rights in Afghanistan” activity</b></p> <p>Seeks 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> <p>\$11.8 million</p>	<p>USAID/Afghanistan is working on the annual Performance Plan and Report where accomplishments for these activities for FY 2023 will be detailed and will provide it when available.</p>
<p><b>Huquq: Safeguarding Civic Rights and Media Freedoms in Afghanistan</b></p> <p>Seeks to empower journalists, civic activists and human rights defenders to defend the basic civil rights and freedoms that underpin civic engagement and free media. 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>\$20 million</p>	<p>USAID/Afghanistan is working on the annual Performance Plan and Report where accomplishments for these activities for FY 2023 will be detailed and will provide it when available.</p>
<p><b>Support for Essential Services for Afghan Women and Girls</b></p> <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. As per the UN Women’s model, support would be implemented through local NGOs to provide immediate assistance for women’s shelters/protection, grants to women-led CSOs, and livelihood interventions.</p> <p>\$30 million</p>	<p>USAID/Afghanistan is working on the annual Performance Plan and Report where accomplishments for these activities for FY 2023 will be detailed and will provide it when available.</p>

**Source:** USAID Afghanistan, response to USAID OIG request for information, 9/22/2023.



## APPENDIX E

# Ongoing Oversight Projects

Tables 5 and 6 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects related to OES.

Table 5.

### Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Agencies, as of September 30, 2023

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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

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

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

To determine whether DoD contracting officials closed out contingency contracts supporting Afghanistan operations in accordance with applicable Federal laws and DoD regulations.

##### ***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; adjustments made to processing SIV applications between 2018 and 2022; 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; and the totality of State OIG reporting on the SIV Program in a capping report.

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

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

##### ***Joint NDAA Section 5275 Report on the Vetting, Processing, and Resettlement of Afghan Evacuees and the Special Immigrant Visa Program***

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

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

##### ***Evaluation of USAID's Role in the Evacuation of Implementing Partners from Afghanistan***

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

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

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

Table 6.

**Ongoing Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of September 30, 2023****DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****DHS Tracking of OAW Population with Potential Derogatory Records***

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

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

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

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

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

**SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION*****Evaluation of the Status of the Education Sector in Afghanistan***

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

***Audit of U.S. Funds Directly Benefiting the Taliban***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

***Evaluation of the Afghan Fund***

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

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

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

**Audit of Contractor Vetting**

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

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

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

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

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



## APPENDIX F

# Planned Oversight Projects

Tables 7 and 8 list the titles and objectives for Lead IG and partner agencies' planned oversight projects related to OES.

Table 7.

### Planned Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Agency, as of September 30, 2023

#### DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### ***Audit of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research's (INR) Execution of Activities Supporting Embassy Evacuations***

To determine whether INR executed its responsibilities by providing all source intelligence analysis and information to the appropriate decision-makers in preparation of the evacuation of U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan; U.S. Embassy Kyiv, Ukraine; and U.S. Embassy Khartoum, Sudan.

Table 8.

### Planned Oversight Projects Related to OES by Lead IG Partner Agencies, as of September 30, 2023

#### SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

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

To determine 1) the current use and disposition of military equipment and weaponry funded by the DoD that the Department 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 Department left behind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Audit of USAID’s Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation Efforts**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## ACRONYMS

Acronym	
AQIS	al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 19
CSO	civil society organizations
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
EAE	Enumeration at Entry
EBE	Enumeration Beyond Entry
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FY	fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIS-K	ISIS-Khorasan
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	DoD, State, and USAID OIGs
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NGIC	National Ground Intelligence Center
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OAW	Operation Allies Welcome
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODASD(RUE)	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia

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



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