

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

1. What is the current security situation in Kandahar province?
2. Could a grade 6 child be a member of PDPA?
3. Was there a youth group?

RESPONSE

1. What is the current security situation in Kandahar province?

Research Response AFG17441 provides details on the return of ex-communists to Kandahar (RRT Country Information 2005, *Research Response AFG17441*, 26 July – Attachment 1).

The UK Home Office provides a fairly detailed view of the security situation in the southern provinces up to October 2006.

SOUTH, SOUTH-EAST AND EAST

8.27 A Human Rights Watch Overview dated January 2006 stated that “In 2005, Taliban and other anti-government forces, some allied with Gulbuddin Hekmaytar [sic], significantly expanded their insurgency in the predominantly Pashtun areas in southern Afghanistan.” [17o] A 2005 review published on 11 January 2006 by IRIN News stated that “Violence blamed on Taliban militia and other insurgent groups has left many southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan off-limits to aid workers, government officials and police.” [36b]

8.28 On 6 February 2006, The Guardian reported that Taliban violence in the south had increased dramatically in recent months, casting doubt on claims that they are a waning force. [18c]

8.29 A Human Rights Watch Report published on 11 July 2006 stated that:

“Nearly a third of Afghanistan’s population lives in the country’s southern and southeastern provinces. The south is the heartland of Afghanistan’s Pashtun community and the cradle of the Taliban movement. By all accounts and benchmarks, security has deteriorated sharply in this area over the past two years. Opposition forces and well-armed criminal gangs operate extensively in this area, and the population receives little succor from the regional warlords nominally operating under government authority...

“In past years, opposition attacks decreased markedly during the winter months, when cold weather hampered movement, particularly across the mountainous border to Pakistan. In 2006, the attacks have continued at an ever higher pace and intensity...

“In 2004, a more robust and aggressive strategy by the coalition managed to push the opposition forces out of some of these areas, prompting the U.S. and Afghan governments to pronounce (again) that the Taliban were on the verge of defeat. But in 2005, Taliban and other opposition forces changed tactics, away from direct confrontations and instead began focusing on civilians and civilian institutions, such as teachers, low-level bureaucrats, schools, and aid workers, an approach similar to that used by anti-U.S. forces in Iraq. At least nine clerics were killed in Afghanistan in 2005.” [171] (p21-22)

...

8.32 A later Senlis Council report published on 5 September 2006 stated that:

“Following the fall of the Taliban regime, southern Afghanistan was largely ignored, with reconstruction and development efforts focusing on Kabul and its immediate surroundings, and more benign regions such as northern Afghanistan. Taliban remnants and other disaffected actors exploited this opportunity to regroup, and with the Afghan transitional government and international community’s attention focused elsewhere, the Taliban and other insurgent groups became entrenched in the border provinces between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Consequently, Kandahar and Helmand effectively became training grounds for anti-state actors.

“The neo-Taliban offensive really started at the end of 2005 and early 2006. Since this date, southern Afghanistan has been plunged into a wave of increasing violence, the outcome of which will be difficult to determine.” [20b] (p59)

8.33 The same report also stated that:

“The Taliban strongholds are located in the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Over the past few months, insurgents intensified their offensive in these areas, inflicting several dozen casualties on US and NATO-ISAF forces, especially in the provinces of Kandahar and Helmand. Despite their losses, which amount to several hundred combatants, anti-government elements are extending the scale of their operations...” [20b] (p61)

“In the southern half of the country, the neo-Taliban have de facto military and psychological control. This is manifest in everyday activities: men grow beards, women wear the burka and they all refuse to work for foreigners, whilst at the same time, people are scared to send their children to schools or have any contact with foreigners.” [20b] (p63)

8.34 The UN Secretary-General’s report of 11 September 2006 stated that since March 2006:

“... the most significant development in Afghanistan has been the upsurge in violence, particularly in the south, south-east and east of the country...

“The growing number of casualties in the south can be attributed both to a rise in anti-Government attacks and to a corresponding increase in offensive military operations being

conducted by the Afghan National Army and its international partners. In the south-east, where major military operations are only just getting underway, insurgent activity has been conducted largely unchecked.” [39n] (p1-2)

8.35 IRIN News reported on 14 July 2006 that:

“Local people and rights groups in southern Afghanistan are increasingly concerned about what they say is an escalation in civilian deaths and injuries resulting from the growing insurgency in the region...

“According to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), at least 600 of the 1,100 deaths in southern Afghanistan this year have been civilians killed by insurgents or coalition attacks. Ahmad Nader Nadery, a spokesman for the AIHRC, said that his organisation’s regional office in Kandahar had received several complaints from local people about civilian casualties during the coalition air strikes.” [36q]

8.36 On 21 September 2006 the US general commanding American forces in Afghanistan was reported by Deutsche Presse Agentur as saying that he had not anticipated the strength of the Taliban in the south of the country:

“The Taliban has been able to take advantage of the weakness of the Afghan government in the south to establish a presence that NATO and US forces have been working to roll back for months, Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry [said]... NATO has inflicted heavy casualties on the Taliban since Operation Medusa began and forced them to retreat and disperse, the alliance’s chief commander, US General James Jones, told reporters Wednesday...

“Defeating the Taliban has been complicated by the militia’s ability to scurry across the border into Pakistan and then later launch raids. The porous border has been a source of tension between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his Pakistani counterpart, Pervez Musharraf.” [40e]

8.37 “It was the sanctuary of this international border that allowed Taliban leadership to survive the 2001 war and regroup in the intervening years. Today, Taliban leadership and spokespeople operate brazenly in areas bordering Afghanistan’s Pashtun belt in the south and east. Its fundamentalist religious schools, never reformed despite countless promises by President General Musharraf, offer almost limitless recruits.” (International Crisis Group, 17 August 2006) [26a]

8.38 On 17 September 2006, Reuters reported that:

“NATO and Afghan government forces have forced Taliban troops out of a southern Afghan district after a two-week operation in which NATO said hundreds of militants were killed.

““This has been a significant success and clearly shows the capability that Afghan, NATO and coalition forces have when they operate together,’ the British commander of NATO troops in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David Richards told a news conference on Sunday.” [24c] (UK Home Office 2006, ‘*Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan*’, 18 October – Attachment 2).

Associated Press in January 2007 published a list of Major Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan that included 6 in Kandahar:

Sept. 18, 2006 — Bomber riding a bicycle targets Canadian troops, killing 4 people and wounding many others in Kandahar province.

...

Aug. 3, 2006 — 21 civilians killed in a suicide car bombing near Canadian military vehicles in town market in Kandahar province.

Jan. 16, 2006 — A man with explosives strapped to his body drives a motorbike into a crowd watching a wrestling match in Kandahar province and kills 21 people.

Jan. 15, 2006 — A car bomber slams into a Canadian military convoy in Kandahar city, killing two passers-by and a senior Canadian diplomat.

...

Oct. 10, 2005 — Two suicide attackers explode bombs in the southern city of Kandahar killing three people.

...

June 1, 2005 — A suspected al-Qaida fighter detonates explosives strapped to his body in a mosque in Kandahar city, killing 20 worshippers. ('List of Major Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan' 2007, *Associated Press*, 23 January, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/01/23/asia/AS-GEN-Afghan-Suicide-Attacks-Glance.php> – Accessed 24 January 2007 CISNET Afghanistan CX169557 Attachment 3).

The *BBC* in July 2006 reported on the general situation in Kandahar:

Beyond the heavy fighting in Helmand, the roadside and suicide car bombs in Kandahar and across Afghanistan which are killing coalition soldiers, Taleban militia and civilians, is a campaign to bring chaos and fear to the country.

Just how co-ordinated this campaign might be is difficult to say, but every day the list of dead and injured is increasing. Some days there are more attacks across Afghanistan than there are in Iraq. (Leithhead, A. 'Afghanistan's Hidden War' 2006, *BBC News*, 27 July, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5220514.stm – Accessed 24 January 2007 (CISNET Afghanistan CX169548) - Attachment 4).

The *Edmonton Sun* in March 2007 reported that Taliban activity continued:

Just hours after the governor of Kandahar province urged on Tuesday village elders to reject the Taliban, a bomb exploded in this troubled district west of Kandahar City, wounding a Canadian soldier, severely injuring a civilian dog handler and killing his dog.

...

"People don't like the Taliban in the area," Abdul Raziq, a local farmer, said afterwards through an interpreter. "If they come again, all the people who live in the communities will tell them to go away because it's dangerous for us."

Then he added, the Taliban are "gone" from the area. "Things are getting better day by day."

It is a claim you'll hear from farmers all the time, but considering the number of continuing attacks, it's not one you can take seriously.

It might be wishful thinking on the farmers' part or perhaps they're merely saying what they think Canadians want to hear. Making the issue even more murky is the realization the farmers know Canadians will be more likely to bring reconstruction help if they can convince Canada the region is safer.

When pushed on the matter, Raziq admits that even though he hasn't seen Taliban fighters for three or four months, they could easily come back to his village.

"I will do my best not to let them in," he said. "But I can't control the Taliban because they have the weapons." ('Taliban still active in Kandahar district' 2007, *Edmonton Sun*, 21

March, <http://www.ca.nada.com/edmontonjournal/news/story.html?id=1895cdf0-012d-4a-f6-a37b-4e43d22a4b77&k=86998> – Accessed 22 March 2007 (CISNET Afghanistan CX174182) - Attachment 5).

The Council on Foreign Relations in February 2007 reported that in relation to the Taliban:

They have launched a number of coordinated suicide attacks (RFE/RL), particularly in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. And their leadership boasts a deep well of recruits, tapping popular antipathy toward the U.S.-backed government in Kabul.

The breakdown in Afghan security is attributable to a number of factors, as this Backgrounder explains. Afghan security forces, despite boosting their capacity, have proven ineffective at combating warlords and drug traffickers, according to a new report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The report finds that the police force in particular has had problems retaining officers, and also with corruption and oversight. Militias and local mafias have filled the security void. Conditions on the ground have deteriorated across the board, CSIS finds, with the exception of economic conditions and women's rights. Unmet expectations have led to flagging public confidence in the Afghan government. ('Taliban Plans Own 'Surge'' 2007, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 February, http://www.cfr.org/publication/12729/taliban_plans_own_surge.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fpublication_list%3Ftype%3Ddaily_analysis – Accessed 28 February 2007 (CISNET Afghanistan CX172529) - Attachment 6).

The UN's *IRIN* news service reported on the difficulties the Police in Afghanistan generally and the south in particular were facing ('Gov't bid to boost police in south' 2007, *IRIN*, 4 March, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70504> – Accessed 11 April 2007 – Attachment 7).

2. Could a grade 6 child be a member of PDPA?

3. Was there a youth group?

Research response AFG14654 provides information on the youth section of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan including recruitment of people as young as 10 (RRT Country Information 2001, *Research Response AFG14654*, 16 May – Attachment 8).

For more information on KhAD and its successor WAD, see the Council of the EU Report, which covers the history of KhAD, its structure, ranks, etc (Council of the European Union 2001 '*Security services in Communist Afghanistan (1978-1992)*' 26 April <http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3df0b5954.pdf> – Accessed 11 April 2007 – Attachment 9).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

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Non-Government Organisations

International Crisis Group <http://www.crisisweb.org/>

International News & Politics

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Institute of War & Peace Reporting http://www.iwpr.net/home_index_new.html

IRIN <http://www.irinnews.org/>

Search Engines

Google <http://www.google.com.au/>
Copernic <http://www.copernic.com/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

CISNET (Department of Immigration Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

List of Attachments

1. RRT Country Information 2005, *Research Response AFG17441*, 26 July.
2. UK Home Office 2006, '*Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan*', 18 October.
3. 'List of Major Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan' 2007, *Associated Press*, 23 January, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/23/asia/AS-GEN-Afghan-Suicide-Attacks-Glance.php> – Accessed 24 January 2007. (CISNET Afghanistan CX169557)
4. Leithhead, A. 'Afghanistan's Hidden War' 2006, *BBC News*, 27 July, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5220514.stm – Accessed 24 January 2007. (CISNET Afghanistan CX169548)
5. 'Taliban still active in Kandahar district' 2007, *Edmonton Sun*, 21 March, <http://www.ca.nada.com/edmontonjournal/news/story.html?id=1895cdf0-012d-4a-f6-a37b-4e43d22a4b77&k=86998> – Accessed 22 March 2007. (CISNET Afghanistan CX174182)
6. 'Taliban Plans Own 'Surge'' 2007, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 February, http://www.cfr.org/publication/12729/taliban_plans_own_surge.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fpublicatio_n_list%3Ftype%3Ddaily_analysis – Accessed 28 February 2007. (CISNET Afghanistan CX172529)
7. 'Gov't bid to boost police in south' 2007, *IRIN*, 4 March, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70504> – Accessed 11 April 2007.
8. RRT Country Information 2001, *Research Response AFG14654*, 16 May.
9. Council of the European Union 2001 '*Security services in Communist Afghanistan (1978-1992)*' 26 April <http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/3df0b5954.pdf> – Accessed 11 April 2007.