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Afghanistan: Whether Taliban members target the family members of high-ranking government officials; whether there are security systems in place to protect the relatives of high-ranking government officials, including state protection and private security operations

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In 16 September 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior program coordinator of the Afghanistan Regional Project, which is run by the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) of New York University, who has also served four years as the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the Southeast region, stated that "family members of GoA [Government of Afghanistan] officials face a credible threat from Taliban intimidation or assassination" (Senior Program Coordinator 16 Sept. 2010). CIC aims to improve "international responses to humanitarian crises and global security threats through applied research and direct engagement" and supports the Afghan government, Afghan civil society and the UNAMA (CIC Sept. 2009).

A 15 June 2010 article published by *The New York Times* indicates that the Taliban are leading a "campaign of assassinations" targeting officials and "anyone else" who is linked with the local government. The article adds that low-level officials, who often do not have access to the same security services that top leaders do, are being targeted (*The New York Times* 15 June 2010). The article also states that some victims of the Taliban "have only the slimmest connections to the authorities"; for example, in June 2010, a seven year old boy was executed for being an alleged informant of the government (ibid.). Without providing a date, the article reports that the brother of a member of Parliament was shot in a bazaar in Kandahar (ibid.). However, a spokesperson for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) force in Afghanistan said that, due to the scarcity of accurate information, it could not be concluded that the Taliban were responsible for all of the recent assassinations (ibid.). The Amnesty International (AI) annual report for 2009 indicates that on 19 October 2009, armed men kidnapped a relative of the late King Zahir Shah in Kabul; the Afghan police rescued him the following week (AI 2009).

Concerning attacks on government officials, an article published by *The New York Times* on 11 September 2010 reports that according to an unspecified United Nations (UN) publication, "unarmed government employees can no longer travel safely in 30 percent of the country's 368 districts ... and there are districts deemed too dangerous to visit in all but one of the country's 34 provinces." Statistics provided by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) of Afghanistan and cited in the United States (US) Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights*

Practices for 2009 indicate that in 2009, 1,954 government employees, mostly police officers, were killed by insurgents (US 11 Mar. 2010, Intro.). A Reuters article cites a US Department of State top official in southern Afghanistan as saying that Taliban members have engaged in an "assassination campaign" targeting Afghan officials in Kandahar, which includes "bombing of government departments" and "assassination squads" (6 May 2010). For instance, on 30 October 2009, the Ministry of Information and Culture in Kabul was attacked by a Taliban suicide bomber; 5 civilians died and more than 21 were injured as a result (AI 2009). The United Kingdom (UK) Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reports that on 18 January 2010, insurgents attacked several government buildings in Kabul; they used automatic weapons, suicide attacks and rocket-propelled grenade launchers (UK 27 Sept. 2010).

A 10 August 2010 AI article states that in the first half of 2010, there have been 183 "executions and assassinations" of civilians by Taliban and other groups of insurgents, which amounts to a 95 percent increase with respect to the same period in 2009. The article adds that the victims were usually targeted because of their alleged support of the government (AI 10 Aug. 2010). The AI annual report for 2009 states that prominent Afghans were kidnapped by armed criminal groups who asked for ransom (2009). The report underlines that often, these kidnappings were not reported for victims and their relatives were afraid of "retaliation and corrupt police officials with ties to armed groups" (AI 2009). Statistics compiled by *The New York Times* from the Afghan police, the military, local authorities and other witnesses indicate that between March 2010 and 9 June 2010, there have been "at least 11 assassinations" of officials in Kandahar, most of them being low-level officials (*The New York Times* 15 June 2010). The same source highlights that those numbers do not include other officials that could have died in "indiscriminate attacks, like suicide bombings" (ibid.).

Sources report on attacks on high-level officials (Reuters 6 May 2010; *The New York Times* 15 June 2010). For instance, in spring 2010, the deputy mayor of Kandahar was shot dead (ibid.; Reuters 6 May 2010). The head of the information and culture department of Kandahar was killed in February 2010 (*The New York Times* 15 June 2010). In 2009, Kandahar's mayor and the governor of the province of Kandahar were "narrowly missed" in attempted killings (ibid.). In the three above cases, sources do not specify who perpetrated the killings. According to *The New York Times*, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Afghan government do not publish all data on attacks that take place in Afghanistan (11 Sept. 2010).

Security Services

Information on security services offered to relatives of high-ranking government officials in Afghanistan could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the following information on private security services in Afghanistan may be of interest.

The Senior Program Coordinator at CIC indicated that while there are security systems in place for government officials, they may be "inadequate" (16 Sept. 2010). He further explained that as a consequence, in addition to the security services that are provided, many officials must rely on their own security team, which is "often" composed of their relatives (Senior Program Coordinator 16 Sept. 2010).

An article published in *Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments* defines

the Afghan National Guard as a security force responsible for "protect[ing] vulnerable personnel and installations" (3 Dec. 2008). The article further indicates that while the Afghan National Guard seems to participate in the protection of some facilities in Kabul, close protection of high-profile persons is still mainly ensured by private local militias or foreign private security companies (*Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments* 3 Dec. 2008). Further information on the Afghan National Guard could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

A report published by the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) states that there are "too few" Afghan police officers to ensure protection of the employees and facilities of the international community (Sept. 2009, 1). A US military representative stated that "the Afghan army and the Afghan police are not quite at the stages of capability and capacity to provide all the security that is needed" (AP 16 Aug. 2010). Similarly, an article published by *Jane's Intelligence Review* states that the Afghan security forces do not have the ability to protect "key officials" (16 Sept. 2010). In the context of the "assassination campaign" against Afghan officials in Kandahar, the US Department of State top official in southern Afghanistan declared that there was a need to provide "protection and secure facilities to house government staff" (Reuters 6 May 2010).

The CIC report states that the need for security services has attracted several private security companies, including "international and national [private security providers] operating with or without the required Afghan licensing permits, as well as militias hired as 'armed support groups' (ASG) by international military forces" (Sept. 2009, 1). A report written by an independent analyst and published by the Afghanistan Analysts Network (ANN), a non-profit research organization with the objective of "bring[ing] together the knowledge and experience of a large number of experts" on Afghanistan (Lefèvre 27 May 2010, 23), states that the Afghan government is "giving in to a cyclical temptation of working with informal armed groups to provide security, particularly in remote rural areas where the Taliban are gaining ground" (*ibid.*, 1).

The CIC report indicates that services provided by private security companies include

static guarding of premises and construction projects; close protection; escorting convoys; security assessment and training; intelligence and risk management; electronic security and surveillance; and quick reaction forces (Sept. 2009, 3).

The report also states that the safety of the Afghan government is at risk because of the lack of "effective oversight" of private security companies (CIC Sept. 2009, 1). An article published by *The New York Times* on 10 June 2010 also states that the security companies "appear to operate under little supervision," and that "many, if not most" of them are not registered with the government. Similarly, according to an Associated Press (AP) article published on 16 August 2010, there have been complaints that private security companies are "poorly regulated, reckless and effectively operate outside local law." Afghan president Karzaï declared in an Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) article that "[p]rivate security companies are thieves at day and terrorists at night" (UN 23 Aug. 2010). *The New York Times* article indicates that according to incomplete investigations, there may be some security companies that "engage in fake

fighting to increase the sense of risk ..." (10 June 2010).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Representatives of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (ANN), Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Embassy of Canada in Afghanistan, the Embassy of the United States (US) in Kabul, and a journalist at *The Wall Street Journal* did not respond within the time constraints of this Response. The Afghanistan section of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) could not provide information.

Internet sources, including: Afghanistan Conflict Monitor (ACM), Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Al Jazeera, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), CanWest News Services, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, Freedom House, GlobalSecurity.org, *The Guardian* [London], Human Rights Watch, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), National Public Radio (NPR) [United States], Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - Refworld, United Press International (UPI), United States - US Agency for International Development (USAID), *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*.

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