



Antonio Giustozzi

FROM INSURGENCY TO GOVERNMENT: How the Islamic Emirate polices Afghanistan



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Much has been written about Afghanistan's police force during the Islamic Republic era, but so far almost nothing about the police of the Islamic Emirate. In this report, AAN guest author Antonio Giustozzi examines the changes in the Afghan police force since the re-establishment of the Emirate in August 2021. He finds that the current police manpower is roughly comparable to that seen before the war (pre-1978), with a ratio of 2,140 police officers per million people. The Taliban nurture an ambition to expand numbers when and if funding becomes available, although the Ministry of Interior is already the best-funded ministry. The police cast their understanding of the rule of law in terms of sharia. However, their territorial and population control techniques resemble those of the pre-war era and of the Republic. These include the police reducing their workload by having elders handle disputes whenever possible. The biggest change, Giustozzi finds, is the police's reliance on militias composed of Taliban commanders and their former fighters. These militias have the authority to detain thieves and are known to have sometimes exceeded their mandate and acted arbitrarily. Some key functions have also been transferred from the police to the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), including intelligence, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. Criminal investigations, beyond the preliminary stage, which used to be the preserve of the Attorney-General's Office, have been transferred to the GDI and the courts.

The Emirate's police compare well with those of the early years of the Republic in terms of professionalism, in that at least the police chiefs are literate and have some education. The Emirate believes there is no need for a police academy, preferring training courses, largely carried out by clerics, although relatively few police officers have received any training as yet. It is hard to make any conclusive statement about the effectiveness of the Emirate's police in curbing crime, but it seems clear that their main difficulties are in fighting urban crime, to which they are unaccustomed, and combatting smuggling, not least because of the alleged complicity of some highly placed Taliban.

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INTRODUCTION

The police of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were known for inefficiency and corruption, weaknesses that were key to the Republic's failure to thrive and, arguably, contributed decisively to its ultimate collapse in 2021.¹ In August 2021, the Taliban took over the Ministry of Interior and more than 500 police stations spread across Afghanistan. The ability of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to police the country will be a crucial factor in its survival in the medium and long term, but it is also important to ask what policing means to the Taliban and how Emirate policing compares with the Republic's.

This report seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- How has the organisation and the functioning of the police changed?
- What territorial presence does the police force have?
- What is the IEA's understanding of the rule of law?
- What is the IEA's understanding of police professionalism?
- What are the police's priorities in fighting crime?

The report begins by comparing the organisational structure of the police pre- and post-2021 and looks at claims and estimates of force strength as well as how police are deployed at the district level.

It goes on to examine how the force controls territory and population. It considers police professionalism in terms of literacy, training and expertise in criminal investigation as well as the Emirate's understanding of the rule of law. Finally, it looks at four of the most common areas of crime or other problems the police deal with: common criminality, dispute resolution, counter-terrorism and smuggling.

This report does not cover the Emirate's 'morality police', the enforcers (*muhtasibin*) of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, who are charged with ensuring that various behaviour is avoided or followed, including dress codes,

¹ See Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammad Ishaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan: The Politics of the Lame Leviathan*, London: Hurst, 2013; Andrew Wilder, [Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police](#), Kabul, AREU, 2008; [Police in Conflict – Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan](#), Washington, SIGAR, June 2022.

the sex segregation of workplaces, congregational prayer in mosques for men, and women not travelling on public transport without a mahram. There is overlap between the two police forces, as the Ministry of Interior's forces may deal with 'crimes' that might be thought of as the preserve of the vice and virtue enforcers, such as engaging in illicit relationships and 'running away from home', although the Republic's police force also policed such crimes. Interviews with enforcers conducted for a [separate AAN report](#) on the Emirate's mission to promote virtue and prevent vice found that they were also advised to call on the regular police if needed.

Map 1: Districts covered by the research



Map by Roger Helms for AAN

This report is based on semi-structured interviews with 38 individuals, primarily in eastern Afghanistan and Kabul city, carried out between January 2022 and September 2025. They comprised: 16 police officers, three members of the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), five Ministry of Interior (Mol) officials, 10 drug

smugglers and four poppy farmers. The report builds on the author's extensive research on police and security forces in the Republic and earlier eras.²

This report refers almost exclusively to *policemen*. The number of policewomen is so tiny that they are mentioned only once in this report.

All interviewees' details are anonymised for their protection. While the district names are mentioned, village and department names are omitted to ensure the safety of interviewees.

As can be seen, the geographic scope of this study is limited and it may therefore not be fully representative of Afghanistan as a whole. The author, however, believes it offers a valuable picture of policing in Emirate-era Afghanistan.

² See Giustozzi and Ishaqzadeh FN1; also Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammad Ishaqzadeh, [Afghanistan's para-military policing in context: The risks of expediency](#), Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2011; [Senior Appointments And Corruption Within Kabul City Police: Practices and Perceptions](#), Integrity Watch Afghanistan, December 2015.

ORGANISATION AND MANPOWER

The most significant formal change to the Ministry of Interior's structure happened in the last years of the now-defunct Islamic Republic. In 2017, the ministry was restructured into four main operational pillars (security, counter-narcotics, intelligence and public protection), each led by a deputy minister, and six support pillars (policy and strategy, personnel, support, administrative, legal and inspection). The security pillar was by far the most important and accounted for the bulk of staffing. Under it were the Uniformed Police (the largest single force), Border Police, police Special Forces, Afghan Local Police (ALP), Traffic Police, Fire and Rescue and the Anti-Crime Police, which were tasked with law enforcement and the investigation of serious criminal activity, as well as the more specialised Major Crimes Task Force (see Figure 1). During the Republic, with the exception of the Major Crimes Task Force, the police were not responsible for criminal investigations beyond the preliminary stage: that work was the responsibility of the Attorney General's Office and state prosecutors.³ The police also played a major paramilitary role in fighting the insurgency.

The organisational structure of the Mol has not changed significantly since August 2021, at least formally. There are still seven deputy minister positions, but only five branches of the police remain: the Counter-Narcotics Police, Uniformed Police (AUP), Border Police (ABP), Traffic Police and the Anti-Crime Police (AACP). The gendarmerie (Afghan National Civil Order Police – ANCOP), which had already been transferred to the Ministry of Defence in 2018, was the only branch of the police force to be abolished. The Afghan Local Police (ALP) had already been disbanded in 2020. Of the other most significant subdivisions of the Republic-era Mol, the Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF), which had effectively been eviscerated long before 2021,⁴ also ceased to exist, while Fire and Rescue was retained. The Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) has not been abolished, but is set to be replaced by a

³ "Discovery of crimes is the duty of the police and investigation and prosecution are conducted by the Attorney General's Office in accordance with the provisions of the law." [Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Constitution \(2004\), article 134.](#)

⁴ See Jelena Bjelica, [Afghanistan's Anti-Corruption Institutions: Too many, and with too few results](#), Afghanistan Analysts Network, 20 May 2019.

similarly tasked force of perhaps 20,000 to secure public facilities, embassies and infrastructure.⁵

Figure 1: Ministry of Interior organogram, 2017

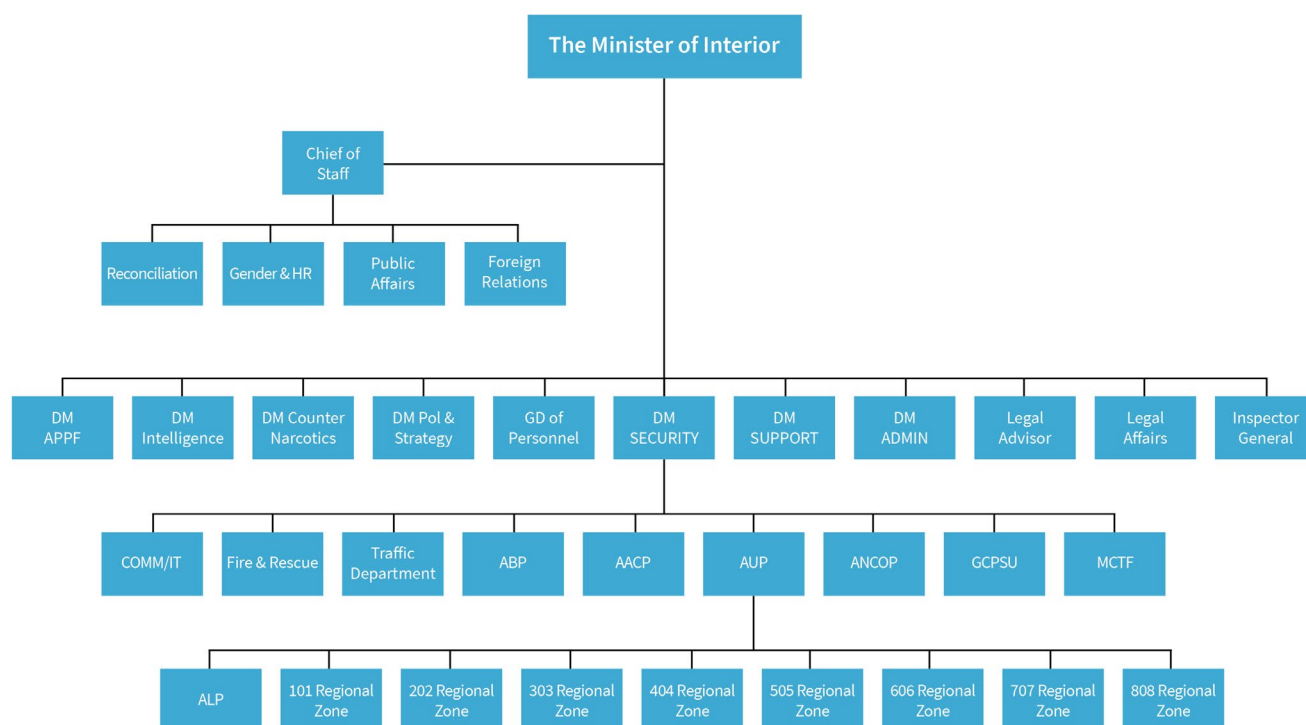


Chart by AAN

Abbreviations: AUP = Afghan Uniformed Police; ABP = Afghan Border Police; AACP = Afghan Anti-Crime Police; ANCOP = Afghan National Civil Order Police; ALP = Afghan Local Police; MCTF = Major Crimes Task Force; APPF = Afghan Public Protection Force; DM = Deputy Minister; GD = General Director

In practice, however, the changes since the takeover have been more extensive, especially at the provincial and district levels. Police stations still have departments for administration, security, logistics and finance, but the GDI now runs the old intelligence, counter-narcotics, criminal investigation and counter-terrorism functions, although the provincial chief of police also has a coordinating role.⁶ The GDI's role was announced in July 2023, when the Attorney-General's Office (AGO) was formally closed by order of the Amir: [ToloNews](#) reported that the office had been “turned into the Directorate of Supervision and Prosecution of Decrees and Orders,” and that “some of the AGO's duties have been given to the courts and intelligence

⁵ Interview with GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022.

⁶ Interviews with: police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025; police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

services.” The counter-narcotics departments in the police districts still exist, but include only two or three officers who report to the GDI. The same applies to the police intelligence departments.⁷ At the centre, the counter-narcotics police have lost their importance as the GDI has largely taken over that function.

According to our interviewees, the GDI is now responsible for “all kinds of investigations,” including criminal matters.⁸ The GDI reports on criminal matters to the Mol deputy minister in charge, for example, in the case of drug-related crimes, to the deputy for counter-narcotics.⁹ The GDI does not get involved in all police operations, engaging only after investigations have begun, though in complex operations, the GDI’s special forces may get involved, if required.¹⁰

To mark the difference from the previous regime, newly designed uniforms started being issued in early 2022.¹¹ Although the actual number of policemen under the Republic was always in question due to large-scale ghost policemen, its personnel charts reached, at least on paper, an all-time high of 121,000 in 2021.¹² It was reported to be expanding its police commando forces to 9,000 in 2017,¹³ while its border force had a strength of 23,000 on paper in 2015 (it was transferred to the army from December 2017).¹⁴ According to an official of the Emirate’s Mol, the original intent in 2021 was to downsize the police force to a *tashkil* (authorised force) of around 50,000.¹⁵ This decision, however, did not last long. A source in the Mol recruitment department (*pezhantun*) noted that an increase to 100,000 was authorised in 2022, subject to funding. In late 2023, another increase to 150,000 was authorised. The Ministry of Defence has also pushed to increase its force. It is

⁷ Interview with police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

⁸ Interviews with: GDI member, Dara-e Nur (Nangrahar) district police station, August 2025; former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

⁹ Interview with GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025.

¹⁰ Interview with GDI member, Dara-e Nur (Nangrahar) district police station, August 2025.

¹¹ Interviews with: Mol official, January 2022; GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022.

¹² ‘Quarterly report to United States Congress’, Washington: SIGAR, 30 April 2021, p66.

¹³ Thomas-Gibbons-Neff, [In bid to beat back the Taliban, Afghanistan starts expanding its commando units](#), Washington Post, 11 August 2017.

¹⁴ [CSTO head’s concerns about Afghan border security baseless, say Afghan border police chief](#), Asia Plus, 16 March 2015; United States. Department of Defense, [Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan](#), December 2020, pp38-40.

¹⁵ Interviews with: Mol official, January 2022 and GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022.

currently reported as standing at 172,000, although, as with claims about the size of the police (more on which below), numbers are likely inflated.¹⁶

Although such increases were formally justified by worsening security, one senior Mol official noted that intra-Taliban power struggles were what really drove them. The minister, Serajuddin Haqqani, lobbied particularly hard to bring the Mol Badri 313 special forces to 50,000 men, or one-third of the total manpower – an exceptionally high share. That target was still far from being reached as of 2025, according to two interviewees.¹⁷

According to data from the recruitment department given to the author in January 2024, approximately 90,000 police and Mol civilian staff were working across the country. This total included: the Badri 313 special force (more than 10,000); the suicide bomber's special battalion (up to 2,000); the border police (5,000); counter-narcotics police (estimate not given); and those working in police training centres, in fire teams and civilian staff (about 10,000). The remaining personnel – roughly 63,000 – comprised the uniformed police force.¹⁸ Additionally, there was a reserve force of 5,000, based in Kabul.¹⁹ Initially, there had been plans to leave the Border Force under the Ministry of Defence, where it had been transferred in December 2017,²⁰ perhaps renaming it the Border Army, but then it was decided to transfer it back to the Mol.²¹

The size of the police force reported publicly is far larger: acting deputy minister Nur Jalal Halali said on 28 August 2022 that the number of police had reached nearly

¹⁶ The Ministry of Defence reported on 28 August 2022 in its accountability session that the army numbered 150,000 personnel and that increases were planned – to 170,000 in 2023 and 180,000 in 2024. In these sessions, the Emirate's senior officials described the achievements of their ministry or other state bodies during the previous year. See Kate Clark and Roxanna Shapour, [What Do the Taliban Spend Afghanistan's Money On? Government expenditure under the Islamic Emirate](#), Afghanistan Analysts Network, March 2023.

The number currently reported for the army, for example, by [Reuters](#) on 25 November 2025, is 172,000 active personnel.

¹⁷ Interviews with: Mol officer, recruitment department, January 2024; Mol official, security department, January 2024.

¹⁸ Interviews with: Mol officer, recruitment department, January 2024; Mol official, security department, January 2024.

¹⁹ Interview with Mol official, security department, January 2024.

²⁰ [Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan](#), Washington, US Department of Defense, 2018, p67.

²¹ Interviews with: GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022; Mol official, January 2022.

200,000,²² although a year later, senior Mol officials reported that it was 161,000, with no explanation given for the difference.²³ The 200,000 claim was mainly propaganda, according to Emirate officials speaking to the author. It was based on the existence of waiting lists of more than 100,000 volunteers who had registered for police service but could not be brought into active service due to a lack of funding. In fact, the Mol was expected to reach the 2023 authorised strength of 150,000 only by 2027. The waiting lists were mainly made up of the retinues of senior ministry officials and police officers.²⁴ It is also not yet clear how the Amir's April 2025 order to reduce the tashkil across the state by 20 per cent has affected the police.²⁵



Newly-qualified police demonstrate their skills at their graduation ceremony at the Police Training Academy in Jalalabad, Nangrahar province.

Photo: AFP, 13 October 2025

²² The figure was given in the Ministry of Interior's 2022 accountability session. See Clark and Shapour, 'What Do the Taliban Spend Afghanistan's Money On?' [see FN16] p13.

²³ This was the figure given at the Ministry of Interior's 2023 accountability session. See Kate Clark, [Survival and Stagnation: The State of the Afghan economy](#), Afghanistan Analysts Network, 7 November 2023.

²⁴ Interviews with: Mol officer, recruitment department, January 2024; Mol official, security department, January 2024.

²⁵ See report of the order here: [Islamic Emirate Cuts 1000s of Governmental Jobs](#), 23 April 2025, ToloNews.

Table 1 seeks to clarify this somewhat confusing picture by consolidating the various figures for authorised strength, claimed strength, and estimates of the force's actual strength and its components at various times between June 2021 and January 2024.

Table 1: Authorised, claimed, and estimated actual strength of police and Ministry of Interior personnel, June 2021 to January 2024

	June 2021	Dec 2021	Aug 2022	Aug 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024
Total police force (claimed strength)	121,000		200,000	116,000		
Total police force (authorised strength)		50,000	100,000		150,000	
Total uniformed police force (estimated actual strength)						63,000
Total Mol workforce – police and civilian staff – (estimated actual strength)						90,000
Police special forces (planned strength)	9,000				50,000	
Police special forces and suicide special battalion (estimated actual strength)						12,000+
Border police/force (authorised strength)	23,000 (under army)					
Border police/force (actual estimated strength)						5,000
Police reserve (actual strength)						5,000

Based on the interviews conducted, most districts have 50 to 100 police officers, with large or ‘troublesome’ districts reaching up to 150 and even 200, as in some districts of Badakhshan.²⁶ An Mol official estimated that Kabul city has approximately 5,000 to 7,000 active police officers, while the other 33 cities and towns have between 400 and 600 each.²⁷ Those last figures appear exaggerated if, as reported by a local police source, there were only about 300 police officers in Jalalabad city.

In some districts covered by this research – like Kama and Behsud in Nangrahar, Charkh and Baraki Barak in Logar, and Chawkai in Kunar – interviewees reported between 40 and 60 police officers, relatively low numbers, according to the interviewees, since these districts were considered quiet.

City police districts in Jalalabad (Nangrahar province), Mehtarlam (Laghman) and Asadabad (Kunar) were also said to have 50 to 60 police officers each, our research indicated. Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), Sarobi (Kabul), Nurgal (Kunar), Qarghayi (Laghman) and Muhammad Agha (Logar) were instead reported to have 80 to 100 policemen each. Higher numbers could be due to threats of insurgency (Mir Bacha Kot, Nurgal), their importance for the transport network (Sarobi), the presence of an important mining site (Muhammad Agha) or high levels of crime (Qarghayi, where some criminal gangs claiming to be ‘mujahedin’, ie Taliban, operate).²⁸ The exception was Chawkai, where staffing levels are low, even though there is some presence of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) insurgents.²⁹ City police districts and most ‘quiet’ districts were deemed by the police sources to be staffed with sufficient numbers of police officers.³⁰ However, the districts with extra manpower were mostly reported by the sources as being insufficiently staffed to deal with the

²⁶ Interviews with: Mol official, security department, January 2024; Mol officer, recruitment department, January 2024; police officer, Qarghayi, Laghman province, September 2025.

²⁷ Interview with Mol official, security department, January 2024.

²⁸ Interviews with: police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) station, November 2024; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024; police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

²⁹ Interview with police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025.

³⁰ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025; police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025; police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024.

challenges they faced.³¹ Typically, in a district, policemen are distributed between the main station and a few posts, each manned by five to seven policemen.³²

Because most of the districts covered were almost entirely Pashtun in terms of ethnic composition, it was not possible to assess whether recruitment was ethnically balanced. Aside from the obvious case of Kabul city, where the police are not local for the obvious reason that there were very few Kabuli Taliban to recruit from, the one exception in the research was Mir Bacha Kot, a mostly Tajik district, where the majority of the policemen were Pashtuns, along with some Tajiks.³³ This contrasts with the previous arrangements: an Emirate policeman noted that “Mir Bacha Kot and other northern districts of Kabul province are mostly Tajik-populated areas and the previous police and army members in these districts were [also] mostly Tajik.”³⁴

³¹ Interviews with: police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025.

³² Interviews with: police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024; police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025.

³³ Interview with police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024.

³⁴ Interview with police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024.

TOOLS OF TERRITORIAL AND POPULATION CONTROL

In general, the IEA police rely on patrols and checkpoints to maintain control of territory and the population. They also collaborate with the GDI and local Taliban groups, which are essentially informal militias made up of Taliban members who remained in their villages rather than secure jobs in the state apparatus. However, by 2025, as the threat of the various insurgencies (ISKP, National Resistance Front (NRF), the Freedom Front and smaller groups) had significantly receded in most parts of the country, the IEA's police relied only sparingly on checkpoints, setting them up when needed, based on intelligence reports and specific crises. According to local police sources, even in the urban districts of Jalalabad, Asadabad, and Mehtarlam, there would be only one to three checkpoints at any given time.³⁵ In rural areas, it is common for the police to set up mobile posts in areas of difficult access (ie, away from the main road).³⁶ Nurgal is a perfect example of this: it is a district of mountains, hills and valleys, impossible to monitor from a single location. Here, according to a police officer, the police rely on mobile posts that shift continuously with the purpose of making the movement of insurgents harder.³⁷ In strategic districts with a rugged geography like Sarobi, several checkpoints are always needed, according to another officer.³⁸

Patrolling is a more routine activity, especially in towns and cities where patrols are constant, a policeman in Pul-e Alam (Logar) noted. Police posts are tasked with visiting nearby villages and are also used to facilitate patrols in remote villages. The police describe their role as community policing and as talking to villagers, but the actual frequency of patrols depends on the distribution of perceived criminal

³⁵ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025; police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025; police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025; police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025; former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

³⁶ Interviews with: police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) station, November 2024; police officer, Charkh (Logar), October 2024.

³⁷ Interview with police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025.

³⁸ Interview with police officer, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024.

threats. In villages unaffected by insurgency or crime, local police officers said patrols were rare, whereas in affected villages, one or two weekly police visits were typical and, in some areas, they were even daily.³⁹



A woman walks past a Border Police checkpoint outside Kabul airport.

Photo: Karim Sahib/AFP, 12 September 2021

In some districts affected by insurgent activities, such as Mir Bacha Kot (where the NRF operates) or Nurgal (where ISKP operates), the police say they coordinate with the nearest army garrison and with Taliban militias to regularly patrol every single village.⁴⁰

The police also say they collect information daily from village *qariadars* (headmen), village mullahs and police informers.⁴¹ A police officer from Jalalabad, for example,

³⁹ Interviews with: police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Charkh (Logar), October 2024; police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) police station, November 2024.

⁴⁰ Interviews with: police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025.

⁴¹ Interviews with: police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Charkh (Logar), October 2024; police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025.

said, “The police district headquarters appointed several informers among the villagers who observe villagers’ activities and report if there are any negative activities or [criminal] cases.”⁴²

When confrontations with criminal or armed opposition groups are considered beyond the police’s capacity to manage, the GDI or either the army or police special forces may be called in. Sources agree that it is also common, in areas where there is a strong Taliban presence, to approach Taliban commanders and their informal militias to provide support to the police.

Many Taliban commanders and their followers did not join the army, police or state administration, choosing instead to remain in their villages. They are armed and remain connected to the Taliban district and provincial leaders. The police chief, head of security, or intelligence head manages relations with these militias and keeps contact details for all Taliban commanders living in their jurisdiction, enabling easy communication. Consequently, Taliban militias frequently intervene in disputes or detain suspected thieves. This reliance on Taliban militias is partly due to a shortage of police officers, according to some interviewees. The interviewees also said that Taliban commanders and their militias are obliged and authorised to intervene if requested, and this is regarded as their duty.⁴³

⁴² Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025.

⁴³ Interviews with: police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025.

POLICE PROFESSIONALISM

In general, the IEA is dismissive of the past training provided by the Western police advisers who worked at the police academy until 2021.⁴⁴ An Mol official from Jalalabad, for example, said Emirate expertise in intelligence and criminal investigation meant they did not need a police academy:

*We have very good and professional crime investigators and crime analysts inside the Taliban and at the Ministry of Interior. You might have seen and heard that from the time that the Taliban took control of Kabul, every day, we arrest thieves, kidnappers and also destroy the cells of our enemies in Kabul city. All these activities are because we have a very good intelligence service, very good crime investigators and also evidence analysis.*⁴⁵

In fact, some interviewees acknowledged that the district-level police stations only have the capacity to handle ‘small cases’. For anything more serious, they call in the provincial headquarters.⁴⁶ Even under the Republic, despite large investments by European countries, investigative policing never really developed.⁴⁷ As one interviewee, a police officer, described it, specialist roles, including counter-terrorism and criminal investigations, have now been taken over by the GDI, which detaches staff to district police and, especially, provincial police headquarters. In Dara-e Nur district (Nangrahar), for example, the GDI has nine officers.⁴⁸ Due to the importance of the drug trade, counter-narcotics has been retained as a separate branch within the police, but “it’s a department in name only,” a police officer from Kama (Nangrahar) said, as “counter-narcotics is mostly covered by the GDI as well.”⁴⁹ Other sources corroborated that this is now the practice nationwide.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Interview with GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mol official, January 2022.

⁴⁶ Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025.

⁴⁷ Giustozzi and Ishaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan*, [see FN1], pp69-70.

⁴⁸ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; GDI member, Dara-e Nur (Nangrahar) district police station, August 2025.

⁴⁹ Interview with police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025.

⁵⁰ Interviews with: former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025; police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar)

Most of the civilian administrative, financial and logistical staff at the Ministry of Interior remain in their posts, the interviews revealed. They account for about 25-30 per cent of the ministry's staffing. However, the police officers who served under the Republic have either fled or been dismissed.⁵¹ A police officer in Sarobi noted that it was also the case at the Kabul provincial police headquarters, by far the largest in the country, that some civilian employees who served under the previous government remain in administrative, telecommunications, finance, IT, operational and other non-military positions.⁵² The same applies to other provincial headquarters, such as Pul-e Alam in Logar.⁵³ At some police headquarters, such as Jalalabad, very few former civilian staff returned to work after the regime change.⁵⁴ Almost all local police sources said that in district police stations, the only remnants of the previous regime were cooks and cleaners.⁵⁵ The sources were also unanimous in saying that the actual police are all 'Taliban', although some joined the movement after the end of the insurgency. There was a clear decision to keep all the 'corrupt police' of the previous regime out.⁵⁶ Reportedly, this is due to a direct order of the Amir and applies to the police, not to civilian staff.⁵⁷ According to a police officer from Kama, this order was certainly very popular among the current police:⁵⁸

It's very difficult to work with those police officers or police soldiers [the lowest-ranking police are referred to as 'soldiers'] who were once our enemy. Building trust with them is very difficult – that's why we don't have a single person from

district police, September 2025; police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025.

⁵¹ Interviews with: Mol official, January 2022; Mol official, security department, January 2024; GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022; police officer, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024.

⁵² Interview with police officer, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024.

⁵³ Interview with police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024.

⁵⁴ Interview with GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022.

⁵⁵ Interviews with: police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

⁵⁶ Interviews with: police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Charkh (Logar), October 2024; police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) station, November 2024; police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025.

⁵⁷ Interview with GDI officer, Nangrahar Police HQ, January 2022.

⁵⁸ Interview with police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024.

*the previous police. All the members of our police force in Kama district are mujahedin or new recruits.*⁵⁹



Members of the Badri 313 special force stand guard as new recruits attend their graduation ceremony at the Jawadiya Madrasa in Kandahar.

Photo: Javed Tanveer/AFP, 15 February 2022

There is likely also to be an issue of securing valuable jobs for the Taliban and their households, as a police officer acknowledged:

*The number of young Taliban members [ie, recent joiners] is higher than that of the number of the old Taliban [ie, veterans of the insurgency] and one thing should be mentioned here, that unfortunately even in the Taliban regime, connections and relations play an important role in appointing people to government jobs.*⁶⁰

The Emirate's MoI has set out to improve its police officers' capabilities through training courses, starting in spring 2022. According to a police officer, as of early 2022, it was considered that the IEA should keep a focus on a professional police force, rather than other civilian-run support services or an army:

⁵⁹ Interview with police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025.

⁶⁰ Interview with police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024.

*Due to there being no fighting in Afghanistan, the Islamic Emirate needs to focus more on making a professional police force rather than an army, because now we are dealing more with people and the community, and we need to have a uniformed professional police force.*⁶¹

However, the army has kept pace with police expansion, as previously seen.

One police officer indicated that, because many policemen are illiterate, they are not allowed to undergo training, although literacy courses have been set up.⁶² According to information supplied by police interviewees,⁶³ as of mid-2025, policemen were being trained in a variety of topics through short basic courses:

- Physical skills: patrolling techniques, counter-insurgency, weapons use, physical training, military drills, police discipline, how to conduct house searches, how to search vehicles, and first aid;
- General skills: literacy, computing;
- Policing skills: criminal investigation, how to deal with criminals, rules for dealing with civilians, rules for carrying out arrests, how to behave towards civilians, handling criminal cases, keeping records, crime detection, how to take fingerprints, document checking, collecting evidence, filing an incident report, taking statements from suspects and from eyewitnesses, how to remain calm during searches and avoid insulting or harming local residents;
- Policing principles: basic principles of policing, rights of criminals under Islamic law, rule of law and the role of police in society.

It is worth noting that the training openly states that policewomen should arrest women and carry out house searches. However, in the provinces covered by this research, there were no policewomen. For in-house searches, local elders should be present, according to the training.⁶⁴ Except for weapons training, all these courses are taught by religious scholars.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Interview with Mol official, January 2022.

⁶² Interview with police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025.

⁶³ Interviews with: police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025 district police.

⁶⁴ Interviews with: police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

⁶⁵ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025; Mol official, security department, January 2024; Mol officer, recruitment department, January 2024.

Mol sources indicated that, as of January 2024, only between 10 and 25 per cent of police officers (depending on the source) had attended these short courses, and they were mostly concentrated in cities, with very few policemen in the districts having received any training.⁶⁶ According to information provided by local police officers, by the summer of 2025, the reported percentages of trained police varied significantly by location. In Kama, 60-70 per cent of officers were trained; in Nurgal, 30 per cent and in Asadabad, Qarghayi and Mehtarlam, only 10-20 per cent were trained.⁶⁷

As of September 2025, the research suggests that most policemen remain untrained and, as one source conceded, tend to behave very harshly and aggressively even towards petty thieves. There have been cases in different provinces of Afghanistan of IEA police holding field courts and judging suspects on the spot, according to one interviewee.⁶⁸ A police officer also described how, in some police stations, officers behave very aggressively toward criminals. Torture is reportedly being used, he said, because many are not trained and the rules set by the trainers are not being followed.⁶⁹ It should be noted that, as was the case under previous governments, torture is both illegal and remains a standard feature of Afghan policing, reported ever since the police force was established.⁷⁰ (There is one proviso under the Emirate: according to the Amir's decrees, torture is currently legal if ordered by a court.)⁷¹

The picture painted by the police interviewees indicates that the quality of training is compromised by poor vetting. At the training centres, trainees must pass a final exam before graduating. However, hardly anyone fails, as trainers are under pressure not to have trainees repeat the course to save money. There are also reports of nepotism affecting the fairness of the exams and recruitment into the police. Another limitation, mentioned by a police officer, is that the trainers use textbooks approved

⁶⁶ Interviews with: Mol official, security department, January 2024; Mol officer, recruitment department, January 2024.

⁶⁷ Interviews with: police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025; police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025; former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

⁶⁸ Interview with police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025.

⁶⁹ Interview with police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025.

⁷⁰ See Giustozzi and Ishaqzadeh, *Policing Afghanistan*, pp154-5 [see FN1].

⁷¹ See [Decrees, orders and Instructions of Taleban supreme leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada](#), Afghanistan Analysts Network, 15 July 2023. That torture is banned is mentioned in the following decrees, with some mentioning that it can be authorised by a court: Number: (8/ Vol 5), 7/3/1441 lunar hijri [4 November 2019]; Number: (65/ Vol 6), 16/3/1442 [2 November 2020]; Number: (29), 12/8/1443 [15 March 2022], Number: (12), 27/4/1444 [21 November 2022].

by the ministries of education and interior, while the trainees have to rely on their own note-taking.

Hence, some police officers (mostly as yet untrained) doubt the value of such training. They noted that they (in the words of one of them) did “not see a big change between those who received police training and those who did not.”⁷²

Another officer assessed his three-month training as “very useful,” but then added:

Most of our mujahedin already know most topics of the training because they’ve been among the people for 20 years and did the policing job in the districts and villages of Afghanistan during the jihad period.”⁷³

Others, however, while acknowledging that the training imparted is very basic and also that the IEA’s police have no equipment, say they have faith that, in the words of one interviewee, “sharia solves all the problems very easily.”⁷⁴ A police officer from Jalalabad, for example, said: “I know we’re not well-trained by international standards, but our basic training is much better than the previous police officers received from the international forces.”⁷⁵

The GDI, as noted above, has taken over much of the more demanding policing work. A GDI officer deemed his organisation to be much more selective in recruitment than the police, but when asked about the capacity of the GDI in policing, said:

There are professionals who graduated from a sharia university; we have members who graduated from the law faculty and most of our members have been trained by high-profile mawlawis and ulema to investigate in accordance with sharia. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan believes in sharia and doing all activities according to sharia. Our investigation system is not based on current technology or a global standard, but our system is much better than any standard that is not based on sharia law.”⁷⁶

⁷² Interview with police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025; former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

⁷³ Interview with GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025.

⁷⁴ Interview with police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025.

⁷⁵ Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025.

⁷⁶ Interview with GDI member, Dara-e Nur (Nangrahar) district police station, August 2025.



Newly-qualified police march during their graduation ceremony at the Islamic Police Training Centre in Guzara district, Herat province.

Photo: Mohsen Karimi/AFP, 28 December 2023

The author had the opportunity to visit a number of police stations around Afghanistan in the early days of the Republic, in 2003-06, and typically found illiterate police chiefs, no uniforms, no filing system and very few trained police officers. Compared to that, the Emirate has not acquitted itself too badly. Although in both 2003-06 and 2021-25, the police were staffed mainly by men who were veterans of the civil war, the Taliban chiefs of police and senior officers were at least all literate and, as of 2025, some record-keeping was in place.

THE RULE OF LAW

As sources recount it, the Emirate promotes its own approach to the rule of law and expects the police to implement it: “As long as the court announces no punishment, the security personnel of the Taliban are not allowed to punish criminals.”⁷⁷ Indeed, the general thrust of the training discussed above is that policemen should enforce the law, but not adjudicate punishment. Above all, they should respect the rule of law as understood by sharia. Arrests have to be based on evidence.⁷⁸ Trainees say that the training teaches police officers to be “very polite and very calm and respect elders and civilians,” as per sharia. Until a person’s guilt is proven, he is just a suspect and the police should treat him well. The police should not torture or insult a detainee. A detainee has the right to defend himself in court.⁷⁹ As far as reciprocity in the use of force is concerned, the police are authorised to shoot insurgents if they show resistance, whereas instructions are that even kidnappers and smugglers should be warned several times before being shot at. Even greater caution should be exercised with other, lesser criminals.⁸⁰ The investigator, another trainee had been taught, “has no right to bring pressure on the accused and the accused should have the right to respond and defend.”⁸¹ A police officer from Kabul explained how all that looks in practice:

When we arrest these Daesh khawarij [historical term to denote religious outcasts, rebels] or the rebel groups, then in prison we have to follow all the rules according to sharia, like not insulting them, not humiliating them and behaving with them very calmly and peacefully.⁸²

⁷⁷ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

⁷⁸ Interviews with: police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

⁷⁹ Interviews with: police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

⁸⁰ Interview with police officer, Logar HQ, September 2025.

⁸¹ Interview with police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

⁸² Interview with police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

According to the interviewees, the police have no authority to punish even small crimes.⁸³ The police and GDI have to investigate and then refer cases to the courts.⁸⁴ In practice, as some interviewees acknowledge, there are problems, a police officer said: “Unfortunately, there are lots of cases of some irresponsible Taliban members punishing the criminal or beating him up without any court decision, which is illegal.”⁸⁵

Police sources also acknowledged that sometimes the involvement of Taliban militias, discussed above, gets out of control. In some villages, there have been cases of local Taliban militias acting arbitrarily against suspected criminals, detaining them in private jails and releasing them in exchange for bribes. Chawkai district police arrested a few Taliban members in these villages.⁸⁶ Clearly, some village Taliban commanders reacted ‘over-enthusiastically’ to the encouragement they received to support and supplement the police. A police officer from Nurgal district said that at the roots of these episodes is also the belief that the Taliban have been policing the country for the last two decades and, presumably, feel they should be allowed to carry on:

*We were in the districts and villages of Afghanistan in the past 20 years, policing the area, dealing with criminals, and the courts of the Taliban were much better than those of the previous government. That was the reason why most of the villagers in Afghanistan solved their problems through the Taliban courts and asked the Taliban to deal with criminals.*⁸⁷

⁸³ Interview with police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025.

⁸⁴ Interviews with: GDI member, Dara-e Nur (Nangrahar) district police station, August 2025; police officer, Kabul, recently trained, September 2025.

⁸⁵ Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025.

⁸⁶ Interview with police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025.

⁸⁷ Interview with police officer, Nurgal (Kunar), September 2025.

FIGHTING CRIME

Common criminality

In the words of the police officers interviewed for this report, the crimes the IEA's police have to face are mostly robberies, kidnappings, some rapes, illicit relationships, family violence and disputes, a few murders and widespread drug smuggling. In addition, in the cities they also have to deal with theft, including of motorcycles and mobile phones, burglaries, gambling and land disputes. Some police officers admitted there is a problem with some IEA officials abusing their power.⁸⁸ A police officer from Jalalabad elaborated:

*Some local Taliban are supporting some criminals, which makes it difficult for us to fight those criminals. Some local Taliban members have links with some local drug dealers and some Taliban members have high-profile support from senior Taliban leaders and engage in illegal sexual relationships.*⁸⁹

An officer in Kama echoed him:

*The biggest difficulties are in fighting drug dealers and kidnappers. Unfortunately, some members of the Taliban, I mean provincial high-profile members of the Taliban, are backing some of these drug dealers, which really makes our duty difficult.*⁹⁰

It is hard to identify significant crime trends across the districts covered. At the district level, even a few detentions can have a disproportionate impact. In Mir Bacha Kot, for example, a police officer described a significant decline in crime

⁸⁸ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025; police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025; police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025; police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) station, November 2024; police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024; police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024; police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025; former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

⁸⁹ Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025.

⁹⁰ Interview with police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025.

as due to the detention of a single kidnapper, a few drug dealers and some petty thieves.⁹¹ Thus, the sources reported that crime had increased in some districts and decreased in others. The one trend in criminal activity that everyone agreed on was an increase in smuggling in 2025.⁹² The police officers interviewed were also adamant that, compared to the chaos of 2021, crime levels were much lower in 2025. In Charkh (Logar), a local police officer claimed that crime was down by 80 per cent from 2021.⁹³ In Pul-e Alam, crime had reportedly decreased by 50 per cent between 2021 and 2025.⁹⁴ Violent crime and kidnappings are still comparatively frequent. In crime-ridden Qarghayi, in August and September 2025 alone, there were four murders (corresponding to a yearly murder rate of about 20 per 100,000 inhabitants) and two kidnappings.⁹⁵

For the IEA, the biggest challenge has been policing urban centres and highly adaptive criminal gangs,⁹⁶ as a police officer in Jalalabad explained:

*We're covering the centre of the city, which has a large population and many businesses and other activities, and our area is very busy, so there are different kinds of crimes. The most difficult ones to fight against are organised kidnapping, pickpocketing, mobile phone theft and there is an organised group of thieves who are wearing women's clothes and stealing money, mobiles and other things from people in busy places.*⁹⁷

The priority seems to be to fight robbers and kidnappers, at least in the towns.⁹⁸ A police officer in Qarghayi noted that another challenge is the kidnapping and smuggling gangs, which are armed and often determined to fight.⁹⁹

⁹¹ Interviews with: police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) station, November 2024; police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024.

⁹² Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad PD8, August 2025; police officer, Kama (Nangrahar) district police, 8 August 2025; police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025; police officer 2, Sarobi (Kabul), November 2024; with police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

⁹³ Interview with police officer, Charkh (Logar), October 2024.

⁹⁴ Interview with police officer, Pul-e Alam city (Logar), October 2024.

⁹⁵ Interview with police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

⁹⁶ Interview with former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

⁹⁷ Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025.

⁹⁸ Interview with former policeman, Mehtarlam (Laghman), September 2025.

⁹⁹ Interview with police officer, Qarghayi (Laghman), September 2025.

Some police officers faced problems of conscience in fighting poverty-driven crime:

I think the main difficulty is fighting robbery, because most people are in a very bad economic situation, that's why some of them have turned to robbery. They will continue this until their sons and family members are fed somehow. When we arrest thieves, the stories they tell make you understand very well that they're forced to rob. ... As long as there's unemployment in this country, the robberies will continue and it will be difficult to stop them.¹⁰⁰

Dispute resolution

A police officer noted that much of the law and order workload in Afghanistan stems from local disputes, fuelled by, among other factors, poor land demarcation, water shortages, inheritance practices and arranged marriages. The police's preference, at least among the Pashtun communities in the districts researched, is for tribal jirgas to deal with such disputes.¹⁰¹ This is in line with what Afghanistan's police have always done and significantly reduces their workload. A police officer from Behsud (Nangrahar) said:

The local jirga has made the police's job easier, and the district police always request the local jirga to resolve basic family disputes, although family crimes or killings are referred to the police and the courts.¹⁰²

This is most common in villages, though it also happens in cities, as confirmed by other police officers, who added details. The police do not merely tolerate the practice and monitor the jirgas' work, but actively encourage it and generally accept whatever the elders propose. It is only when the elders fail to find a solution that matters are referred to the Emirate's courts.¹⁰³ Many disputes are referred to the jirgas without the police even knowing.¹⁰⁴ This is especially true for small disputes.¹⁰⁵ One police officer in Jalalabad estimated that 50 per cent of disputes are resolved by elders and the rest are taken to court by the police.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Interview with police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025.

¹⁰¹ Interview with police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025.

¹⁰² Interview with police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025.

¹⁰³ Interview with police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with: police officer 2, Jalalabad HQ, 22 July 2025; police officer, Behsud (Nangrahar), July 2025.



A man accused of stealing sits on the ground inside a police station in Kabul.

Photo: Bulent Kilic/AFP, 30 September 2021

The police, however, insist they have a monopoly over criminal cases and never permit communities to handle them independently. Honour killings are regarded as crimes and are not within the jurisdiction of the jirgas to address, although old blood feuds, dating back to before the regime change, can still be resolved by the jirgas.¹⁰⁷

Counter-terrorism

In places like Kunar, sources said, the police still have to deal with ISKP and also handle the numerous groups of Pakistani Taliban (TTP) that hang around, and they therefore pay relatively little attention to common crimes. Monitoring the Pakistani Taliban's behaviour, making sure that they comply with IEA rules and laws, and at the same time, protecting them from death squads allegedly paid by Pakistani intelligence is a significant drain on manpower. In practice, the TTP do not really comply with all the rules (certainly not with the one banning them from fighting from

¹⁰⁷ For the situation in the south-east, see Sharif Akram, [Breaking the Cycle of Centuries-old Violence: A decline in blood feuds in Khost province?](#), Afghanistan Analyst Network, 3 August 2025.

Afghan territory). Police officers in Kunar stressed that the level of ISKP activity was very low at the time of the interviews, with occasional arrests and rare shootouts.¹⁰⁸ In other areas, typically north and northeast of Kabul, such as Mir Bacha Kot, the police have to deal with residual activity by groups such as the National Resistance Front, which, however, are not seen by the police officers interviewed as posing a significant threat.¹⁰⁹ Overall, counter-terrorism was only a marginal distraction for the IEA in the summer of 2025.

Smuggling

The Emirate is very committed to preventing weapons smuggling and many smugglers are reportedly detained, but it is also true that, according to a smuggler, “there are lots of Taliban senior and local commanders who have links with weapons smugglers” and “sell American weapons.” Another smuggler said that the demand for American weapons is very high, in particular, in Pakistan, especially among the Pakistani Taliban. Former servicemen of the previous government often sell their weapons, but as the smuggler observed, “we have contacts and our trusted people inside the Taliban that help us in smuggling weapons.”¹¹⁰

Despite the increase in weapons smuggling, most illicit trafficking continues to involve drugs. Before the 2022 poppy ban, accounts by drug smugglers suggested that Taliban police appeared to operate on the basis of existing agreements between the smugglers and the IEA, which targeted those who had not signed deals and ensured that those who had paid the required taxes.¹¹¹

The April 2022 ban was highly effective. In 2022, the harvest was allowed to go ahead and was little affected, but by 2023, the ban had reduced poppy acreage by about 90 per cent.¹¹² The smugglers interviewed for this report agreed with foreign

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with: police officer, Chawkai (Kunar), September 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025; GDI officer, Asadabad (Kunar), September 2025.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews with: police officer 2, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul), November 2024; police officer, Mir Bacha Kot (Kabul) station, November 2024.

¹¹⁰ Interview with weapon smuggler, Nangrahar, January 2022.

¹¹¹ Interviews with: brother of drug smuggler, Khwahan (Badakhshan), April 2022; drug smuggler in northern and northeastern Afghanistan, April 2022; drug smugglers, Takhar Province, 13 April 2022; drug smuggler in eastern Afghanistan, March 2022.

¹¹² See [Understanding the impact of the Taliban drug ban Situational analysis of Afghanistan to inform EU policymakers](#), Lisbon, EUDA, May 2025.

analysts that, at the time of the ban, large quantities of drugs were stockpiled, mainly in the hands of major smuggling gangs. It is very likely that influential smugglers and some senior Taliban members managed to purchase the last harvest of 2022, knowing the enforcement of the ban was imminent.¹¹³

Farming and police sources agree that during 2024-25, the IEA's counter-narcotics police have been taking action against those growing poppy. Some farmers have been arrested and asked to guarantee that they would not grow opium again before being released. In other cases, the Emirate officials just eradicated the standing crop.¹¹⁴ The sources agree that, from time to time, this caused resistance. In Sorkh Rod and some other parts of Nangrahar, rioting farmers failed to deter the IEA's eradication teams.¹¹⁵ Even the elders could not prevent the eradication, as officials ignored the elders' efforts to lobby them.¹¹⁶ The same happened in Badakhshan, where popular protests and a delegation of elders did not manage to prevent eradication in 2025.¹¹⁷ In Baghran (Helmand), protesting farmers had their houses burned down.¹¹⁸ An IEA counter-narcotics officer noted that resistance is a regular occurrence:

*In every district or village where opium is cultivated, our teams first face complaints and resistance from the elders: There are two reasons behind this: one is that those elders know the problem of the farmers and they are forced to defend the farmers, and the second reason is that some elders are involved in the cultivation of opium themselves.*¹¹⁹

The elders raise countless problems, such as the lack of a good market for their agricultural produce, the lack of alternative seeds, and the exceptions made for farmers with connections high up in the IEA.¹²⁰

¹¹³ Interviews with: drug smuggler in southern Afghanistan, May 2025; drug smuggler, Takhar Province, April 2022; drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2025; senior Taliban army commander, Helmand, May 2024.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with: poppy farmer, Hesarak (Nangrahar), June 2024; counter-narcotic police officer, Nangrahar Province, July 2025; counter-narcotics department official, MoI Kabul, July 2025.

¹¹⁵ Interview with poppy farmer 2, Hesarak (Nangrahar), June 2024.

¹¹⁶ Interview with poppy farmer 3, Hesarak (Nangrahar), June 2024.

¹¹⁷ Interview with counter-narcotics police, Nangrahar province, July 2025.

¹¹⁸ Interview with drug smuggler, southern Afghanistan, May 2025.

¹¹⁹ Interview with counter-narcotics department official 2, MoI Kabul July 2025.

¹²⁰ Interview with counter-narcotics department official, MoI Kabul, July 2025; senior Taliban army commander, Helmand, May 2024.

Due to the extremely poor economic conditions, a counter-narcotics officer at the Mol believed that the police could not bring greater pressure to bear on the farmers.¹²¹



A soldier stands guard as other Emirate security personnel destroy a poppy field in Dand district, Kandahar province.

Photo: Mohammad Noori/ Anadolu Agency via AFP, 18 March 2023

Counter-narcotics officials in the Mol shared some data about poppy cultivation and smuggling. As of mid-2025, 70 per cent of the old poppy farmers were still abstaining from planting poppies. After dropping from 200,000 hectares to less than 5,000 hectares in the first year of the ban, the poppy acreage rose to 20,000 in 2025, according to IEA counter-narcotics estimates.¹²² One of the smugglers provided his own estimates: after dropping 90 per cent in 2022-23, in 2023-24, opium production increased and then increased again in 2024-25.¹²³ Local police sources provided

¹²¹ Interview with counter-narcotics department official, Mol Kabul, July 2025.

¹²² Interviews with: counter-narcotics department official, Mol Kabul, July 2025; counter-narcotics department official 2, Mol Kabul July 2025. For independent figures see [Alcis](#) and [UNODC](#).

¹²³ Interview with drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2025.

additional data. In Nangrahar, the area of cultivatable land under poppy shrank initially from 70 per cent to 5-10 per cent, but rose back to 10-15 per cent in 2025.¹²⁴ Smugglers and Taliban alike noted that in 2025, the enforcement of the ban was somewhat more lax, helping poppy cultivation to increase slightly.¹²⁵ In addition, ephedra, which can be used to make methamphetamine, became popular with farmers because eradication teams have been ignoring its cultivation.¹²⁶ As more farmers were seen to escape eradication, others felt encouraged to try ephedra.¹²⁷

The counter-narcotics police also report being active against smugglers. In Nangrahar, according to a member of the local counter-narcotics department, around 100 large and small smugglers were arrested in 2024-25. Counter-narcotics operations were intensifying during 2025-26. In just two months between late spring and early summer 2025, 80 small smugglers were detained with approximately 500 kg of various drugs.¹²⁸

Official statistics released in June 2025 show that 28,000 smugglers had been detained nationwide since August 2021, and the police had carried out 98,000 counter-narcotics operations.¹²⁹ One official in the counter-narcotics department of the MoI, however, indicated that these numbers are misleading, in that the number of detentions includes poppy farmers detained for a few days. The actual number of drug smugglers detained, he said, was less than 5,000 and these were mostly small smugglers. Most of the arrests of drug smugglers happened in the north, northeast and eastern provinces of Afghanistan, with only a few in the southern provinces.¹³⁰ According to one smuggler interviewed, detained smugglers are typically sentenced to a few years in jail.¹³¹

Counter-narcotics sources converged in assessing that the number of active smugglers has increased. As a result of the resumption of poppy cultivation in some

¹²⁴ Interview with counter-narcotics police, Nangrahar province, July 2025.

¹²⁵ Interviews with: drug smuggler 2 in southern Afghanistan, May 2025; Taliban commander based in Helmand province, April 2025; drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2025.

¹²⁶ Interview with counter-narcotics department official 2, MoI Kabul July 2025.

¹²⁷ Interviews with: poppy farmer, Chaparhar (Nangrahar), June 2024; poppy farmer, Behsud (Nangrahar), June 2024.

¹²⁸ Interview with counter-narcotics police, Nangrahar province, July 2025.

¹²⁹ [Qani: Nearly 100,000 Counter-Narcotics Operations Conducted](#), ToloNews, 26 June 2025.

¹³⁰ Interview with counter-narcotics department official, MoI Kabul, July 2025.

¹³¹ Interview with drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2025.

areas, a number of small smugglers, who had given up on drug smuggling after the ban, resumed their activities, especially in the northeastern provinces and in the southern provinces.¹³²

A smuggler in Takhar confirmed that high demand had driven small smugglers back into the market, after many left following the ban.¹³³ According to another in Helmand, it was only “low-level smugglers with a few kilos of heroin, cannabis or opium” who got arrested.¹³⁴ A drug smuggler from Kunar stated that he personally knows two drug smugglers and one weapons smuggler who were detained by the IEA in Nangrahar Province. The two men smuggling drugs were carrying 15kg and 20kg of drugs, respectively, while the man smuggling weapons was carrying 15 M16 rifles. He then heard that the two drug smugglers might be about to be released because they were linked to major smugglers, who had negotiated their release with the IEA authorities.¹³⁵

Farmers often pay bribes to the IEA eradicators in order to save their poppy fields, our interviewees revealed.¹³⁶ More importantly, not only smugglers and poppy farmers, but also several IEA counter-narcotics officers, alleged that senior IEA figures protect smugglers and farmers, enabling them to operate with impunity. In fact, after the ban, there was a race among smugglers to reach deals with the senior Taliban. Multiple interviewees asserted that all the major smugglers had been able to make deals.¹³⁷ An IEA counter-narcotics officer noted:

Thousands of drug smugglers were caught in different provinces and the number of arrested smugglers is very high. I don't have the exact figure, but there isn't a single major drug smuggler among these thousands of smugglers who's been jailed by the mujahedin. I can confirm and testify that our department did arrest some significant drug smugglers, but they were soon

¹³² Interviews with: counter-narcotics department official, MoI Kabul, July 2025; counter-narcotics police, Nangrahar province, July 2025; police officer, Nurgal (Kunar) district police, September 2025.

¹³³ Interview with drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2025.

¹³⁴ Interviews with: drug smuggler 2 in the southern Provinces, May 2025; Taliban commander based in Helmand province, April 2025.

¹³⁵ Interview with drug smuggler, eastern Afghanistan, March 2022.

¹³⁶ Interview with drug smuggler in southern Afghanistan, May 2025.

¹³⁷ Interviews with: Taliban commander based in Helmand province, April 2025; drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2022; drug smuggler, Takhar, April 2025; drug smuggler 2 in southern Afghanistan, May 2025; drug smuggler 1 in southern Provinces of Afghanistan, May 2025; counter-narcotics department official, MoI Kabul, July 2025; counter-narcotics department official 2, MoI, Kabul, July 2025.

*released because high-profile leaders were behind them and facilitated their release. Just three important leaders from [redacted] mediated and managed to free some key smugglers along with their seized drugs.*¹³⁸



Members of the Badri 313 special force stand amid debris of the former Central CIA base in the Deh Sabz district northeast of Kabul.

Photo: Aamir Qureshi/AFP, 6 September 2021

¹³⁸ Interview with member of counter-narcotic drug department at ministry of Interior, July 2025.

CONCLUSION

Despite changes in government and personnel, the activities of the police in 2025 remain largely the same as under previous regimes. In particular, their techniques for controlling the population and territory have changed little since the pre-1978 era. Compared to the Republic's police, the IEA police are more proactive and much more determined to assert control. This is not only due to their facing a fraction of the active armed opposition that the Republic's police faced. Already in the earliest years of the Republic, before the Taliban's insurgency blossomed, the police were not very effective, at least in terms of policing.¹³⁹ As in previous eras, the Emirate's police are also happy to leave a role to the community leadership, but they want it to be well-defined and limited to dispute resolution only. Another similarity is the low level of police professionalism. The IEA has come up with its fix, training courses delivered by religious scholars, but clearly, this has major limitations.

Despite the IEA prioritising security ministries when it comes to spending, the Emirate police remain constrained by a lack of resources, which translates into manpower shortages. The Ministries of Interior and Defence and the GDI together account for half of all government spending, with the Mol taking more money than any other ministry.¹⁴⁰ The overall amount available is much smaller than under the Republic because the United States and other countries are no longer providing massive support to Afghanistan's security forces. As the country is now largely at peace, it could be argued that there was no need to expand the security forces after the takeover. The most significant driver of that expansion, however, appears to have been the competition among Taliban leaders, which has led to both personnel inflation and excessive concentration of manpower in the Mol's special forces.

¹³⁹ It could be argued that the Republic's police force was not established with the main aim of maintaining law and order. Already in 2006, Mark Shaw wrote that the Mol was appointing Chiefs of Police "to both protect and promote criminal interests." He described the result as a "complex pyramid of protection and patronage, effectively providing state protection to criminal trafficking activities" and involved powerful political players who had stepped back from direct involvement in the [drugs] trade but continued to benefit financially. See Mark Shaw, 'Drug Trafficking and the Development of Organized Crime in Post-Taliban Afghanistan', in Doris Buddenberg and William A Byrd (eds), *Afghanistan's Drug Industry*.

¹⁴⁰ See World Bank, [Afghanistan Economic Monitor](#), October 2025, p7.

The IEA obviates any manpower shortages by relying on its members, who have not been integrated into the state apparatus and are organised into what can be described as local militias that can be called up as needed. This is a practical solution, but it further dilutes the quality of policing and risks facilitating abuses. The Taliban no doubt want to implement the rule of law as they understand it, but face considerable constraints due to the composition of the police force, most of whom have not yet received any training. Many policemen are, in fact, illiterate. Another major hurdle is that the Taliban are not immune to abuses of power and nepotism.

While counter-terrorism is not a major challenge as of winter 2025-26, smuggling remains very hard to tame, not least because of complicities within the Taliban themselves. Most other forms of criminal activity are under control, according to the IEA, although obtaining hard data is very difficult. The Taliban still seem to struggle with urban crime, with which they are not familiar. The impression is that the IEA's police are more effective in dealing with some types of crime than others – murders and kidnappings, rather than smuggling.

At present, controlling population and territory is likely the IEA's top priority, and its police force can deliver on that. This is no mean achievement when compared to the record of other Afghan governments post-1978. However, given that attracting investment to boost the economy is a key priority, the Emirate will need to make greater efforts to build an adequate police force, particularly by establishing a rule of law environment that investors deem adequate, and by improving its capacity to fight urban crime more effectively. Any increase in spending on the Islamic Emirate's police force, however, carries opportunity costs, reducing what can be spent on other sectors, also crucial to the economy, including health, education, agriculture and infrastructure.

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Cover: Then acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani reviews newly-qualified police during their graduation ceremony at the police academy in Kabul.

Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 5 October 2023