



Afghanistan 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Religious Terrorism; Religious Violence; Crime; Anti-American sentiment; Faith-based Organization; Narcoterrorism; Improvised Explosive Device; Political Violence; Winter weather; Employee Health Safety; Drug Trafficking; Kidnapping; Bribery

South Central Asia > Afghanistan; South Central Asia > Afghanistan > Herat; South Central Asia > Afghanistan > Kabul; South Central Asia > Afghanistan > Kandahar; South Central Asia > Afghanistan > Mazar-e Sharif

3/15/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

A lack of basic infrastructure, government services, and emergency health facilities contribute to making Afghanistan an exceptionally dangerous country.

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Afghanistan remains an extremely dangerous country. Criminal activity runs the gamut from the regular operation of several local, regional, and international terrorist organizations and other organized criminal elements to individual thefts, home invasion, assaults, etc. Criminal

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activity is widespread. Criminals rarely operate alone, but rather in groups that are prone to use deadly force on victims.

The security situation remains volatile and unpredictable with insurgents actively plotting high-profile attacks against international and private sector institutions and personnel. It is often difficult to differentiate between traditional illegal activity, politically-motivated criminal behavior, and terrorism. While narcotics trafficking accounts for a large portion of Afghanistan's crime problems, the country is challenged by a myriad of criminal terrorist threats, many of which target foreigners.

All foreigners and Afghans associated with foreigners are potential targets, including non-governmental organization (NGO) employees, clergy, local medical staff, aid and rehabilitation workers, and others. Visitors and residents of Afghanistan must be on guard against assault, kidnapping, and all forms of theft.

Transnational organized crime, specifically related to the drug trade, also remains a serious problem.

Other Areas of Concern

Visitors must remain vigilant to the threat of unexploded ordnance. While many de-mining operations continue, there are un-cleared minefields throughout the country. Colored flags or rocks are used to indicate whether an area has been cleared of mines. Red indicates that a field has been identified but not cleared. White indicates that a field has been swept, although

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this is not an assurance that the field has been entirely cleared. White-flagged fields are generally 90 percent cleared.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

The road conditions outside of Kabul vary. Within Kabul, there are a handful of functioning traffic lights. The roads are filled with potholes, and there are no lanes. Traffic control by Afghan National Police (ANP) Officers is generally poor. It is common to see drivers going the wrong way around traffic circles or driving at night without headlights.

Generally, all roads are of an inferior quality, and travelers should exercise great caution while driving. While some roads in Kabul and other large cities might accommodate normal sedans, a four-wheel drive vehicle is essential outside of major cities. Many roads outside the capital are unimproved and can become impassable during the winter.

Road hazards are compounded by the large number of commercial vehicles and the unsafe operation of those vehicles.

Foreigners involved in an accident with locals are expected to pay for damages, no matter

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who is at fault.

Other Travel Conditions

IEDs are being used with greater frequency throughout Afghanistan, especially in the capital, mostly in the form of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). VBIEDs remain a serious threat to both Afghan security forces and members of the international community. Given the possibility of IEDs, small-arms fire, and other forms of attacks, visitors are strongly recommended to travel in armored vehicles, keep their doors locked, and wear personal protective equipment (body armor, helmets).

Roadblocks and checkpoints controlled by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and random "insurgent" checkpoints remain a problem. ANDSF have been known to shoot at vehicles that do not stop at their checkpoints. Appropriate identification is generally sufficient to permit passage through government run checkpoints.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Critical

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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Decades of disorder and warfare has made Afghanistan fertile territory for international terrorism. During the rule of the Taliban, Afghanistan was utilized as a safe haven for several organizations including al-Qai'da, which benefited from the regime's tolerance of international terrorist organizations. Al-Qai'da, Islamic State-Khorasan Province, and a number of other organizations remain active.

Politically-motivated terrorism is a major concern. Attacks against foreigners are on the rise, and RSO expect that trend to continue. The winter brought with it a lull in violence, but insurgent activity shows no sign of abating this season. The risk of direct fire, improvised explosive devices (IED), and rocket attacks remains very high. Insurgents will often combine multiple tactics to attack a fixed location in what is known as a "complex attack."

Kabul has been and remains a high-profile target for large-scale insurgent attacks, as successful operations tend to warrant greater media coverage. There were 249 significant attacks in Kabul in 2015, an increase of 29 percent over the 193 attacks in 2014.

On May 13, 2015, insurgents attacked the guest house known as Park Place. The attack was initiated by an insurgent detonating a suicide vest while other insurgents entered the guest house and opened fire on guests.

On May 26, 2015, insurgents attacked the guest house known as the Heetal Hotel, which is used by Australian security personnel and government officials. Approximately 4-5 insurgents attempted to breach the perimeter of the hotel with hand grenades and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) but were unsuccessful and subsequently defeated by security personnel.

On June 22, 2015, a female Dutch country director for a Swiss NGO was kidnapped during

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her morning commute to work.

On August 10, 2015, a VBIED detonated near the Hamid Karzai International Airport, reportedly targeting Afghan government officials exiting the nearby Kabul Garrison in non-tactical vehicles.

On October 5, 2015, insurgents conducted a complex attack initiated by a VBIED against a house .05 kilometers from the Russian Embassy. The attack was conducted against the home of a former governor of Helmand province.

October 7, 2015, has been dubbed "Black Friday" due to the ferocity and volume of attacks conducted that day: insurgents conducted a complex attack against Camp Integrity in Kabul; a suicide bomber detonated outside the Afghan National Police Academy in Kabul targeting a group of officers who were exiting the compound, killing approximately 20; and a VBIED detonated next to the perimeter wall of the Sia Sang military compound in Kabul, resulting in multiple casualties and significant structural damage.

On December 11, 2015, insurgents conducted a complex attack against a Spanish Embassy guest housing compound using a VBIED to gain entry, followed by armed gunmen storming the compound.

On December 20, 2015, a dual U.S./Afghanistan national working for a USAID implementing partner organization was shot to death in Kabul.

On December 28, 2015, insurgents detonated a VBIED in the vicinity of the East Kabul Airport gate, injuring six civilians and killing two others.

On January 1, 2016, insurgents detonated a VBIED targeting the Le Jardin restaurant frequented by expatriates and Afghan government officials in the Taimani district of Kabul. Two Afghan civilians were killed and 18 were injured.

On January 4, 2016, a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated near Kabul International Airport targeting a German tactical vehicle, which, because it was heavily

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armored, sustained minor damage and was able to depart the scene.

Additionally, on the evening of January 4, insurgents detonated a VBIED adjacent to the Camelot housing compound resulting in over 20 casualties.

Despite Coalition and ANDSF efforts, insurgents remain active throughout Afghanistan, particularly in the eastern and southern provinces.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political violence ranges from targeted attacks against Afghan and international security forces in transit to attacks against guesthouses where foreigners reside. The principal method of attack during 2015 was the use of IEDs.

Western interests remain primary targets and guest house are regularly targeted.

Post Political Violence Rating: Critical

Civil Unrest

Visitors must remain alert for the possibility of civil unrest. While the government has formalized and implemented a system for legal and orderly protests, spontaneous and

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potentially dangerous demonstrations do occur. In 2015, there were several significant demonstrations for a variety of reasons, including one on November 11 in which several thousand protestors converged on the Presidential Palace in Kabul following the beheading of several ethnic Hazaras. As a rule, foreigners should make every effort to avoid large groups of any kind, particularly political or religious gatherings. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Religious and ethnic violence remains relatively common. Religious violence tends to focus on the split between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. The periods around Shia holidays (Ashura celebrations) can bring increased tension and threats of violence.

Those openly proselytizing and promoting non-Muslim faiths put themselves at extreme risk.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

During colder months, mountain roads and passes can become impassable due to snow. Avalanches are common, and travelers need to be aware of the high risk of eroding roads

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along precipitous thoroughfares. The Salang Pass between Jabal-Sarag and Mazar-e-Sharif is one of the most commonly snowed-in passes.

Afghanistan is a high-risk earthquake zone, and seismic activity is common. In 2015, over 150 earthquakes occurred in Afghanistan. The largest measured 7.5 on the Richter scale and occurred on October 26, 2015, in Badakhshan. Northeastern Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies at the center of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Rudimentary construction techniques common throughout Afghanistan contribute to the possibility of severe injury or death due to earthquakes.

Road conditions throughout the country are hazardous. Those hazards are compounded by, among other things, a lack of rules or regulations governing the transport of hazardous materials.

Drug-related Crimes

The growth of opium production and the associated smuggling industry constitute a major threat to the rule of law. The illegal narcotics trade undermines the integrity of Afghan law

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enforcement and funds terrorist activity. An informal but complex system, intertwined with local political motivations, governs which group or individuals profit from poppy cultivation in each region. Travelers should be aware that this environment fuels conflict between drug traffickers, often resulting in fighting between opposing groups. Additionally, opium growers may guard their territory by employing violent, sometimes murderous, militia members.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping remains a constant threat, particularly against foreigners working for NGOs. Locals who work with foreigners are also at risk, with insurgents often sending “night letters” threatening to kidnap family and friends. Virtually every foreigner is considered wealthy relative to local standards and is, therefore, a potential kidnapping victim. The motivation for these attacks is primarily financial, but visitors should be aware of the potential that criminal kidnappers might sell their captives to terrorist groups, with whom there is a definite threat of execution. Proselytizers and reporters are high-value targets for kidnappers with a political agenda.

Police Response

The local law enforcement authorities are generally ineffective not just in deterring crime but also in responding to distress calls and alarms. More often than not, the response time is significantly longer than Western norms, resulting in a lack of disruption of the crime taking place and a mediocre record in apprehending suspects after the fact. Further, bribery is openly solicited at all levels of local law enforcement. In some cases, officers carry out crimes themselves which in turn creates a lack of trust among the civilian population.

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U.S. citizens are subject to the laws of the Afghan government.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Contact the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit at the U.S. Embassy immediately to report the arrest of a U.S. citizen.

The State Department website describes the type of assistance that the ACS Unit can offer in the case of the arrest or detention of an American citizen abroad. If a U.S. citizen is arrested in Afghanistan, a Consular staff member will visit the prisoner in jail to verify his/her wellbeing, facilitate communication with family members, and provide a list of local lawyers. The ACS Unit cannot pay for legal representation. ACS Unit staff monitor conditions in prisons and can protest allegations of abuse against U.S. citizen prisoners when requested to do so.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you are the victim of a crime, the ACS Unit may be able to assist you. Please review the "Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas" that the State Department can offer.

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Police/Security Agencies

National Directorate of Security (NDS): The national intelligence agency with both internal and external responsibilities.

Ministry of Interior (MOI): Supervises interior security/law enforcement entities. They control the Afghan National Police.

Afghan National Police (ANP): This is the primary police organization. It has within its ranks the Afghan Border Police, Afghan Uniformed Police, Afghan Highway Police, and the Criminal Investigations Department.

Afghan Border Police: Conducts land and airport immigration and border security.

Afghan Uniformed Police: This is the primary civil law enforcement agency. The ANP is divided into five regional commands (north, south, east, west, and central) as well as the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP). Other forces falling under the command and control of the ANP include local traffic police departments as well as the fire department.

Afghan Highway Police: This is no longer in service but remains within the organizational structure of the MOI with nascent interest on the part of the government to have it return. Its

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mission included the establishment of safety and security primarily along the “Ring Road,” Afghanistan’s main supply route.

Criminal Investigations Department: Tasked with investigation, crime scene forensic procedures, documentation of crime, and assisting other agencies, including the use of the crime lab housed at the Ministry of Interior.

Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF): Initially established in 2009 under Presidential Decrees 62/45 that mandated the dismissal of all private security contract agencies. Former President Karzai formally dissolved the APPF in February 2014. President Ghani has taken some steps to re-establish the APPF, but the exact nature and scope of the program has yet to be publicized.

Medical Emergencies

Medical services are generally of poor quality. Facilities often lack basic cleanliness, diagnostic and treatment equipment, and even the most common medications. Private clinics are often operated by individuals without government licenses or even medical degrees. There is no public agency that monitors these operations. If eligible, foreigners should seek care on a Coalition Forces military base.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

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The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul maintains a list of medical providers in Afghanistan. This information is provided for informational purposes only.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/afghanistan>.

OSAC Country Council Information

OSAC's Country Council is very active in Afghanistan, totaling over 50 organizations and individual members. Membership is represented by USAID implementing partners, private companies, NGOs, and educational institutions. The Council maintains regular contact with the United Nations, U.S. and Coalition Forces, foreign embassies, and the government of Afghanistan. The Kabul OSAC Steering Committee meets regularly to exchange security information of a critical nature to the entire Country Council membership. If a company is operating within Afghanistan and is headquartered in the U.S., it may become a member by visiting the OSAC website: www.osac.gov. For additional information about OSAC, contact the Regional Security Office at KabulOSAC@state.gov. To reach OSAC's South and Central Asia team, please email OSACSCA@state.gov.

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U.S. Embassy Contact Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

Great Massoud Road Wazir Akbar Khan (neighborhood) Kabul, Afghanistan

Hours of Operation: 8:00am – 4:00pm Sunday to Thursday

Embassy Contact Numbers

(When using the country code, omit the first zero. Within Afghanistan, dial zero without the country code.)

Embassy Operator: +93 (0)700-10-8000

Medical Unit: +93 (0)700 108 394

After Hours Consular Emergency Duty Line: +93 (0)700-201-908

Overseas Citizen's Services Hotline: +1-888-407-4747

Website: <http://kabul.usembassy.gov/>

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Embassy Guidance

Americans are strongly urged to avoid travel to Afghanistan. If Americans plan to travel to Afghanistan, or already reside here, they are encouraged to register with the Embassy through the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive the latest travel updates and information and to obtain updated information on travel and security issues. U.S. citizens in Afghanistan are instructed to regularly monitor the Embassy's Security Announcements, as well as the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs website, where the Worldwide Caution, Country Specific Information, and the Travel Warning for Afghanistan are found.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Situational Awareness Best Practices

For Americans who travel to Afghanistan, ensure that your housing accommodations are appropriately secure, fortified with barriers and "vetted" armed guards. Maintain a low profile. Americans should avoid public markets, crowded areas, demonstrations, or bazaars. When possible, travel should be conducted in armored vehicles with the doors locked. Backup communication systems (radios) and personnel tracking and locator devices are recommended. In addition, organizations should obtain as much voluntary information from their personnel as possible (biographic data, photographs, cell phone data (IMEI and SIM card numbers), notarized letters from the individual authorizing next of kin) to utilize in the event of a crisis.

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Americans are advised to file a travel plan with someone they trust that includes information about where they are traveling, routes they intend to use, and times of the travel to include waypoints for check-in.

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