

# THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S PLANS FOR POST-WITHDRAWAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE IN AFGHANISTAN

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*An American attack helicopter in Afghanistan. Source: Andre Klimke/Unsplash*

## WHAT'S AT ISSUE?

With U.S. troops nearly fully withdrawn from Afghanistan, the Biden administration has released its first post-withdrawal budget request for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). The proposed \$3.3 billion aid package comes amid an aggressive Taliban offensive that has overwhelmed Afghan forces unaccustomed to operating [without](#) extensive international support and gives insight into the Biden administration's intentions for ongoing security assistance to Afghanistan.

## OVERVIEW

In mid-April The Biden administration [announced](#) its plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. For the past twenty years, direct military engagement, security assistance, and economic aid have been the primary tools of U.S. assistance efforts in Afghanistan. Although the withdrawal—now scheduled for [August 31](#)—will leave only a 650-person [contingency force](#) for embassy and airport security, White House representatives have made it clear that the United States intends to continue providing security assistance and diplomatic support after the withdrawal. Accordingly, the Biden administration has requested \$3.3 billion for the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) for FY2022, the first post-withdrawal aid package.

The request comes amid steady [territorial losses](#) and a stream of casualties for Afghan government security forces. Over the past several weeks, the Taliban have seized several key border crossings and districts, while warlords and [local militias](#) look to fill the security vacuum. In its April 2021 Quarterly Report, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports that “ANDSF casualties from January 1 to March 31, 2021,

were substantially higher compared to the same period last year.” For a more detailed examination of U.S. security assistance efforts in Afghanistan, see the Security Assistance Monitor’s June 2021 [report](#).

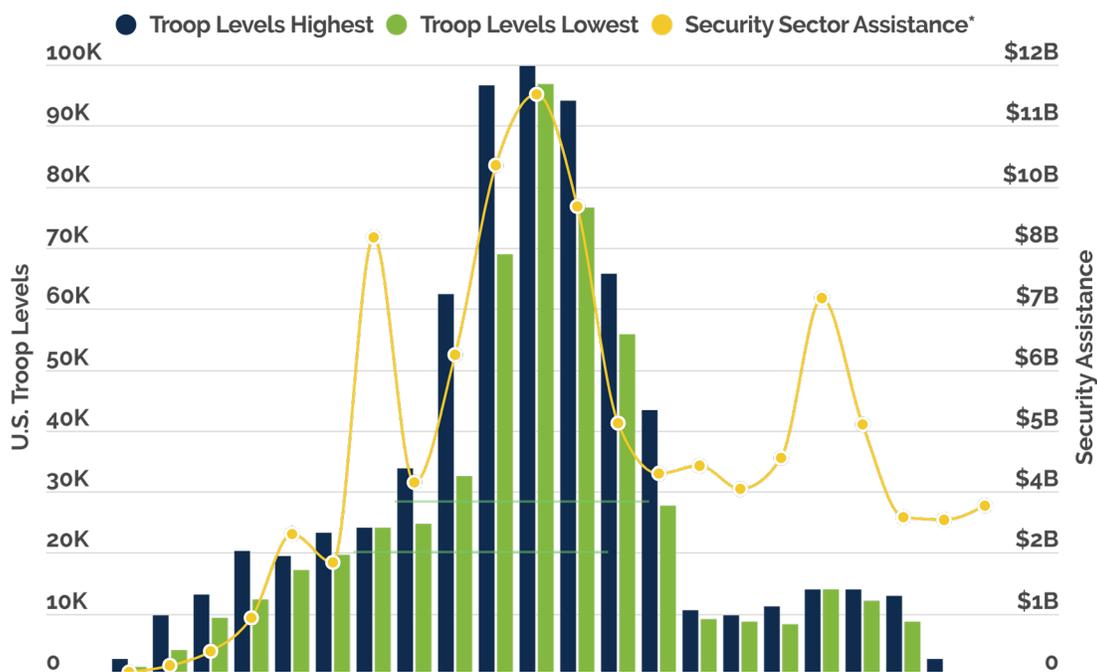
The FY2022 request indicates at least a short-term commitment to continued U.S. support for Afghanistan’s security forces. The Biden administration is seeking to maintain funding for the ANDSF, and in the case of the Afghan National Army, National Police, and Special Security Forces, seeking an increase in funding over previous appropriations. This comes as the Afghan government has struggled to take on a greater portion of security costs, including military and police salaries, fuel, and equipment.

## KEY BUDGET TAKEAWAYS

The \$3.3 billion FY2022 ASFF budget request offers some insights into the priorities for enduring U.S. military support to the Afghan government. As the Defense Department’s [FY2022 ASFF Justification](#) notes, the withdrawal of U.S. forces does not indicate an end to U.S. support for the ANDSF. “To the contrary, the Afghan forces now have to operate without complementary kinetic activity by U.S. forces, making continued provision of security assistance via the ASFF even more important than previously to maintain the viability of the Afghan forces and strengthening the Afghan government leverage in negotiations to end the war on terms that preserve a democratic form of government.”

Nevertheless, despite the high sum of \$3.3 billion, the proposed budget would represent the smallest ASFF request of the past decade, suggesting that the Biden administration is seeking to strike a balance between sustaining support for the Afghan security forces while

Security Assistance and Troop Levels, FY 2001-2021

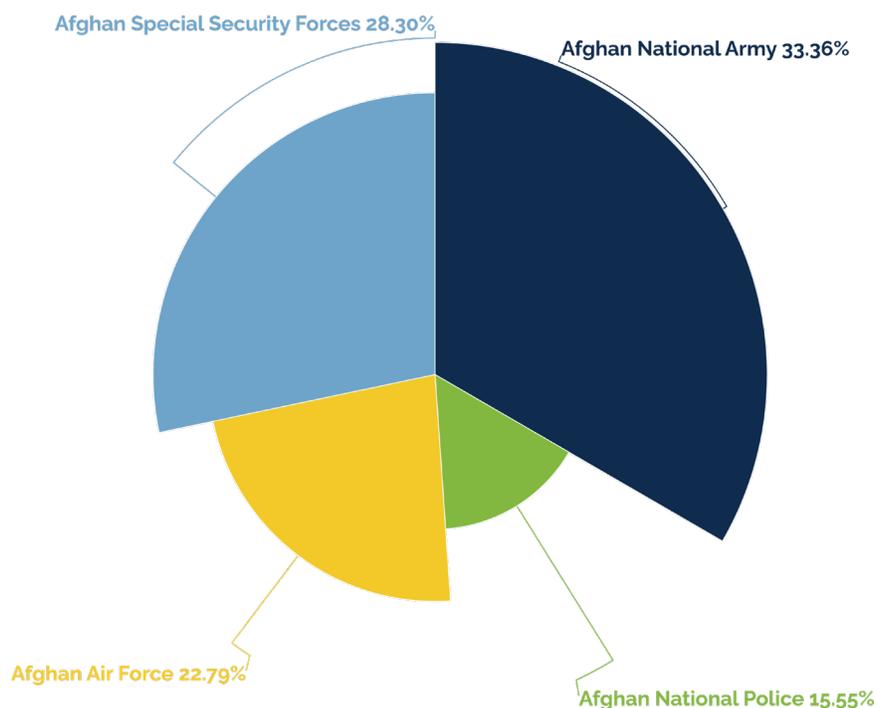


also minimizing its security presence in the country.

It is clear that U.S. defense planners see the ANDSF's air and special operations capabilities as essential to stemming territorial losses. In a recent [report](#) to Congress, the Department of Defense noted that "the ASSF [Afghan Special Security Forces] and AAF [Afghan Air Force] remain the most capable forces within the ANDSF and continue to improve their combat capabilities." This focus on special security forces and the air force is in line with the 2016 ANDSF Roadmap enacted by President Ghani, which planned for a doubling of the ASSF and increase in AAF resourcing.

In particular, the ASSF have become the go-to troops for high-priority missions and have been at the vanguard of a number of essential operations to retake or hold key districts from the Taliban. They have routinely been praised by U.S. personnel as the most professional and capable of the Afghan combat units. Accordingly, ASSF accounts for 28% of the ASFF budget request despite comprising only 9.6% of the ANDSF's personnel. Nevertheless, even the elite of the ANDSF have struggled under the weight of recent

### FY 2022 ASFF Budget Request by ANDSF Budget Group



fighting. Recent battles have resulted in especially [severe losses](#), raising questions as to the sustainability of leaning too heavily on the smaller force.

The largest portion of the proposed budget remains for the Afghan National Army (ANA), which accounts for the bulk of the ANDSF at about 181,000 troops, followed by the Afghan National Police (ANP), with 113,000 personnel. But when broken down on a per-capita basis, an unequal distribution

takes shape, with the AAF receiving \$98 thousand per servicemember, the ASSF \$27 thousand, the ANA \$6 thousand, and the ANP \$4 thousand. This reflects not only the relative importance of these units in the ANDSF strategy, but also the more costly and high-end equipment and sustainment needs of these particular forces.

Though low in relative historical terms, the \$3.3 billion request would still put Afghanistan near Israel as the largest annual recipient of U.S. security sector assistance. But with the departure of foreign troops, questions remain about how the multibillion-dollar assistance enterprise will be administered and managed, as well as how strategic changes in the Afghan government's defense strategy will shape security cooperation with the United States. Already, the ANDSF is re-evaluating its defense posture, [consolidating](#) around key population centers, and soliciting support from local [militia forces](#) and warlords. With intra-Afghan talks aimed at reaching a political solution to the conflict faltering, and with violence across the country on the rise, what endures of U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan will continue to shape reality on the ground even after American troops return home.

## CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT IN THE 2022 BUDGET REQUEST FOR AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

### Sustainment

The ASFF sustainment budget is used to fund the upkeep of ANDSF combat operations and includes military and police salaries, uniform replacement, database management, biometric enrollment and retention programs, contracted logistics support for the maintenance of vehicles and combat equipment, powering and maintaining radio-logistics networks, ammunition, and weapon repair parts.

### Equipment and Transportation

This portion of the budget funds essential equipment such as aircraft, small arms, emergency disaster response equipment, engineering provisions, explosive disposal tools, combat equipment, and radio jamming and installation kits, alongside other costs like light vehicle and aircraft replacement and equipment transportation costs. In recent years, the U.S. government has made an effort to transition from building and equipping to improving, readying, sustaining, and professionalizing the ANDSF through this line item.

### Training and Operations

The training and operations budget facilitates the training and professionalization of the ANDSF. A portion of funding goes to U.S.-based training program costs, including travel, living allowances, medical expenses, and non-aviation training. Other allocations include funding for the Facility Engineer School contract, out-of-country training for female employees, Afghan Air Force flight and operations programs, radio communications training, tactics and leadership development, and English language training.

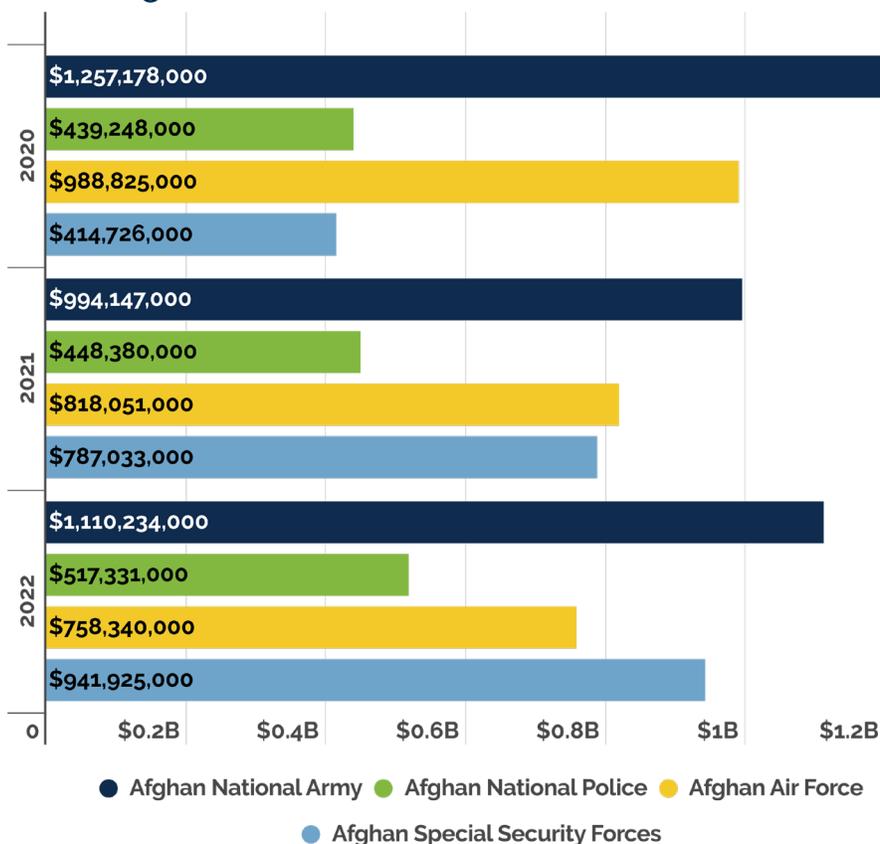
## Infrastructure

Infrastructure now makes up a small (0.3%) portion of the total ASFF budget, but consists of funding allocated to major construction projects, power grid connection for field facilities, and women’s facilities, such as barracks, kindergartens, and female living and working spaces.

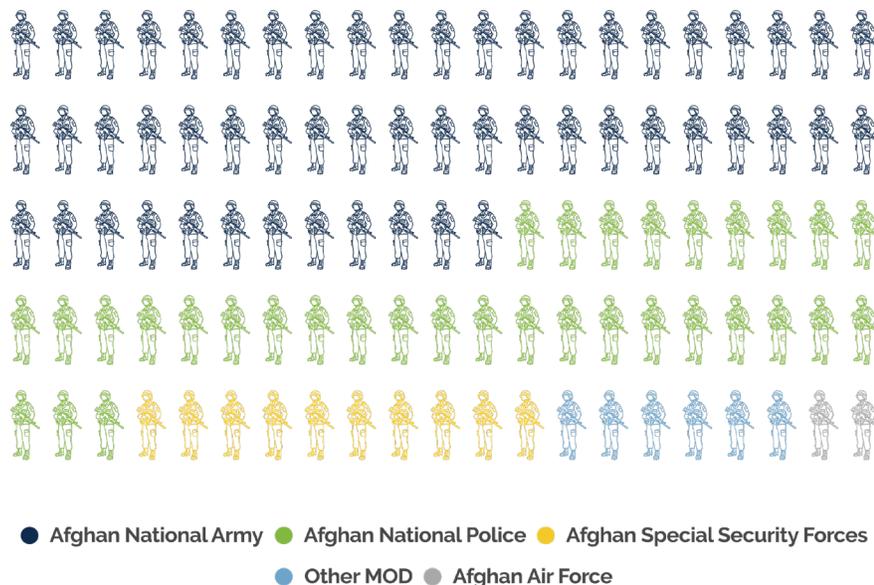
## BUDGETARY CHANGES

The [FY2022 Congressional Budget Justification](#) for the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) requests \$3.3 billion for the ANDSF, a \$280 million increase from the amount appropriated in FY2021 and a \$228 million increase over FY2020. Nevertheless, the proposed budget represents a sharp decline over previous requests, which were \$4.8 billion and \$4.02 billion in FY2020 and FY2021, respectively. This divergence between funding and requests is a result of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, which appropriated only \$3.05 billion for the ASFF in FY2021 and included a rescission of \$1.10 billion for FY2020 appropriations, a nearly 25% reallocation of funds. In this context, the \$3.3 billion request is far below the fund’s peak of more than \$11 billion in FY2011, though, if approved, it would keep Afghanistan as one of the largest annual recipients of U.S. security sector assistance.

Budget Breakdown for the ASFF FY2020-2022



## FY2022 Authorized End Strength of the ANDSF by Service



## Afghan National Army

The Afghan National Army (ANA) request of \$1.1 billion, the largest component of the ANDSF, would see an 11.7% increase in the overall budget from FY2021 appropriations, but a 10.1% decrease from the previous budget request. In either case, it would represent near-historic lows for ANA funding. Between FY2014 and FY2021, ASFF appropriations for the Afghan National Army have averaged \$2.2 billion annually.

## Afghan National Police

The Afghan National Police (ANP) request of \$517 million would be a 15.4% increase from FY2021 ASFF appropriations but a 14.1% decrease from President Trump’s last request. Still, if appropriated, the \$517 million would be the largest ASFF assistance package to the ANP since FY2019.

## Afghan Air Force

The Afghan Air Force (AAF) is the only ANDSF component to see a budget cut in the FY2022 ASFF request compared to previous appropriations. Funding for the AAF was already funded at a high per capita level compared to Afghanistan’s other security forces. The \$758 million proposed allotment would represent a 7.3% cut from FY2021 appropriated amounts, and an even steeper 9.2% reduction compared to the FY2021 request. The \$59 million loss can be explained largely by a \$64 million cut in Training and Operations assistance.

## Afghan Special Security Forces

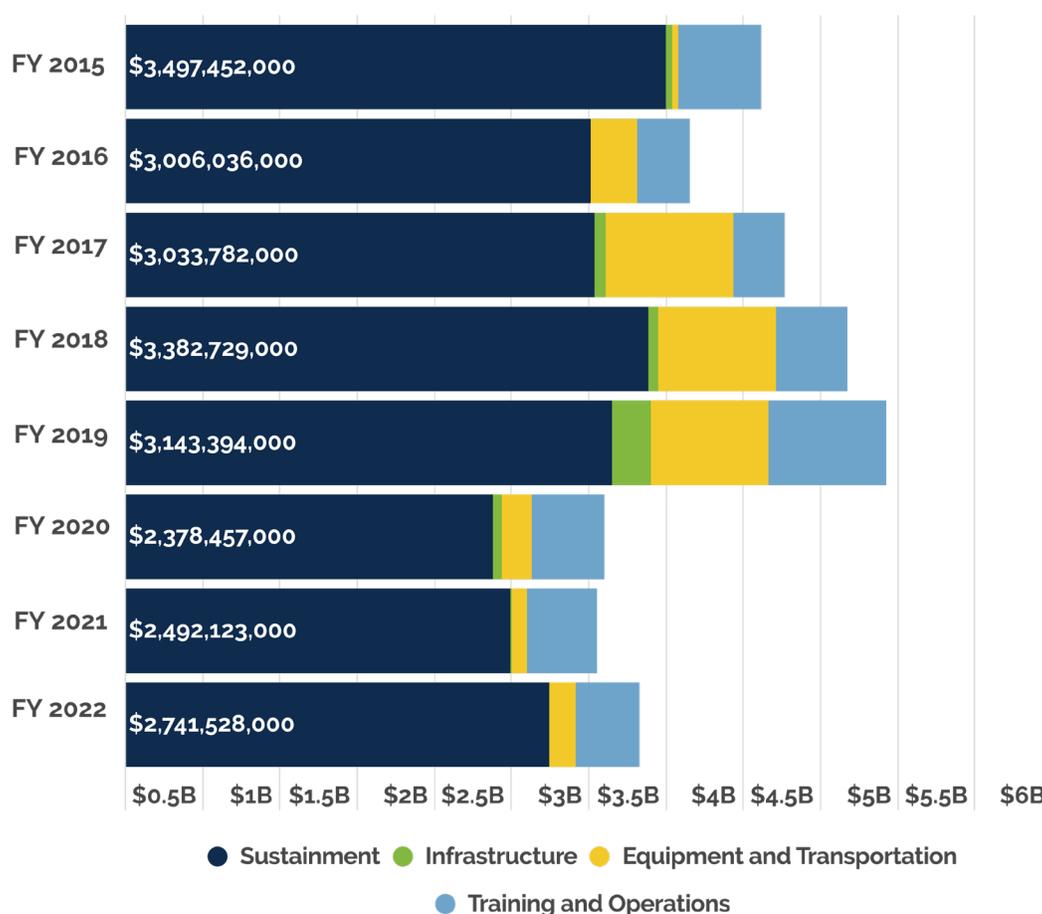
The Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) are the biggest winners in President Biden’s first ASFF request, with a proposed budget of \$942 million, a 20% increase over the last fiscal year’s appropriations. Though the request is 30% less than what was requested in FY2021, if appropriated, it would be the largest ASFF allocation for the ASSF since FY2018, and more

than a 124% increase when compared to FY2020 appropriations.

## THEMATIC CHANGES

The ASFF also breaks down its request by thematic category: Sustainment, Infrastructure, Equipment and Transportation, and Training and Operations. Sustainment is the largest bucket of money, amounting to more than \$27.4 billion between FY2012-FY2021 and averaging \$2.7 billion annually during that time. Since FY2015, sustainment support has remained relatively stable, ranging from an annual amount of \$3.4 to \$2.3 billion. The most recent request sits comfortably in that range at \$2.7 billion.

Budget Activity Breakdown for the ASFF, FY2015-2022



The second-largest thematic allocation has historically been for Equipment and Transportation, averaging \$818 million annually between FY2012 and FY2021. However, the FY2022 request would skew on the conservative side, amounting to just \$167 million, an increase of 71% from the previous fiscal year, but well below the average over the last five years, \$445 million. Significantly, more than 47% of the Equipment and Transportation budget request is being proposed for the ASSF, which has an FY2022 end strength of just

23,428 personnel, compared to the 181,858 in the ANA.

The military training and operations funding request of \$417 million follows aggregate trends, with a five-year average of \$486 million. However, since FY2020, the ANP and ANA have received lower levels of funding compared to that of their ASSF and AAF counterparts. Over the last three years, ASSF and AAF have accounted for more than six times the training and operations funding allocated to the ANP and ANA., reflecting the premium the United States has placed on developing Afghan air capabilities and their elite troops. In fact, despite amounting to just 11.8% of the ANDSF FY2022 authorized end strength, the AAF and ASSF would receive 83% of the proposed training and operations funding.

Of the requested funds, only \$1.8 million is being proposed for infrastructure. Whereas previous budgets have spread infrastructure spending across the major ANDSF components, the FY2022 request only requests infrastructure money for the ANA. Infrastructure spending has historically fluctuated, but the requested allocation for F20Y22 is lower than any previous infrastructure request in the past decade after the FY16 budget, which allocated no funding to infrastructure.

### FY2022 Authorized End of Strength of the ANA by Rank

