



# Afghanistan Update

A twice-weekly, one-page situation report on the latest developments affecting U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

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## Latest news on talking to the Taliban

On Wednesday, Afghan President Karzai visited Saudi Arabia seeking their assistance to persuade Taliban militants to negotiate a settlement to the war.

- Saudi Arabia has a unique relationship with the Taliban: it was one of the few countries to recognize their regime in Afghanistan before it fell in 2001.

International donors have pledged \$140 million in recent weeks to establish a trust fund to re-integrate Taliban militants.

However, incentives for Taliban militants to abandon the insurgency are not new, and despite previous cash offers the insurgency has expanded steadily:

- In 2004, NATO estimated that fewer than 400 Taliban remained in Afghanistan.
- In 2009 NATO estimated that 25,000 Taliban remained in Afghanistan.
- For early 2010 NATO estimates the number of Taliban at nearly 30,000.

## In Quotes:

*"Taliban have a growing influence in most of Afghanistan's provinces, and the border area between that country and Pakistan remains the epicenter of global terrorism. Without your continued support, we will not be able to show the meaningful progress in Afghanistan that the commander-in-chief has ordered."* **Admiral Mullen**, Chairman on the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 2 Feb. 2010

## In Quotes:

*"Many of the insurgents are not in it for religious or ideological reasons... [they] are not necessarily ideologically against the Afghan government or the international troops... they fight for the Taliban for small amounts of money simply to make a living, or for other grievances... What is on offer to them is the chance of a new life."* **NATO Secretary General Rasmussen** on "bribing" the Taliban, 4 Feb. 2010

## Who's Who:

**Anders Fogh Rasmussen** became the Secretary General of NATO on 1 August 2009. He visited Afghanistan for three days beginning 7 August.

Rasmussen (b. 26 January 1953) was Prime Minister of Denmark 2001-2009, which currently has 740 troops in Afghanistan. He supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In a December 2009 Spiegel interview he said that "[NATO] will not be in Afghanistan forever. We will stay as long as it takes to finish our job." Furthermore, "[NATO] cannot view our challenges in Afghanistan separately from the problems in Pakistan."

In 2005 a major Danish newspaper published a full page of cartoons depicting the image of the prophet Mohammed, which offended many Muslims around the world. Rasmussen described the controversy as Denmark's worst international crisis since World War II, said that he "was deeply distressed that the cartoons were seen by many Muslims as an attempt by Denmark to mark and insult or behave disrespectfully towards Islam or Mohammed."

## Key Issue: New Helmand Offensive Planned

- U.S., NATO, and Afghan military officials have announced a large offensive will soon begin in Helmand Province.
- The openness regarding the major military operation is being touted as a break from usual military secrecy, although the last three major military operations have been similarly announced beforehand to the press and by distributing fliers.
- The target for the new offensive is Taliban-held town of Marjah, which is a hub for their lucrative heroin trade. Around 125,000 people live in and around Marjah, and it is occupied by between 600 and 1,700 Taliban and foreign fighters.
- This is the first major operation since President Obama ordered a surge of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan.
- In Kabul, NATO spokesman Brig. Gen. Eric Tremblay told reporters that the operation will include at least 1,000 Afghan police and thousands of Afghan soldiers as well as thousands of NATO troops. This offensive will involve the highest number of Afghan forces in any joint operation since 2001

## Key Issue: American Soldiers Killed in Pakistan

- On Wednesday three American soldiers were killed, and two wounded, in a roadside bombing next to a girls school in northwestern Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan.
- The attack was against a five vehicle military convoy in the Dir district, part of Swat, which was the site of a major Pakistan military offensive against the Pakistani Taliban in 2009.
- Three children were killed, and over 100 injured, in the bombing of the girls school that had been recently renovated with U.S. humanitarian assistance.
- At least 12 other American service members have been killed in Pakistan since 11 September 2001, in hotel bombings and a plane crash.
- The American soldiers were Special Operation Forces invited by Pakistan's military, which have been training their paramilitary Frontier Corps for 18 months.
- Pakistani police have arrested 35 suspects in connection with the bombing, which is thought to have been a suicide attack.

## Budget Numbers:

The U.S. has given more than \$15 billion to Pakistan since 2001, of more than \$10 billion has been military aid. The recent Kerry-Lugar legislation has pledged \$7.5 billion over the next five years. USAID has provided more than \$3.4 billion (including Emergency Economic Assistance) to support economic growth, education, health, good governance, earthquake reconstruction assistance, as well as humanitarian assistance.

*The [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) serves Members and staff by providing relevant and accessible information on Afghanistan. It is non-partisan.*

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