



# Afghanistan Update

14 May  
2010

A twice-weekly, one-page situation report from the [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) on the latest developments affecting U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

## Issue in Focus: Kandahar

- According to the locals who live in the areas surrounding the city of Kandahar, the Taliban are arriving in far higher numbers than in previous years.
- Hundreds of young fighters, many coming from over the border in Pakistan, appear to be mustering in exactly the places where NATO expects to do some of its heaviest fighting this summer.
- A recent public opinion survey in Kandahar conducted for the US army found that despite their efforts to remain above the fray, most of the 1,994 people questioned sympathized with the insurgents' reasons for taking up arms against the government. Some 94% of respondents did not want foreign forces to start a new operation.
- Last week NATO began trying to play down the military aspect of this summer's surge, saying it would prefer to call it a "process that is encompassing military and non-military instruments" rather than an "operation", or "offensive".
- US General Stanley McChrystal said on Thursday that the outcome of pivotal military activities in Kandahar would be clear by the end of the year. He said the crucial moment would be when Afghans believe the tide has turned in Kandahar, the spiritual heartland of the Taliban.

## Scrutiny Mounts on Ahmed Wali Karzai

- A number of Afghans are warning the United States that shoring up the Afghan president's half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai's grip on power in Kandahar will only undermine the effort to root out political corruption, create a respected police force, and establish a trustworthy and respected government there.
- Some analysts have also argued that Wali Karzai effectively grants his brother, President Karzai, de facto control over all local government appointments and have criticized Wali as "the most visible, most intractable symbol of the corruption and the corporate self-interest of the Karzai government in southern Afghanistan".
- Wali Karzai has rejected all accusations as lies spread by his enemies, and claims jealousy from rivals is playing a part in the criticism he faces. Moreover he claims to have a "good working relationship" with Americans.
- Elsewhere, both Western and Afghan officials argue that the risks of ousting Ahmed Wali are too great. Tooryalai Wesa, the Kandahar governor said: "He's the one keeping Kandahar in balance. If you don't have him in the system here, you don't want to see what would happen."

## Disease Destroys Afghan Poppy Harvest

- Up to one-third of Afghanistan's poppy harvest this spring has been destroyed by a mysterious disease, according to estimates revealed Wednesday by United Nations officials. The disease is expected to wipe out as much as 2,500 tons of opium, mostly in the southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan.
- Fuelled by insurgent propaganda that Western troops will destroy their poppy crops, Afghan farmers have started blaming the American and NATO militaries for spreading the disease, a charge that the American military emphatically denies.
- Reduced production is causing prices for fresh opium to soar as much as 60 percent. The price increase may make it harder to persuade farmers to give up the crop next year, and is also raising by hundreds of millions of dollars the value of opium stockpiles held by traffickers and insurgents.
- Experts have noted that a similar blight has hit Myanmar and India, and worry that it is also affecting other crops, including fruit trees like apricot and apple. Dried fruits account for half of all Afghanistan's exports.

## Taliban Threats Empty So Far

- The Taliban threatened to launch a fresh offensive across Afghanistan this coming week, as President Karzai was visiting the US, has so far shown little evidence of happening. The offensive, that was supposed to have started Monday, would include "assassinations of government officials, roadside bombs and suicide attacks against foreigners and those who support them."
- However, insurgents have ramped up attacks in Kandahar, where their latest act claimed responsibility for the death of a government official in Arghandab, a key district in the province.

## Afghan-Pakistan Trade Transit Deal

- Afghanistan is close to reaching a long-delayed trade transit deal with Pakistan that would allow Afghan produce to be trucked across Pakistani territory to key import partner India.
- The pact would help Afghan farmers to move their goods to India - the greatest potential market for Afghan produce in the region - and it is hoped encourage them to grow higher value products such as pomegranates rather than opium poppies.
- However, one problem that persists is that trucks would not be permitted to enter India, and instead produce would have to be transferred onto Indian trucks at the border.

## Oversight of Private Contractors & NGOs

- Investigators from the congressional national security and foreign affairs subcommittee are due to issue a final report next month on whether US taxpayers' dollars are being paid to militia commanders to protect convoys ferrying supplies through Kandahar province.
- Major General Nick Carter, Britain's most senior commander in southern Afghanistan, has criticized private security companies with business operations in Afghanistan of operating in a "culture of impunity" that is encouraging lawlessness and corruption.
- Afghanistan's government has dissolved 152 Afghan and 20 international aid organizations based in the country, some for misconduct. Last year the commission cancelled the operating licenses of 255 domestic and 13 foreign NGOs.

## Karzai Visit to Washington

- Afghan President Hamid Karzai and senior members of his cabinet have completed a four-day visit to Washington.
- Go to the [ACCH Policy Page](#) for a summary of the key quotes from the visit.

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