



Afghanistan Update

21 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.

Upcoming Events

National Consultative Peace Jirga

- President Karzai will host a peace jirga (grand assembly of Afghans) on May 29 to present his draft for negotiations with the Taliban and to seek advice from delegates on peace moves. The draft pushes for the removal of the names of insurgent leaders from a U.N. sanctions list and possibly giving them asylum overseas.
- Karzai said this week that the West was starting to realize the war in Afghanistan cannot be won militarily and that the peace process must involve reaching out to the Taliban.

International Kabul Conference

- The 'Kabul Conference' due to be held on July 20 will be a follow up to talks in London in January where the international community and donor nations renewed their pledge towards supporting Afghanistan. The foreign ministers of all leading NATO partner nations are planning to attend the conference, as well as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.
- Mark Sedwill, NATO's senior civilian envoy to Afghanistan, told the press this week: "Two objectives are expected again from the Kabul Conference in particular, first, renewing the compact between Afghanistan and the international community, which is very important. And secondly the international community standing behind the Afghan government and its people."

Key Issue: Taliban Attacks

- A Taliban suicide car bomber struck a NATO convoy in Kabul Tuesday, killing six of its service members, five of them American, officials said. Twelve Afghan civilians also died.
- That bombing was followed by a pre-dawn assault Wednesday against the giant U.S.-run Bagram Air Field, for which the Taliban also claimed responsibility.
- The attack on Bagram, though entirely unrealistic for considering any Taliban military gain, killed one U.S. contractor and wounded nine American soldiers. The U.S. soldiers at the base responded by killing 10 insurgents.
- The attacks come as NATO readies a major offensive in the southern province of Kandahar, a major Taliban stronghold. They also serve as a reminder that the city's defenses can still be penetrated by determined attackers.
- Analysts say that the bombing Tuesday suggests the Taliban have reconstituted their underground cells, presumably from within the city's large Pashtun community which forms the bulk of the insurgent force.

In the News:

- Forty-five delegates, including representatives from the Taliban, the Afghan government and major political parties, have arrived in the Maldives to take part in unofficial talks aimed at resolving the continuing crisis in Afghanistan. The talks, which begin this evening, were organized by Jarir Hekmatyar, the son-in-law of Gulbadin Hekmatyar, an Afghan warlord and leader of the Hezb-e-Islami party. Both the Taliban and President Karzai have sent representatives, but stopped short of endorsing the meeting. ([Al Jazeera](#))
- The US has launched an investigation into allegations that a number of American soldiers were responsible for the "unlawful deaths" of at least three Afghan civilians. Military investigators also said no charges have yet been filed. ([Reuters](#))
- An Afghan prosecutor has issued an arrest warrant for an American Special Forces commander over allegations that a police chief was murdered by a US-trained militia. ([The Guardian](#))
- A prominent Muslim cleric and government supporter was killed on 17 May in Kunar Province in eastern Afghanistan, in an ambush in which two others died, government Afghan officials said. ([Time](#))
- The commanding general of U.S. Marines in Afghanistan says his troops have made deals to take half of all poppy-producing land out of commission. Maj. Gen. Richard Mills says farmers in Helmand Province have given him pledges they will not reseed next year. ([AP](#))
- British Prime Minister David Cameron and President Karzai agreed on Saturday to strengthen ties between London and Kabul in the first meeting between the new PM and a foreign leader. ([Reuters](#))
- The wreckage of a passenger plane which went missing earlier this week with 48 people aboard, including six foreigners, has been found in Afghanistan, government officials said on Thursday. ([Reuters](#))

In Quotes:

"We're essentially seen as helping a couple of families and their companies and their tribes [in Kandahar]...and that marginalizes and disenfranchises other tribes, which wind up supporting the Taliban."

"I heard some [NATO officials] almost throwing up their arms with the view that there didn't seem much we could do about it — and we depend on this guy [Ahmed Wali Karzai]. Others thought we had to be more aggressive, not in eliminating him or his contracts or his companies, but in spreading around the wealth."

Michael O'Hanlon, Brookings Institute, commenting on his recent trip to Kandahar. ([NPR](#))

Key Issue: Ahmed Wali Karzai Continues to Generate Debate

- Afghan military investigators have accused Ahmed Wali Karzai of intervening to protect powerful allies who are squatting illegally on government property in southern Afghanistan.
- In response, he shut down the Kandahar legislature this week by refusing to lead the provincial council until he can clear his name.
- The dispute pits Karzai, a member of Afghanistan's dominant Pashtun ethnic group, against the local Afghan army corps commander, who's considered an ally of a rival Pashtun leader.
- The eight-page Afghan Defense Ministry report comes as American strategists are counting on the Kandahar kingpin to be a key ally in the evolving U.S.-led effort to drive the Taliban out of their spiritual capital and bolster a pro-Western government there.