



# Afghanistan Update

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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.

## Key Issue: Insurgents' Attacks

- A car bomb exploded Wednesday outside a small NATO military base in Kandahar city, wounding two Afghans and destroying 11 cars. The blast occurred in a visitors' parking lot of Camp Nathan Smith that houses a few hundred Canadian soldiers, American military police, and U.S. and Canadian government employees working on development projects.
- Following the announcement of a spring offensive against NATO and Afghan government forces, insurgents have launched attacks since 18 May against Bagram and Kandahar air bases, and a suicide attack on a NATO convoy in Kabul that killed 12 civilians and 6 NATO service members – 4 of whom were senior officers. Insurgents are also attacking a district government building in Nuristan Province in eastern Afghanistan.
- Though the attacks are small-scale and operationally ineffective, they have generated strong reactions across the international media and are creating the perception of a resilient and coordinated insurgency. ([Der Spiegel](#))

## Kandahar in Focus

- Tooryalai Wesa, the governor of Kandahar Province, is receiving increasing media attention as NATO activities in the province continue to build this summer. Reports state that he is burdened by the perception that he is an outsider who lacks a support base, and that he cannot stand up to the city's most powerful people. Wesa relies heavily on US support to make up for his small and low-paid staff and few resources. ([ET](#))
- British Major General Nicholas Carter told reporters that Ahmed Wali Karzai, the Afghan president's powerful half-brother and elected chairman of Kandahar's provincial legislative council, is ready to "stand out of the way" and play a less important role in the province, and plans to gradually cede power to Governor Wesa. ([AFP](#))
- Zhari District has been identified as a key 'gateway to Kandahar city', as the main staging area and home of insurgents with little to no Afghan government presence. The 2nd battalion of the 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team is currently in charge of western Zhari, the same controversial Stryker Brigade that has 10 of its soldiers under investigation (see In the News section below and [Der Spiegel](#)).
- The effort to make a decisive shift against insurgents in Kandahar this year is increasingly being portrayed as a 'make or break' moment for both the international forces and the strategy of ISAF commander-in-chief, Gen. Stanley McChrystal.

## In the News:

- A dispute between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has left **hundreds of railway carriages with supplies for NATO forces in Afghanistan stranded** in Central Asia. Uzbek authorities are holding the Tajik trains at their border. The supply route, recently-established as NATO's 'Northern Distribution Network', provides an important alternative to routes going through Pakistan that have been troubled by attacks and hijackings. ([Reuters](#))
- **At least 10 members of a US Army unit of the 5th Stryker Brigade are under investigation** by the Army's Criminal Investigation Command for killings of the three civilians and other allegations including illegal drug use, assault and conspiracy. The Brigade has suffered some of the highest casualty rates of the war and has attracted criticism for being too heavily focused on combat operations. ([AP](#))
- **Insurgents killed six village elders** in a district of Khost Province in eastern Afghanistan after they refused to hand over aid money they had received from the government's National Solidarity Program that has been successful in funding grassroots development projects. The insurgents kidnapped 15 elders, who were the heads of their village councils, and a day later the bodies of six of them were found, shot to death. ([NY Times](#))
- A UK newspaper has reported the **widespread conviction amongst Afghan professionals that the west is prolonging conflict in Afghanistan** in order to maintain influence in the region. The report recounts commonly-held beliefs that the US are funding the insurgency; the US funds the madrassas that produce insurgents; US army helicopters deliver supplies behind insurgents' lines; and all aid organizations are intelligence-collecting agencies. ([The Guardian](#))

## National Peace Jirga:

- The Afghan government has pushed back the date of the national peace jirga (conference) aimed at reaching an agreement for dealing with insurgents who are willing to stop fighting. The government says "technicalities" have forced it to delay the start of the so-called peace jirga for three days until June 2, the second postponement announced within the past month.
- A spokesman for the peace jirga has said that the postponement is to arrange the logistics for bringing so many local and regional delegates to Kabul from some of Afghanistan's most remote provinces.
- Other reports state that the jirga has been delayed again by angry MPs who have threatened to boycott it, over President Karzai's failure to submit 11 nominees for parliamentary approval for cabinet posts that have been vacant since the beginning of the year.
- On Monday, officials in northern Afghanistan said insurgents on motorbikes shot and killed a tribal elder in Faryab Province who planned to attend the June 2 conference. ([AP](#))

## In Quotes:

*"Our intent is to take away from [the insurgents] access to the population where they are traditionally strongest. And that will take away from them some of their credibility as well as recruiting, funding, access to narcotics...It won't be decisive. But it's a pretty severe blow to them if they lose what we would consider their most important area."* **Gen. Stanley McChrystal**, interview with [ABC News](#).

*"We've got a few months to make a giant difference...It's all about the government, it's all about the police. This is the Afghan government's to win or lose. There's enough combat power from a military standpoint to do what we need to do."* **Senior military official** who has helped plan the campaign ([ABC News](#)).

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