



Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief from the [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

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Province Profile - Kandahar

Take Aways

- **Kandahar is a strategic center of gravity in Afghanistan:** it was the birthplace of the Taliban movement and it sits at the intersection of the vital lines of communication across the country's south.
- **Insurgents have steadily expanded their control and influence over Kandahar's population.**
- General McChrystal, commander of all NATO and US forces in Afghanistan, has said that after the Marjah offensive, **Kandahar is likely to be the next area for major operations against insurgents.** [AFP](#)

Key Facts

- **Governor of Kandahar:** Tooryalai Wesa
- **Provincial Capital:** Kandahar City
- **Mayor of Kandahar City:** Ghulam Hayder Hamidi
- **Area:** 20,858 square miles, with 16 districts. (slightly smaller than West Virginia)
- **Members of Parliament:** 14, including 3 women, out of the 249 total *Wolesi Jirga* members.

Total Kandahar Population: around 913,900

- Around 85% of Kandahar's population lives in Kandahar City and nearby rural "suburbs."
- Pashtun is spoken by 98% of the population.

Sewage Infrastructure in Kandahar is poor:

- Only one-fifth of households have access to sanitary toilet facilities; the remainder use traditional latrines or open areas.
- Less than two-thirds of homes use safe drinking water.

Roads in Kandahar are fairly well developed:

- Three-fourths of roads can be open all year, but the remaining close due to seasonal conditions.

Literacy and education in Kandahar are low:

- One quarter of men are literate.
- 5% of women are literate.
- One third of boys are enrolled in school.
- Around 12% of girls are enrolled in school.

Narcotics production remains a problem:

- Kandahar's poppy production rose 35% between 2008 and 2009 while production has declined by one third nation-wide since 2007.
- 16% of Afghanistan's poppy is from Kandahar, the second largest producer after Helmand.

Key Issues

NATO-ISAF Regional Command South – Based outside Kandahar City.

- Command of RC South rotates between Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Currently led by UK Maj. Gen. Nick Philip Carter.
- Some analysts worry that the rotating leadership prevents smooth and effective continuity of military and development operations.
- Canada operates Kandahar's Provincial Reconstruction Team.

Transport – Kandahar has historically been on regional trading routes, and with its proximity to Pakistan it continues to act as a regional trade hub.

- Afghanistan's major Ring Road highway passes through Kandahar city.
- Residents have long desired a Ring Road spur so military convoys could bypass the center of town, where civilians have been killed by insurgents' roadside bombs.
- Kandahar City has a major international airport which is used for supplying the coalition forces as well as a regional civilian travel hub.

Taliban Shadow Government – The Quetta Shura Taliban has made Kandahar one of their primary objectives in their insurgency campaign. They exert authority through a large shadow government presence in Kandahar City.

- Insurgents target Afghan government officials; the police chief was killed last June.
- Much of the province is very unsafe for coalition forces, and Kandahar has seen some of the largest and most advanced roadside bombs.

Development efforts in Kandahar, past and present:

- In the 1950s the United States built large irrigation systems and the Dahla Dam, which forms Lake Dahla, the key reservoir for the province's agricultural industry.
- Current development efforts are challenged by the deteriorating security situation: international aid organizations and the UN have been targeted by militants.

Agriculture in Kandahar – Field crops and orchards are heavily reliant on Kandahar's intricate irrigation systems from surface and underground water sources.

- Kandahar's farms remain very vulnerable to droughts, and one-fourth of Kandahar households rely on agriculture as their main revenue source.
- Land disputes arise from inheritance and disputed deeds from the Taliban, Soviet, and earlier eras. The Taliban often exert their influence in settling these disputes.
- Many farmers are share croppers or long term renters, and can be influenced to grow profitable poppy and marijuana by land-owners affiliated with insurgents as a direct challenge to Kandahar's legitimate government.

Pashtun Tribes – The history of southern Afghanistan has largely been shaped by rivalries between two Pashtun sub-tribes: the Ghilzai and Durrani. For 200 years, ending in 1973, Afghanistan was ruled by Durrani kings from Kandahar. The tribal system has been significantly weakened by three decades of war.

- Tribal affiliation in Kandahar City is much weaker than the countryside.
- Tribally-based networks remain a mobilizing force in Kandahar's politics.
- Tribally-based cartels have gained considerable power over two lucrative sources of revenue in Kandahar: contracts from foreign organizations and the opium trade.

Possible Questions

- How is continuity of operations maintained with rotating command of RC South?
- How effective are alternative livelihood programs for poppy famers?
- What is being done to counter the Taliban's Shadow Government influence?

In the News

A senior provincial official, Abdul Majeed Zazai, was killed by gunmen on motorcycles in Kandahar this week. He was the head of the information and culture department of Kandahar. [BBC](#)

Further Reading

[MRRD](#)
[NPS](#)

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