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Daily Analysis

Afghan Anger Boils Over

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A cargo truck in a U.S. military convoy crashed into traffic May 29 in Kabul, killing several civilians and [triggering lethal riots \(NYT\)](#) in the capital city. The U.S. military said [the truck's brakes failed \(AP\)](#) and called the incident an "unfortunate traffic accident." Furious Afghans surrounded the convoy, throwing stones and drawing gunfire, and then [rioters and looters rampaged through Kabul \(CSMonitor\)](#), attacking foreign businesses and NGOs. Afghan President Hamid Karzai imposed a curfew and [Afghan police patrolled the streets \(Reuters\)](#) in an attempt to restore order.

Nearly five years after a U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban, the unrest highlights the tense and fragile security situation in Afghanistan. Afghans are angry that some \$12 billion in foreign aid received by the state since 2001 has not provided jobs, improved security, or raised the standard of living; 53 percent of Afghans still live on less than one dollar per day. Afghans are also suffering attacks from a [resurgent Taliban](#) using Pakistan as a base to stage deadly [cross-border suicide missions](#). In a [CFR Special Report](#), Barnett Rubin says the Pakistan-based Taliban insurgency is becoming more lethal and effective.

A U.S. campaign of air strikes against militants in the south has killed dozens of Afghan civilians, further angering the population. More than fifty alleged Taliban members were killed in a [May 29 air strike \(al-Jazeera\)](#) on Helmand province, and some 372 people, including civilians, have been killed in violence since May 17. Many Afghans seem fed up with the presence of foreign troops—and well-paid foreign consultants driving large cars—in their country. Other analysts say, however, that the riots did not reflect anti-American or anti-foreigner sentiment as much as the organization of criminal gangs and anti-government forces, which used the crash as [an excuse to commit crimes and spread disorder \(RFE/RL\)](#).

The violence in Kabul comes as the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\) force in Afghanistan](#) prepares to take over security operations in the country's volatile south from U.S. troops, who are drawing down. But Amin Tarzi of Radio Free Europe says many of the countries participating in the southern expansion—Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia, which is not even a member of NATO—[do not have clear mandates](#) or missions for their presence in the south. Many experts fear casualties to these troops will cause the political will in their home countries to wilt and lead to their withdrawal; some say the Taliban has increased their attacks on the NATO presence in the south in part to [force this result \(RFE/RL\)](#). CFR fellow [William L. Nash](#), who commanded a NATO mission in Bosnia, tells cfr.org the Pentagon has the "arrogant attitude" that U.S. forces are more effective than NATO troops, and warns that unless the Defense Department commits political will and resources to the success of the NATO southern expansion, the mission will fail. "The United States seems to be taking a we/they mentality with NATO," he says. "But NATO's us. There seems to be some propensity to abrogate responsibility, as opposed to finding a new way to be more efficient."

And political reform is moving slowly, if at all. Karzai's choice for chief justice of Afghanistan's Supreme Court was recently [rejected by Parliament \(Jurist News Service\)](#) over allegations that he ignored human rights and damaged free speech. Human Rights Watch has criticized Karzai's choices of ["human rights abusers and warlords"](#) to fill many of the country's provincial police chief posts. CFR Senior Fellow Isobel Coleman and Harvard's Swanee Hunt say [women's rights are under attack](#) again in Afghanistan. For many women, [life is hardly better now \(al-Jazeera\)](#) than it



Frustrated Afghans vented their anger in Kabul. (Photo: AP)

was under the oppressive Taliban. Coleman and Hunt say the repression of women is not only wrong and unfair, but damaging to the country's progress and development.

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