



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 20, 2012

Afghan Insider Attacks Targeting Troop Morale, Resolve

As U.S. troops suspended most joint operations with Afghan forces in response to the ongoing killings of American soldiers by the Afghan police and military personnel with whom they serve, a senior NATO officer said that the “insider” attacks were part of an attempt by the Taliban to drive a wedge between the two sides and to weaken the morale and resolve of “coalition” forces. Australian Brig. Gen. Roger Noble, a senior officer serving with NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), acknowledged that the attacks have had an impact on soldiers serving with Afghan troops, but insisted that the majority of the Afghan personnel are trustworthy.



“They were pretty unhappy,” Noble told reporters at a Pentagon briefing, speaking of the U.S. soldiers and other coalition forces. He said that the attacks strike “right at the heart of our resolve. It’s one thing to be killed in action by the insurgents. It’s quite another to be shot in the back of the head at night by your friends.”

He insisted, however, that the coalition soldiers “live and breathe with Afghans, and they know that most of the Afghans they’re with think that sort of conduct is abhorrent. The enemy’s got a tough task in actually driving a wedge between us, because we know what the people that do this are trying to do, and we will stand firmly against it.”

On September 18 the Pentagon announced that U.S. troops would suspend most joint operations with “friendly” Afghan security forces. The move came following the deaths September 16 of two American soldiers at the hands of Afghan police, along with an incident in which two British soldiers were gunned down by an Afghan wearing a militia uniform.

In addition, on September 14 two U.S. Marines were killed in an attack on a joint American-British base camp by attackers disguised in U.S. Army uniforms. There was speculation that the attack, which also destroyed six AV-8B Harrier jets, was aimed at capturing or killing Britain’s Prince Harry, who is serving in his country’s military and was on the base at the time. He was not injured in the attack. While the Pentagon said that U.S. troops will continue with patrols, they will not team up with Afghan troops, which are also maintaining their operations. “Until now, U.S. and NATO troops routinely conducted operations with their Afghan counterparts,” reported [Fox News](#). “But under the new order, such operations will now require the approval of a regional commander.”

The ISAF issued a statement stressing the need to take “some prudent, but temporary, measures to reduce our profile and vulnerability to civil disturbances or insider attacks.... This means that in some local instances, operational tempo has been reduced, or force protection has been increased.”

An ISAF spokeswoman, Major Lori Hodge, referred to the amateur “anti-Islam” video that has raised animosity in the Middle East, telling reporters that “in response to an increased threat situation as a result of the ‘Innocence of Muslims’ video, plus the recent insider attacks, ISAF forces are increasing their vigilance and carefully reviewing all activities and interactions with the local population. We



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adjust our force protection measures based on the threat. If the threat level goes down, we could see a rolling back on this decision.”

The Obama Administration responded to the announcement September 18, with White House Press Secretary Jay Carney explaining that partnerships between the U.S. troops and national forces would continue “at the battalion level and above. This does not mean there will be not partnering below that level. The need for that will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.”

Fox News noted that 51 international troops have been killed thus far this year by Afghan forces or attackers wearing national uniforms. “The attacks have spiked in recent months, damaging the trust between the NATO and Afghan forces at a time when ongoing training and cooperation are critical in order for allied troops to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and turn control of security over to the Afghan forces,” reported Fox.

While insisting that he was “very concerned” about the attacks, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said September 17 that he and other Pentagon officials think they represent a “kind of a last-gasp effort” by the Taliban “to be able to not only target our forces but to try to create chaos because they have been unable to regain any of the territory that they have lost.”

Some lawmakers have strongly suggested that the attacks add impetus to an earlier American withdrawal. “I think all options [should] be considered, including whether we have to just withdraw early rather than have a continued bloodletting that won’t succeed,” Senator McCain (R-Ariz.) told reporters on Capitol Hill. “The whole program has to be re-evaluated because the process they said would lead to that [December 2014] withdrawal has been an abject and total failure.”

Meanwhile, U.S. troops on the ground in Afghanistan have been concerned for some time about the antagonism they have faced from their Afghan “partners.” [Business Insider](#) reported that a 21-year-old Marine who was killed by an Afghan soldier he was training expressed concern to his father that he might be in danger from such trainees.

“Lance Corporal Greg Buckley Jr. trained Afghan security forces in the restive Helmand Province before he and two other Marines were killed on Aug. 10 by one of the Afghans he was training,” reported the news site. “Buckley knew something was wrong after a tormenting encounter with an Afghan trainee earlier in the year.”

Buckley’s father recalled a phone call he had received from his son in Afghanistan in which the Marine described the encounter he had with the Afghan trainee. “The guy turned around and said to Greg, ‘We don’t want you here. We don’t need you here,’” the elder Buckley recalled his son saying, according to a [CNN](#) account. “Greg turned around again and said, ‘Why would you say that?’”

For the next several hours on the night watch the two men shared, the Afghan soldier kept repeating the same phrase over and over. “Greg said, ‘I thought I was going to lose my mind,’” his father recalled. “Pitch black out, and all he kept saying over and over again is, ‘We don’t want you. We don’t need you. We don’t want you.’”

The young Marine warned his superiors that one day the Afghans they were training would turn their weapons on them, and told his father to be prepared for news that he’d been killed in the way he feared.

The elder Buckley said that shortly before his son was gunned down by the Afghan he was training, he had been told that his duty there was being shortened. “It was only two days he had left there in Afghanistan,” he told CNN.

Related article: [U.S. Coalition Suspend Joint Operations With Afghan Troops](#)

Photo: In this June 19, 2012 photo, Afghan soldiers prepare for a mock ambush as part of a training exercise at the U.S. Marine-run Joint Sustainment Academy, Camp Leatherneck in

Helmand, Afghanistan: AP Images



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