



Written by on July 21, 2009

## Taliban Suicide Bombers Strike in Afghanistan

Groups of Taliban suicide bombers attacked government buildings and a military base in eastern Afghanistan, killing as many as six people, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported on July 21.

A combined total of at least 13 suspected Taliban militants and Afghan security forces were killed during the attacks. AFP quoted provincial spokesman Rohullah Samoon, who said:

One of the bombers detonated in front of the intelligence department, killing three intelligence officers. The other bombers were killed by security forces.



AFP also quoted Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahed, who admitted in a phone conversation with the network that the Islamist militia were responsible for both attacks. "Fifteen of our mujahedin [holy fighters] — suicide bombers who also have guns — entered the governor's compound and other government buildings" in Gardez. "Four of our mujahedin have entered the Jalalabad air base — they have killed several Afghan and foreign forces."

The Middle East-based *al Jazeera* network reported that the suicide bombers, some wearing women's burqas, attacked the governor's house, police headquarters, and intelligence headquarters in Gardez, the provincial capital of Paktia, and that U.S. and NATO forces were dispatched to quell gunbattles.

An AP report noted a separate attack in Jalalabad, in the eastern province of Nangarhar, when two suicide bombers were attacked on a motorcycle, initiating a gunbattle in which they and a police officer were killed. A BBC report said that the militants were trying to gain access to the airport, which is used as a base for Afghan and foreign troops.

The *Christian Science Monitor* noted that the attacks also come a day after Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced a temporary increase in the size of the Army by 22,000 soldiers to meet the demands of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Current U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan is listed as 58,000.

"This is an important and necessary step to ensure that we continue to properly support the needs of commanders in the field, while providing relief for our current force and their families," Gates said at a July 20 Pentagon briefing.

U.S. military sources announced on July 21 that one member of its forces died in a vehicle accident, raising the monthly U.S. death toll to 31, making July the deadliest month for U.S. troops in Afghanistan since the 2001 invasion.

The July 19 edition of *The Nation* (a Pakistani publication) reported that Afghan President Hamid Karzai has urged the U.S. and its NATO allies to develop a new strategy for fighting the Taliban, warning that an increase in troops will not necessarily improve security. "We have to rethink the way we do things — without that there won't be any improvement," said Karzai.



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While speaking to reporters from his office on July 18, Karzai suggested a different strategy:

I don't think the increase in troops will address the problem. We need to concentrate on finding other avenues of defeating terrorism and seeking peace. We must engage in negotiations, bring back those Taliban who are willing to return, who have been driven out by fear and coercion and the mistakes we've all made. They are part of this country and must be called back.

Karzai promised that, if he is re-elected as president on August 20, he will make talks with the Taliban and other militant groups, such as Hezb Islami, his priority. "If Mullah Omar wants to come and talk, he's welcome—it's a desire we have and we should try for it. Without a sincere peace process on all sides, matters will only get worse."

It is possible that Karzai, as an Afghan, has more insight into the mind-set of the Taliban than his foreign counterparts and that his approach may produce better results with fewer casualties. It is also imperative to keep in mind that he is a political candidate and that campaign rhetoric is always to be regarded suspiciously.

Whether his comments stem from wisdom or vested political interest, he is undoubtedly right that a better way should be found to defeat the Taliban, but also quite likely wrong that negotiating with militants driven by such fanatical idealism can be profitable.

Had the United States done the constitutionally correct — and militarily wise — thing after 9/11 and declared war on the Taliban government that then ruled Afghanistan, and then followed through by committing whatever resources it took for total victory, we would not still be losing personnel there at the rate of several per day. Had we not wasted several years, billions of dollars, and thousands of lives invading Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein (who was no enemy of the United States) it would have been Osama bin Laden and not Saddam who dangled at the end of a rope.

But wars fought solely to achieve a U.S. victory do nothing to enhance the power and prestige of the United Nations. And so we continue, as we have continually done since Korea, fighting another no-win war to enforce some UN resolution or another.

It isn't stupidity; it was planned that way.



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