

US-NATO LOOSING CONTROL IN AFGHANISTAN?

Insurgents attack heart of US-led occupation

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Small groups of insurgents fighting the US-led occupation of Afghanistan carried out a coordinated series of attacks on Sunday against prominent NATO and Afghan government facilities in the capital Kabul and three other provinces. Among the buildings hit with small arms and rocket propelled grenades were the parliament, the US, British, German, Japanese and Russian embassies, the NATO headquarters and a newly-opened hotel. In the country's eastern provinces, airfields and police stations were attacked.

Operations by Afghan and foreign troops to regain control of the heavily-guarded governmental and diplomatic zone in Kabul continued for 20 hours into Monday afternoon. Afghan government forces, assisted in some cases by foreign troops, claimed yesterday that they had killed 39 insurgents. Eight Afghan army and police personnel were reportedly killed and up to 40 wounded. At least four civilians were killed in cross-fire and several dozen injured. There were no reported casualties among foreign military forces or diplomatic staff.

The attacks had parallels with last September's assault on the US embassy and NATO's main command centre in Kabul. On Sunday, fighters were again able to infiltrate weapons, ammunition and explosives into the city and take up positions undetected in construction sites within a few hundred metres of their intended targets.

The puppet Afghan government headed by President Hamid Karzai claimed that insurgents had dressed in female burkas that covered their faces and decorated cars with flowers in order to pass through security checkpoints. This was contradicted by locals, who told the *New York Times* they had seen a utility vehicle occupied by a group of men simply drive into the car park of a building site near the embassy zone. As in earlier incidents, the seeming ease with which security was breached suggests the insurgents were assisted by elements in the Afghan government forces.

In a statement yesterday, Karzai described the attacks as "an intelligence failure for us and especially for NATO." The coordinated assault inflicted another blow to the claims of the Obama administration and its allies that Karzai's regime will soon be able to exert full control over the country without large-scale foreign military assistance. After more than ten years of constant operations by tens of thousands of American and allied troops to crush Afghan resistance, insurgents have demonstrated their ability to strike at the heart of the US-led occupation.

The Taliban, the Islamist movement that held power in Afghanistan before the 2001 US invasion, claimed responsibility for the attacks. A Taliban spokesman issued a statement on Sunday, describing them as the beginning of the insurgency's "spring offensive."

Throughout the decade-long war, resistance operations have ebbed during the bitter Afghan winter and surged as weather conditions improve.

This week's events will only add to the sense of crisis and failure surrounding the US-led occupation. Over the past year, there has been a string of attacks on US and other foreign troops by members of Afghan government security forces, indicating both the widespread hostility to the occupation among the local police and army and the extent to which they have been infiltrated by insurgent organisations.

The Taliban or other resistance groups have been able to carry out a wave of high profile assassinations, killing some of the most prominent allies of Hamid Karzai and scores of police and government officials. Since the beginning of the year, Afghan hostility to the occupation has also been revealed in the outpourings of anger over incidents such as US troops burning copies of the Koran, urinating on corpses and killing unarmed villagers, including women and children.

US officials, including the ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker, dismissed the Taliban claims that it had organised Sunday's attacks and instead blamed the Haqqani network—an insurgent movement based among ethnic Pashtun tribes in southern Afghanistan and North West Pakistan. The Haqqani movement has its origins in the US and Pakistani-backed Islamist insurgency against the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in the 1980s. It has fought the US occupation since 2001, allegedly operating from safe havens in Pakistan.

Just hours before the attacks in Kabul, as many as 150 militants stormed a prison in the town of Bannu in North West Pakistan. Close to 400 prisoners were released, including at least 30 men being held for fighting against the pro-US Pakistani government. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the main anti-government Islamist organisation, which maintains close ties with the Afghan Haqqani fighters, claimed responsibility.

A recent report by the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War described the Haqqani network as the most capable and sophisticated of the insurgent groups and asserted that it had been able to spread its influence from the south to Kabul and the eastern provinces. Institute analyst Jeff Dressler told the BBC that Sunday's attacks were "likely intended to send a message to the US, UK, Russia and the Afghans that this will in fact be a bloody year for all forces in Afghanistan, particularly [in] the east of the country."

The US attempt to blame the Haqqani network for the latest attacks is more than likely bound up with the desperate efforts that have been made by the Obama administration to initiate negotiations and strike some form of deal with the main Taliban leadership, hoping to bring most of the resistance to an end. US conditions, however, have included the Taliban recognising Karzai's US-backed regime and bowing to Washington's demand to maintain bases in Afghanistan into the indefinite future.

Tentative moves toward talks collapsed in March after the Taliban rejected the US insistence that discussions involve the Karzai government. With the bulk of American forces scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan over the next two-and-a-half years, and numerous European countries preparing to exit even sooner, the Taliban leaders appear increasingly convinced that they will be able to dispense with the US-backed regime altogether and reclaim power.

After more than ten years of bloody repression in Afghanistan, which the Obama

administration has extended over the border into Pakistan, the only response of US imperialism to the debacle it confronts will be further violence. With deadlines for withdrawal approaching, the US will escalate the killing in order to pressure the Taliban into accepting talks on its terms and realise the neo-colonial objectives of the war.

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