

Afghan Trainee Kills Six US Troops

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The killing of six US soldiers by an Afghan police officer is one of the bloodiest in a series of incidents that call into question the US-NATO strategy of turning over combat operations to Afghan forces in 2014.

Monday's "fragging" of US Army trainers took place at a remote outpost in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province, near the Pakistani border. An Afghan border policeman, subsequently identified as Ezzatullah, turned his weapon on the American soldiers as they were conducting a training exercise in the use of mortars. He was also shot and killed in the confrontation.

Two separate armed opposition groups took responsibility for the killings, claiming that the Afghan police officer had infiltrated the security forces to conduct just such an attack.

"We can not rule out that he was used by the enemy, but he had been a border policeman for three years, and had been a good boy," Gen. Mohammed Zaman Mamozai, a senior official in the Afghan Interior Ministry, who previously headed the border police in the region, told the New York Times Tuesday.

The killings marked the sixth such incident in just over a year. Earlier this month, an Afghan soldier gunned down two US Marines at a forward operating base in Helmand Province and then disappeared. Last August, an Afghan policeman shot to death two Spanish paramilitary troops engaged in training, together with their interpreter. In July there were two such attacks by Afghan soldiers, one in which two US civilian trainers were killed, and another in which three British Gurkhas died.

Monday's attack was the most deadly, surpassing an incident last December, when five British soldiers were shot dead by an Afghan police officer whom they had been "mentoring" in Helmand. The Afghan officer escaped after the shooting.

In the wake of the latest episode—referred to in military parlance as a "green-on-green" incident—NATO spokesman Lt. Col. John Dorrian stated: "Incidents of this nature are a tragic reality of this kind of effort. Although we do everything we can to prevent them."

The spokesman did not spell out why such killings are an inevitable feature of "this kind of effort." Clearly, they are the result of a colonial-style war in which broad masses of the Afghan population oppose the foreign occupation and the US-led forces are largely unable to distinguish friend from foe.

The killings are particularly troubling for Washington and NATO given that the goal affirmed at the recent NATO summit in Lisbon is to train Afghan security forces to take the "leading

role” in combat operations by the end of 2014, with US and other foreign troops staying on beyond then in a “supporting role.”

To meet this goal, the occupation authorities have instituted less than selective criteria for recruitment into the Afghan puppet forces, which are in turn ostensibly serving a government seen as illegitimate by the bulk of the Afghan population.

The US strategy for reaching this 2014 goal entails bleeding the armed opposition groups white in order to force them into negotiations based on Washington’s terms, which are designed to secure Afghanistan as an American semi-colony and base for projecting US military power into the energy-rich region of Central Asia.

This has taken the form of special operations raids aimed at assassinating suspected leaders and members of the Afghan resistance, increased air raids and a major US military offensive around the southern city of Kandahar.

The Associated Press Tuesday reported that aerial bombardments in Afghanistan are up sharply, with US warplanes dropping 1,000 bombs and missiles on targets in the country in the month of October alone.

In an interview with the AP, Col. James Sturgeon, chief of the air operations control center in Kabul, said, “We’re seeing about a 20 percent increase in sorties over last year.”

The former top US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, had issued orders curtailing air strikes based on the conclusion that they were inflicting large numbers of civilian casualties, which were in turn fueling popular support—and recruitment—for the Taliban and other resistance organizations. President Barack Obama’s dismissal of McChrystal last summer was apparently due in part to a decision to escalate such attacks.

The AP interviewed Mohammad Rahman Danish, a former district leader in Afghanistan’s eastern Kunar province, who said that air raids there are now taking place “both day and night.”

“The people in the area are very angry at both sides,” he said. “The Taliban are coming and influencing the residents, and the Americans are conducting operations. The local people are suffering. Houses are destroyed. The land is destroyed in the operations. That is the reality.”

The Obama administration is set to issue a formal review of its Afghanistan strategy this month, with administration and Pentagon officials predicting that it will propose no change of course and will claim progress in achieving US goals.

Two assessments issued on the eve of this review strongly dispute the official optimism in Washington, warning that the US-led occupation is actually losing ground to the armed opposition.

In a report entitled “Afghanistan at the Breaking Point,” the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace warned: “The current strategy of defeating the Taliban militarily is unrealistic. The coalition is on the defensive across much of Afghanistan and, with current troop levels, can at most only contain the insurgency. On present course, the coalition is swiftly heading toward an impasse.”

The report predicted that merely to maintain itself in the areas it is now attempting to secure through the ongoing military offensive, the US-led occupation will be compelled to significantly increase troop levels next year, rather than initiate the beginning of the drawdown that Obama promised last December.

The report states that independent experts, journalists, consultants and humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan reject the Pentagon's claims of "reversing the momentum" of the insurgency.

"They maintain that the insurgency has made considerable headway in recent months and has not experienced significant reversals in the south," the report states. "The facts have so often been at odds with the optimistic tone of NATO's public statements that there is a risk of undermining the confidence of public opinion and political decision makers." It pointedly added that the military's conclusions "do not appear to be shared by Western intelligence agencies, notably the CIA."

Describing the situation of the US-led occupation, the report states: "U.S. outposts are totally isolated, and it takes hours to leave a base, even to travel just a few hundred meters. There are no Afghan forces to provide backing for coalition forces, neither in Kandahar nor in Helmand. The state apparatus is nonexistent, and the idea of 'government in a box' has proven unworkable.

"Afghan security forces, notably the police, are subjected to constant pressure, and very few village leaders dare to work with the coalition. Villagers rarely collaborate with Western forces, and the fact that most improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are planted during the day suggests that many villagers are complicit in the insurgency. It is naïve to think that—at least in this region—the local population wants to be protected from the Taliban; a large majority oppose the coalition presence, which they see as bringing about fighting and civilian losses."

Another report issued by the International Crisis Group reaches similar conclusions. "While success is being measured in numbers of insurgents killed or captured, there is little proof that the operations have disrupted the insurgency's momentum or increased stability," it states. "The storyline does not match facts on the ground."

The report states that Afghan security forces "have proven a poor match for the Taliban" and "remain dangerously fragmented and highly politicized."

On the other hand, the insurgency has managed "to proliferate in nearly every corner of the country," the report warns. "Contrary to US rhetoric of the momentum shifting, dozens of districts are now firmly under Taliban control."

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