

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Afghanistan This Week

Report Number: 120

Week 15-21 May 2010

May, 23, 2010

Mohammad Amin

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Political Headlines Summary

MoI receives \$1m equipment

KABUL (PAN): The United Nations Development Project (UNDP) delivered equipment worth one million US dollars to the Anti-Corruption Department at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) here on Saturday.

US forces condemned for civilian deaths

JALALABAD (PAN): More than a thousand residents of Surkh Rod district in eastern Nangarhar province have protested a coalition forces' raid, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians.

Afghanistan issues arrest warrant for US officer

AN AFGHAN prosecutor has issued an arrest warrant for an American special forces commander over allegations that a police chief was murdered by a US-trained militia.

Taliban claim downing NATO copters

NATO says several Afghan and foreign troops have been wounded after their helicopter was forced to have an emergency landing in southern Afghanistan.

US-led soldier killed in Afghanistan

Clashes in southern Afghanistan claim the life of another foreign soldier, NATO's International Security Assistance Force says in a statement.

NATO soldier killed in Afghanistan

Another NATO soldier has been killed in southern Afghanistan in the last 24 hours, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) says in a statement.

200 NATO troops die in Afghanistan this year

KABUL — Two hundred NATO soldiers have died during the war in Afghanistan so far this year, according to an AFP count based on the icasualties website and following the killing of two Italians on Monday.

4 US-led troops killed in Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan has claimed the lives of four US-led soldiers amid an upsurge in attacks against the foreign forces in the country.

Foreigners among 14 held in Kabul

KABUL (PAN): Kabul police arrested more than a dozen alleged militants -- five of them Pakistani nationals -- on the outskirts of the Kabul on Monday, a week after Taliban fighters warned of launching multiple attacks on major Afghan cities.

8 Americans killed in Kabul blast

Eight Americans are reportedly among those killed in a car bomb attack against the US-founded Counterinsurgency Academy in the Afghan capital Kabul.

2 US-led forces killed in Afghanistan

At least two foreign soldiers have been killed in a roadside bomb blast in the south of Afghanistan amid an upsurge in attacks against US-led forces.

Wolesi Jirga issues ultimatum to Karzai

KABUL (PAN): The Wolesi Jirga set a Saturday deadline for President Hamid Karzai to nominate the remaining cabinet ministers or warned they would go on strike.

British troops accused of helping Taliban

LASHKARGAH (PAN): The chief of Musa Qala, one of the most troubled districts in southern Helmand province, on Thursday accused British forces of assisting Taliban fighters.

MP urges NATO troops to leave Kabul

KABUL (PAN): A former presidential candidate, Ramazan Bashardost, Thursday asked NATO troops to leave Kabul to avoid civilian casualties.

'50 US-led troops, Afghan soliders killed'

The Taliban claim its militants have launched a wide-scale attack on a military camp in Afghanistan, killing at least 50 US-led and Afghan soldiers.

7 US-led troops killed in Afghanistan

At least seven German soldiers have been killed in northeastern part of Afghanistan, increasing the number of foreign troops killed in the country, the Taliban claim.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

Norwegian PM makes surprise visit to Kabul

KABUL (PAN): Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, making an unannounced visit to Kabul, met President Hamid Karzai on Monday.

Afghanistan on top of OSCE agenda: EU

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan would be on top of the agenda for the annual meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana, the European Union special representative said on Monday.

A Road Map to Peace in Afghanistan

Last week, Afghan President Hamid Karzai traveled to Washington to seek support from Barack Obama for his plan to reconcile with the Taliban and forge a path to peace in the war-torn country. SPIEGEL has obtained a copy of his secret peace plan, which foresees reintegrating Taliban fighters into Afghan society.

EU backs peace jirga, elections

KABUL (PAN): European Union Special Representative Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas presented his credentials as the Head of the European Union Delegation to Afghanistan to President Hamed Karzai on Wednesday.

Second Afghan peace meeting in Maldives: government

COLOMBO – Afghan government envoys and Taliban representatives will hold a second meeting at a holiday resort in the Maldives later Thursday, a spokesman for the president of the Indian Ocean nation said.

Taliban deny attending peace talks with Afghan government in Maldives

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban say they are not attending peace talks with the Afghan government in the Maldives.

US to command UK troops in Helmand

British troops based in southern Afghanistan are to come under US command, in a major military command shake-up among Western forces occupying the country.

German president in Afghanistan

German President Horst Koehler has made a surprise visit to Afghanistan to meet with German soldiers in an effort to boost their morals amid climbing casualty figures.

Social Headlines Summary

Flash floods hit Badakhshan

FAIZABD (PAN): A man was killed, four people were injured and 100 houses destroyed by flash floods in the northeastern province of Badakhshan on Sunday night, an official said on Monday.

Plane with dozens aboard crashes in Salang

KABUL (PAN): A passenger plane with 36 people on board, including foreigners, is believed to have crashed in the mountainous Salang Pass, north of the capital Kabul, on Monday, officials said.

Phone services for all in five years: Sangin

KABUL (PAN): All Afghans would have access to telecommunication services and 50 percent would enjoy the Internet facility over the next five years, an acting minister said on Tuesday.

Economic Headlines Summary

Japanese govt promises \$1 billion for railway

MAZAR-I-SHARIF - Japan has pledged \$1 billion to construct a railway in Afghanistan, the Finance Minister Omar Zakhelal said on Thursday.

Political Headlines

MoI receives \$1m equipment

Khawaja Basir Ahmad - May 15, 2010 - 17:07

KABUL (PAN): The United Nations Development Project (UNDP) delivered equipment worth one million US dollars to the Anti-Corruption Department at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) here on Saturday.

Lt. Gen Haidar Basir, deputy minister of administrative and logistics affairs, said the tools had been donated by the UN Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) and the UNDP.

Major General Muhammad Wakeel Akbari, head of the Audit Department at MoI, said the apparatus included 12 secret cameras, 24 video cameras, 12 voice recorders, 50 walkie-talkies, a car, furniture, lights and safes.

Basir said six mobile anti-corruption teams had been formed in different zones of the country. He added the teams comprised 42 personnel, 20 of them trained in operating computers and cameras.

The number of anti-corruption officials would be increased to 540 with time and each group would be assisted by 90 policemen, Akbari told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Around 277 cases of corruption have been registered since the initiative was launched nine months ago. Fifty of the cases were referred to the authorities concerned after investigations, according to Akbari.

US forces condemned for civilian deaths

Abdul Mueed Hashmi - May 15, 2010 - 18:46

JALALABAD (PAN): More than a thousand residents of Surkh Rod district in eastern Nangarhar province have protested a coalition forces' raid, which resulted in the killing of 11 civilians.

Angry tribal elders, religious scholars and people from different walks of life met Governor Gul Agha Sherzai and a delegation from the Ministry of Interior in Jalalabad on Saturday.

Residents said US troops opened fire at the men who were busy threshing their wheat crop in the Bawal village of Surkh Rod district Thursday night. Most of the victims were young men, wearing dirt-soiled clothes.

Their bloodied bodies were transferred from the site by tractor-trolleys. One of them carried five corpses, including that of a grey-bearded man.

A tribal elder, Maulvi Azizur Rahman, said all those killed in the operation were innocent people. He added Afghan National Police (ANP) also killed a civilian during a subsequent protest.

Sherzai said US forces had informed him about the action against a Taliban commander, Mullah Shamsuddin. But things went wrong during the operation, he added, arguing police fired at the crowd in self-defence.

"I'm responsible for the protection of civilian lives in this province," the governor assured, saying an investigation into the incident was underway. He blamed the enemies of peace for sneaked into Nangarhar from other areas and fomenting trouble in the province.

The director-general of Crime Branch at the Ministry of Interior, General Mirza Muhammad Yarmand, told the gathering they were shocked by civilian deaths. He promised a thorough and impartial investigation into the raid.

Also present at the meeting was Safia Siddique, a lawmaker from the province. She asked the participants how an 8th Grade student could be a branded as a terrorist and killed by foreign forces.

A month back, US forces stormed the legislator's house and killed one of her relatives. She called upon the governor to ensure an end to nighttime raids on civilian houses in the province.

Head of Afghanistan's Peace Caravan, Haji Abdul Zahir Qadeer, also alleged the young men killed in the coalition operation were innocent civilians. He said they would move the attorney office against US forces and Afghan police.

At the end of the meeting, the participants issued a resolution condemning civilian casualties. They accused foreign forces of violating all international laws, Afghan values, presidential decrees and human rights.

Afghanistan issues arrest warrant for US officer

The Irish Times

05/15/2010

By Stephen Grey in Kandahar

AN AFGHAN prosecutor has issued an arrest warrant for an American special forces commander over allegations that a police chief was murdered by a US-trained militia.

Brig Gen Ghulam Ranjbar, the chief military prosecutor in Kabul, has accused the US of creating an outlaw militia which allegedly shot dead Matiullah Qateh, the chief of police in the city of Kandahar.

The militia, which Brig Gen Ranjbar claimed is armed and trained by US special forces, also allegedly killed Kandahar's head of criminal investigations and two other officers when they attempted to free one of their members from a courthouse.

"We lost one of this country's best law enforcement officers for the [attempted] release of a mercenary," said Brig Gen Ranjbar, interviewed for a film to be shown on Britain's Channel 4 News tonight.

He accused American officials of refusing to hand over evidence or to permit his investigators to interview the special forces commander, known to Afghans only as “John or Johnny”, who he alleges sanctioned the raid.

The warrant, which has been circulated to border posts and airports, is an embarrassment for the US military, which is facing growing criticism for links to militias controlled by warlords.

In Kandahar, the militias have been accused of murder, rape and extortion.

Brig Gen Ranjbar said an investigation found that the force that killed Qateh operated from Camp Gecko in the hills outside Kandahar, a base for US special forces and the CIA.

Officials in Kandahar said the militia supplied guards and was trained to work alongside special forces and intelligence officials in raids against Taliban targets.

“If you go to Kandahar, people say these guys pretend to be interpreters but they carry out night raids and assassinations,” said Brig Gen Ranjbar. “We hear lots of strange and shocking stories.”

He claimed that suspects arrested for the courthouse raid had confessed to being part of a 300-strong militia unit run by “Johnny”. They said they “could not move a muscle and could not leave their base without Johnny’s orders”, Brig Gen Ranjbar said.

“He was the head of the group and they [the Americans] were the ones paying them.”

Col Wayne Shanks, a spokesman for the US military, denied that any US or other coalition forces were involved in the attack, and said those involved “were not acting on behalf of US or international forces”.

But according to the Afghan account, the militia known locally as the “Kandahar Strike Force”, or the “Kandahar Special Group”, arrived at the courthouse last June with US-supplied uniforms, vehicles and weapons. They demanded the release of a comrade held for a traffic offence. When police were called to the scene by terrified court officials, the militia opened fire, killing Qateh and three other policemen.

“The police chief took two steps forward and that’s when they fired,” claimed a witness, who showed Channel 4 the crime scene, pockmarked with bullet holes.

“Within a couple of seconds the chief was sprayed with bullets.”

The involvement of the Camp Gecko militia is politically sensitive because of its alleged close ties to Ahmed Wali Karzai, brother of Afghan president Hamid Karzai.

Militia members claim to have been recruited by associates of the president’s brother,

who press reports have claimed is on the CIA payroll.

Interviewed by phone, Ahmed Wali Karzai called for an amnesty for the 41 men convicted of Qateh's murder, but denied he had any militia connections.

Local militias have also been linked to a raid on November 10th last year when US and Afghan troops allegedly burst into the home of Janan Abdullah (23), riddled him with bullets and left his wife paralysed.

"Nothing was left undamaged, they shot at everything," said one of his uncles. "He was just lying in bed. I'd say they fired 200 bullets at him."

The family claimed it was Afghans who did the shooting and stole thousands of pounds in cash.

A US military spokesman said they had "no record" of the raid.

However, the family were given medical treatment at Camp Gecko.

Taliban claim downing NATO copters

Sat, 15 May 2010 14:34:20 GMT

NATO says several Afghan and foreign troops have been wounded after their helicopter was forced to have an emergency landing in southern Afghanistan.

The incident took place in Kandahar province, where NATO and Afghan soldiers clashed with Taliban militants.

Taliban say they have shot down the chopper. They say many foreign troops were killed in the attack.

Taliban also say they have brought down another NATO helicopter in Helmand province, killing dozens of foreign troops there.

Meanwhile, an Afghan official said NATO and Afghan troops killed at least 10 Taliban militants and arrested one of their senior commanders in a joint operation in Helmand.

According to official announcements, 2009 was the deadliest year for foreign troops with a total of 520 US-led soldiers killed in action.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched with the official objective of curbing militancy and bringing peace and stability to the country.

US-led soldier killed in Afghanistan

Sun, 16 May 2010 07:37:34 GMT

Clashes in southern Afghanistan claim the life of another foreign soldier, NATO's International Security Assistance Force says in a statement.

The western alliance said on Sunday that the soldier was killed in fighting with militants, AFP reported.

The statement did not mention the soldier's nationality, in keeping with ISAF policy.

Attacks against 130,000 US-led troops in Afghanistan have been on the rise. Washington plans to deploy 30,000 additional troops by August.

According to official announcements, 2009 was the deadliest year for foreign troops with a total of 520 US-led soldiers killed in action.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched with the official objective of curbing militancy. Nine years on, however, Afghanistan remains unstable and insecure.

NATO soldier killed in Afghanistan

Mon, 17 May 2010 06:59:49 GMT

Another NATO soldier has been killed in southern Afghanistan in the last 24 hours, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) says in a statement.

The death brings to 198 the number of foreign troops that have been killed this year during the Afghan war, AFP reported, quoting the statement released on Monday.

The soldier, whose name or nationality has not been announced by ISAF, died after an improvised bomb exploded in southern Afghanistan.

He was the second NATO soldier killed on Sunday. The first soldier was killed in a clash with militants on that day.

Washington plans to deploy 30,000 additional troops by August. This is while attacks against the 130,000 US-led troops in Afghanistan have been on the rise.

According to the independent icasualties.org website, a total of 520 foreign soldiers lost their lives in Afghanistan in 2009, making the year the deadliest for foreign troops there to date.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched with the official objective of curbing militancy. Nine years on, however, the country remains unstable and insecure.

200 NATO troops die in Afghanistan this year

AFP

05/17/2010

KABUL — Two hundred NATO soldiers have died during the war in Afghanistan so far this year, according to an AFP count based on the icasualties website and following the killing of two Italians on Monday.

The Italians were killed and two others wounded when a bomb hit a NATO military convoy in northwestern Afghanistan, Italy's foreign ministry said.

The four were in a vehicle that was struck by a roadside bomb, the weapon of choice of Taliban-led insurgents fighting the Western-backed Afghan government and around 130,000 US-led foreign troops in the country.

The attack was about 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) south of the town of Bala Murghab on the border with Turkmenistan, a spokesman for the Italian contingent in Afghanistan said in a television interview.

Italy has 3,300 troops in Afghanistan as part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force and heads the western regional command headquartered in the city of Herat.

In southern Afghanistan, two NATO soldiers died Sunday -- one of injuries sustained from a bomb attack on May 14 and the second in an "insurgent attack".

The latest deaths brought to 200 the number of foreign troops to die this year during the Afghan war, according to an AFP tally based on that kept by the independent icasualties.org website.

A total of 520 died in 2009, which was the deadliest overall year so far for US-led NATO troops in the nine-year war in Afghanistan.

NATO and the United States are set to boost their overall number of troops in Afghanistan to 150,000 by August as part of a last-ditch strategy to reverse the Taliban momentum and allow American forces to start withdrawing next year.

4 US-led troops killed in Afghanistan

Mon, 17 May 2010 12:19:47 GMT

The war in Afghanistan has claimed the lives of four US-led soldiers amid an upsurge in attacks against the foreign forces in the country.

The soldiers were killed in a series of attacks in the past 48 hours.

In an incident in the northwestern city of Herat, a bomb hit a convoy of US-led troops, which, according to Italy's Foreign Ministry, killed two Italian soldiers and critically wounded two others.

NATO had earlier confirmed that two other soldiers were killed in the restive south.

The latest fatalities raise the death toll of foreign troops to 200 in 2010.

According to official figures, 2009 was the deadliest year for foreign troops with a total of 520 US-led soldiers killed in action.

The US-led the invasion of Afghanistan was launched with the official objective of curbing militancy and bringing peace and stability to the country.

Nine years on, however, civilians are paying the price while insurgency is on the rise.

Foreigners among 14 held in Kabul

Khawaja Basir Ahmad - May 18, 2010 - 16:20

KABUL (PAN): Kabul police arrested more than a dozen alleged militants -- five of them Pakistani nationals -- on the outskirts of the Kabul on Monday, a week after Taliban fighters warned of launching multiple attacks on major Afghan cities.

Afghan security forces, backed by coalition troops, made the arrests in the Musayee district, southeast of the central capital, Kabul Crime Branch Chief Gen. Abdul Ghaffar Syedzada said on Tuesday.

Two AK-47 assault rifles, some explosives, ammunition, a car and a motorbike were seized in the operation, he added.

The news of arrests came the day a Taliban suicide bomber killed six foreign soldiers and 12 Afghan civilians in western Kabul.

Musayee district chief, Qazi Sulaiman, said local authorities were not aware of the operation. He asked for coordination with district officials ahead of such military moves.

8 Americans killed in Kabul blast

Tue, 18 May 2010 08:12:26 GMT

Eight Americans are reportedly among those killed in a car bomb attack against the US-founded Counterinsurgency Academy in the Afghan capital Kabul.

An Afghan army officer on the scene said 22 people, including eight Americans, were killed in the car bomb attack against a NATO convoy, according to a DPA report.

The unnamed officer added that three US vehicles were destroyed in the incident.

The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

"We claim responsibility. The attack, which was a suicide car bomb, was carried out by one of our mujahedeen," Zabihullah Mujahed, a Taliban spokesman told AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location.

He said the attack occurred at 8:15 a.m., and that the attacker was able to "destroy five foreign vehicles and damage one more."

Kabul Deputy Police Chief Mohammad Khalil Dastyar said five of the dead and five of the wounded were foreigners. He did not provide nationalities.

Another senior Afghan police officer, meanwhile, said seven foreign troops - five American and two Canadian - died in the attack.

The Interior Ministry, on the other hand, said 12 people died, all of which were civilians, and 47 other civilians were wounded. It said most of the casualties came from a bus that was hit in the explosion.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai described the attack as "heartbreaking".

"We are condemning the attack in the strongest terms. I hope Afghanistan will soon get out of this suffering, God willing," he said on Afghan television.

Meanwhile, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) refused to confirm the casualties.

"ISAF Joint Command is working with our Afghan partners to assess an explosion that took place this morning on the Darulaman Road in Kabul," a NATO statement said.

The attack occurred as Afghan President Hamid Karzai was scheduled to hold a press conference after his recent visit to the United States.

ISAF said police had cordoned off the area and an investigation would be conducted.

2 US-led forces killed in Afghanistan

Wed, 19 May 2010 09:58:14 GMT

At least two foreign soldiers have been killed in a roadside bomb blast in the south of Afghanistan amid an upsurge in attacks against US-led forces.

According to a Press TV correspondent, the US-led forces confirmed in a statement that the two soldiers were killed on Tuesday but did not disclose their nationalities or the exact location of the incident.

Most of the foreign forces based in southern Afghanistan are American, British or Canadian.

Earlier, a Taliban spokesman claimed that ten foreign troops have been killed in clashes with militants. He said the fighting took place in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.

The deaths bring the number of US-led forces killed in Afghanistan so far this year to 210. The rising foreign death toll in the war-torn country has slashed support for the Afghan war in both the US and Europe.

NATO's Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan Mark Sedwill believes the US-led foreign forces in Afghanistan are likely to face record high casualties in 2010.

Thus far, 2009 has been the deadliest year for foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan, with a total of 520 US-led soldiers killed.

The United States plans to deploy 30,000 extra troops in Afghanistan by August.

Wolesi Jirga issues ultimatum to Karzai

Abasin Zaheer - May 19, 2010 - 20:28

KABUL (PAN): The Wolesi Jirga set a Saturday deadline for President Hamid Karzai to nominate the remaining cabinet ministers or warned they would go on strike.

Wednesday's ultimatum is the second time in less than a month that the lawmaking body has set a deadline for the introduction of the remaining 11 out of 25 cabinet ministers.

Speaker of the House, Mohammad Yunus Qanuni, said if the government failed to meet their demand by Saturday, they would not debate any bill.

MPs would attend sessions but would not put any legal instrument on the agenda for discussion, he said.

But a presidential spokesman termed the deadline "too short". Siyamak Herawi said the president was trying to find competent and talented people for the post.

Abdul Kabeer Ranjbar, an MP from Kabul, said the president was purposefully delaying naming new ministers until after a new parliament is elected.

Elections for the 249 seats in the lower house are expected to be held on September 18.

"The government fears the new ministers will be rejected by the parliament," Ranjbar said.

The Wolesi Jirga has approved only 14 out of the 41 ministers nominated by Karzai since his election in August last year.

British troops accused of helping Taliban

Zainullah Stanikzai - May 20, 2010 - 21:30

LASHKARGAH (PAN): The chief of Musa Qala, one of the most troubled districts in southern Helmand province, on Thursday accused British forces of assisting Taliban fighters.

Mullah Abdus Salam, the district chief, who once served as a Taliban leader, told a press conference in Lashkargah, provincial capital, that he would never have switched sides if he knew foreign troops would only be fighting for their own interests.

"Today I am going to declare that British are helping the Taliban and that they are involved in the humiliation of government officials," Salam said.

Over the past two years, British troops under NATO's command had limited their area of control so that the Taliban held sway in most of the district.

The official said he lost 30 men during an attack by insurgents on his residence in the Shahkarez area three months ago. The clash lasted three days and eventually the Taliban overran the area, but the British troops did not help, he said.

Salam said he did not have respect for either the Taliban or the Afghan government. "I don't see something which could help pave the way for peace talks," he said.

He said he was one of the top Taliban during their regime and had served as Uruzgan governor. He said he joined the government to help end the fighting and try to improve the plight of people in the region.

"Unfortunately, I did not know that foreign troops would come here for their own specific goals," he said.

He accused foreign troops and the government of double standards and said he would discourage other Taliban leaders from joining the government.

He said foreign troops had only managed to bring stability to Marja, Nad Ali and Nawa districts in the province, where reconstruction work had begun, but four key districts of the Alizai tribes including Baghran, Kajaki, Musa Qala and Nawzad remained neglected.

The district chief said work needed to be done on those other areas.

He also alleged that the Taliban leader Mullah Omar and other top figures were under the control of Pakistan and foreigners and they were being treated like prisoners.

MP urges NATO troops to leave Kabul

Muhammad Jawad Sharifzada - May 20, 2010 - 18:15

KABUL (PAN): A former presidential candidate, Ramazan Bashardost, Thursday asked NATO troops to leave Kabul to avoid civilian casualties.

The call comes two days after a suicide bomber rammed his explosives-laden vehicle into a convoy of NATO forces in Kabul, killing 12 civilians and six foreign soldiers.

Bashardost, also an MP from Kabul, urged foreign forces not to commute in the capital city before 9pm, when crowds in the city start thinning out.

Addressing a press conference here, Bashardost lashed out at Afghan security officials for being unable to secure even the capital. He asked security and intelligence bosses to step down.

The call from the MP -- popular with the Hazara minority -- comes amid a land dispute between Hazaras and nomadic Kuchis in the Maidan Wardak province.

The ethnic conflict in Behsud and Dimirdad districts should not be stoked, he stressed, accusing "certain circles" of exploiting the situation to promote their vested interests.

It is for the third year in a row that deadly fighting has erupted between the two communities over grazing land in the central province. So far, the government has not been able to find a permanent solution to the problem.

'50 US-led troops, Afghan soliders killed'

Fri, 21 May 2010 05:56:46 GMT

The Taliban claim its militants have launched a wide-scale attack on a military camp in Afghanistan, killing at least 50 US-led and Afghan soldiers.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the militants attacked the base in Urgan in the southeastern province of Paktika on Friday, Press TV learned.

The assailants raided the base using a truck containing 7000 kilograms of explosives. They detonated the truck after having entered the military camp, the spokesman explained.

The armed militants, once inside, engaged the servicemen inside the base in a battle, Mujahid added.

The fighting is still going on between the militants and troops inside the base.

Earlier on Wednesday, Taliban militants targeted the US-run Bagram airbase with rockets, small arms and grenades, killing at least 60 US-led forces.

Wednesday's attack came after attacks on Tuesday left eight foreign soldiers dead.

7 US-led troops killed in Afghanistan

Fri, 21 May 2010 07:26:47 GMT

At least seven German soldiers have been killed in northeastern part of Afghanistan, increasing the number of foreign troops killed in the country, the Taliban claim.

Taliban militants killed the soldiers in an attack in Badakhshan province, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on Friday.

He also noted that a US military base has been targeted by militants in eastern Afghanistan. There have been no reports of any casualties in the attack.

In another incident in the country, the Taliban claimed that it assaulted a military base in southeast, killing at least 50 US-led and Afghan soldiers.

The United States and its western allies plan to increase the number of their troops stationed in the war-ravaged country to 150,000 by August.

Germany has nearly 5,000 troops with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. Last month, seven other German soldiers were killed in battles with Taliban forces.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Norwegian PM makes surprise visit to Kabul

Javed Hamim Kakar - May 17, 2010 - 14:21

KABUL (PAN): Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, making an unannounced visit to Kabul, met President Hamid Karzai on Monday.

Karzai warmly welcomed his guest and held hour-long talks with Stoltenberg at the Presidential Palace, an official source told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Counterinsurgency and anti-corruption efforts were on the top of the agenda for the meeting, according to official, who did not want to be named.

Norway has 470 soldiers operating within the framework of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the northern province of Faryab.

As many as five Norwegian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan so far.

Afghanistan on top of OSCE agenda: EU

Frozan Rahmani - May 17, 2010 - 11:10

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan would be on top of the agenda for the annual meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana, the European Union special representative said on Monday.

Vygaudas Ushackas made the remarks at a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Zalmai Rasul and Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev in Kabul.

Afghanistan's stability was in the interest of the region, said Saudabayev, currently on his second visit to Kabul. His first trip to Afghanistan was in 2009.

Kazakh diplomats believe Afghanistan's stabilisation could be one of the main subjects on the summits agenda. Diplomats in Vienna from 56 member nations are working on a possible draft agenda for the proposed summit.

Chairing the OSCE this year, Astana seeks to strengthen the organisation's assistance to Afghanistan. Kazakhstan has so far provided some four million dollars in humanitarian assistance to the country.

Rasul briefed the visiting minister on President Hamid Karzai's recent four-day visit to Washington for talks with his US counterpart Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other US officials.

At talks in Washington Karzai underlined the need for greater regional cooperation, Rasul said, urging the minister to attend the upcoming Kabul Conference, scheduled for July 20.

Later in the day, the visiting minister also held talks with President Hamid Karzai at the Presidential Palace in Kabul. He invited the Afghan leader to the OSCE summit to be held in the Kazakhstan capital later this year.

Saudabayev assured Karzai Afghan students would start getting admissions to Kazakhstan's universities next week, the palace said in a statement.

Under a 2009 agreement, Kazakhstan agreed to allocate 50 million dollars to educate 1,000 Afghans at its universities over the next several years, starting in 2010. The president, accepting the invitation to attend the OSCE meeting, thanked Astana for extending cooperation to his country. He also called for expanding economic ties between the two states. Also on Monday, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan signed an inter-governmental agreement on jointly combating the menace of drug trafficking. Rasul and Saudabayev inked the agreement on behalf of their respective countries after a formal meeting.

A Road Map to Peace in Afghanistan

Der Spiegel

05/17/2010

By Susanne Koelbl and Sohail Nasir

Karzai's Plan to Negotiate with the Taliban

Last week, Afghan President Hamid Karzai traveled to Washington to seek support from Barack Obama for his plan to reconcile with the Taliban and forge a path to peace in the war-torn country. SPIEGEL has obtained a copy of his secret peace plan, which foresees reintegrating Taliban fighters into Afghan society.

The cell was just 2 meters by 2.5 meters (6.5 feet by 8.2 feet) in size. There were no windows and rock music was piped in around the clock. The prisoner, Ghairat Baheer, the son-in-law of the legendary insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, sat half-naked on a concrete floor. It was winter and he was only fed once every 48 hours. Not all of the inmates at the "salt pit," as the CIA agents called their secret prison near the Kabul airport, survived the ordeal.

Baheer is one of Hekmatyar's closest confidantes. US special forces captured him in October 2002, but Afghan President Hamid Karzai personally intervened to ensure his release. After six months in the "salt pit" and a further five-and-a-half years at the US military prison camp at Baghram, Karzai's workers pulled him out of the jail and drove him to dinner at the president's palace in Kabul. It was the start of rapprochement talks with Hekmatyar's radical Islamist group Hezb-i-Islami, which the president is continuing to conduct now.

During his visit to Washington last week, Karzai wanted to get the green light from US President Barack Obama for his negotiations with insurgency leaders. He took with him a detailed, ambitious road map for ending the war against the Taliban. SPIEGEL has obtained a copy of the 36-page document.

Safe Passage into Exile

In it, top Taliban leaders are offered safe passage into exile and their names would be dropped from the United Nations sanction list if they sever their "links with al-Qaida." Fighters who lay down their weapons will not face prosecution and will be protected from persecution. With the help of comprehensive job programs, the former Taliban militants are to be trained to work developing the national highway system and on infrastructure projects, or as members of a civil emergency response unit to provide relief in natural disasters such as floods or landslides. "The reintegration packages and approaches are designed in such a manner to ensure successful reintegration of different ranks of ex-combatants, and to provide local solutions to local problems," the document reads.

But instead of negotiating directly with the leaders, the Americans prefer, at least for the time being, to "reintegrate" only foot soldiers and local leaders. They prefer to negotiate with Taliban chiefs from a position of strength that would be achieved, at the soonest, after the summer offensive in Kandahar.

The Americans and the Karzai administration both agree widely that the three most important Pashtun groups, namely followers of Mullah Omar, Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani, who were absent at the first international conference on the future of Afghanistan that took place in Germany in December 2001, must also be given a place in Afghan society in the future. But it remains entirely unclear how that can be accomplished without causing the collapse of the government in Kabul or triggering a civil war with the country's Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara minorities.

"We are weary of war and division, and we have shed too many tears," the document reads. "Out of division let us build unity."

'Puppet Karzai Must Go'

"The Afghan Taliban no longer insist to govern, but they want to negotiate directly with the Americans. The puppet Karzai must go, the Western military must withdraw, sharia must be implemented and a shura with representatives from across the country led by Mullah Omar must be convened," Hamid Gul, the former head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) told SPIEGEL, describing the prerequisites for a cease-fire.

Gul, 73, is a dyed-in-the-wool Islamist. During the 1990s, he was one of the men who helped build the Taliban -- and he is still close to them. And right up to today, Pakistan secretly considers the Taliban to be its fifth column in Afghanistan. The countries which have up until now supported the Taliban's enemies, the so-called Northern Alliance mainly comprised of Tajiks and Uzbeks, are following similar strategies: Iran, India and the bordering former Soviet republics.

Nevertheless, a delegation of Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami, led by his son-in-law Baheer, made an initial peace offer to Karzai in March. In a 15-page program, which SPIEGEL has also obtained, the group calls for the "complete withdrawal" of Western troops within six months, starting in July 2010, as well as new elections and the release of all political

prisoners.

In exchange, they are offering a cease-fire and the breaking-off of ties with al-Qaida fighters. Now the possibility is being discussed of Hekmatyar going into exile in Saudi Arabia for a few years and Baheer being appointed as a minister in Karzai's cabinet.

EU backs peace jirga, elections

Pajhwok Report - May 19, 2010 - 19:37

KABUL (PAN): European Union Special Representative Ambassador Vygaudas Usackas presented his credentials as the Head of the European Union Delegation to Afghanistan to President Hamed Karzai on Wednesday.

After the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, Vygaudas Usackas is now authorised to represent, coordinate and negotiate on behalf of the EU in Afghanistan, the EU said in a press statement.

The ambassador and the president reviewed preparations for the National Consultative Peace Jirga, slated for May 29, the July 20 Kabul Conference and the parliamentary elections, set for September 18.

Usackas reiterated EUs long-term commitment to enabling and empowering the Afghan people to bring peace and prosperity to their country. He said the peace jirga would be an Afghan-led process, and that the EU would support it both politically and morally.

The EU itself was possibly the best example of reconciliation in the 20th Century, he said, hoping the upcoming Wolesi Jirga elections would be held in a transparent and inclusive manner.

"I look forward to working closely with the president, his government and the Afghan people to promote stability and sustainable economic development in Afghanistan," the ambassador said.

Second Afghan peace meeting in Maldives: government

AFP

05/20/2010

COLOMBO – Afghan government envoys and Taliban representatives will hold a second meeting at a holiday resort in the Maldives later Thursday, a spokesman for the president of the Indian Ocean nation said.

Envoys for Afghan President Hamid Karzai were due to meet with several members closely connected to the Taliban to discuss national reconciliation, Maldivian President Mohammed Nasheed's office said.

Nasheed's press secretary Mohamed Zuhair said his government is not involved with the

discussions.

"Afghanistan's stability affects the peace and security of our region. The government of Maldives supports efforts to bring a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan," Zuhair said in an email to AFP in Sri Lankan capital Colombo.

He said there was no legal impediment for the men linked to the Taliban to enter the Maldives as they had valid passports and their names were not on United Nations or international travel blacklists.

"Maldivian security and intelligence agencies have been fully informed of the talks," Zuhair said, without giving further details.

The Maldives hosted a similar peace meeting in January ahead of the London conference of world powers to discuss Afghanistan.

During the London conference, global leaders agreed that Afghanistan should take increasing control for its own security from the end of this year and backed Karzai's plan to reward moderate Taliban who disarm.

The key plank of Karzai's proposals, welcomed by the London conference, was an internationally-backed fund to persuade moderate Taliban fighters to lay down their weapons in return for jobs.

However, Taliban described the conference as a waste of time.

Afghanistan accuses neighbouring Pakistan of sheltering Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants who have been fighting Karzai's government and attacking the international forces that support it.

Taliban deny attending peace talks with Afghan government in Maldives

The Associated Press
05/21/2010

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban say they are not attending peace talks with the Afghan government in the Maldives.

Maldives spokesman Mohamed Zuhair said Thursday that representatives of the Afghan government and Taliban members were meeting in the island nation this week to discuss an end to the nearly nine-year war.

A Taliban statement e-mailed to reporters Friday said those at the talks claiming to be from the Taliban are no longer active members and have "surrendered" to President

Hamid Karzai's government.

The talks were organized by Hizb-i-Islami, a Taliban-allied insurgent group which began negotiations with the government last March. The government says it has no representative at the talks either although lawmakers are attending unofficially.

US to command UK troops in Helmand

Fri, 21 May 2010 21:16:55 GMT

British troops based in southern Afghanistan are to come under US command, in a major military command shake-up among Western forces occupying the country.

The change, which, according to British military sources, will immediately affect 8,000 UK troops in the violence-ridden Helmand Province, was announced by Britain's Maj. Gen. Gordon Messenger in a London news conference on Friday, BBC reported.

While the British Prime Minister David Cameron has said in a Berlin news conference that the move "does not make sense," Gen. Messenger insisted in London that the changes made "complete sense" and were "welcomed," according to the report by the state-sponsored news network.

UK military sources have also attributed the change to growing British casualties in Helmand due to insufficient force levels.

Helmand is considered Afghanistan's most dangerous province for the occupation forces as dozens of foreign troops have lost their lives in Taliban attacks over recent months.

Britain has about 10,000 troops in Afghanistan, mostly based in the south of the country. The number of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan since 2001 stands at 286.

German president in Afghanistan

Fri, 21 May 2010 22:08:12 GMT

German President Horst Koehler has made a surprise visit to Afghanistan to meet with German soldiers in an effort to boost their morals amid climbing casualty figures.

On the first visit to Afghanistan since his re-election in 2009, the German president visited the Bundeswehr field base in the northern region of Mazar-i-Sharif, where most German troops are based, AFP reported.

Speaking to German troops on Friday, Koehler stressed that "I will do everything that I can, so that what you have achieved here will be appreciated in Germany,"

"Your mission is tough and dangerous," he noted.

The visit came as seven other German soldiers were killed last month in battles with Taliban forces.

Germany has more than 4,500 military forces in Afghanistan as part of the US-led International Security Assistance Force.

Amid growing public resentment towards the prolonged mission in Afghanistan, the German parliament, the Bundestag, voted in February for extension of Germany's military mission in Afghanistan and the deployment of additional 859 troops.

Social Headlines

Flash floods hit Badakhshan

Jafar Tayar - May 17, 2010 - 20:33

FAIZABD (PAN): A man was killed, four people were injured and 100 houses destroyed by flash floods in the northeastern province of Badakhshan on Sunday night, an official said on Monday.

Fifty orchards and 250 acres of farmland were damaged by the flooding, said the regional head of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA).

A power station, 16 canals and a bridge connecting Joram and Khash districts were also ruined, Sanaullah told Pajhwok Afghan News. The affected people would be provided aid once the losses were surveyed, he promised.

Forty shops were wiped out in the Jozon Valley of the remote province, said Dr. Syed Nasir, director of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS).

Abdul Rauf, 55, a resident of the Joram district, said he left before floodwaters gushed into his home. Currently living in a relative's house, he lost his house, farmland and an orchard.

He asked the Afghan government and humanitarian organisations to help the victims rebuild their lives.

Recent floods in 14 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces killed 159 people and wounded 273 others, with 14 going missing, according to Ahmad Shakib Hamraz, an official of ANDMA.

He said the floods had also washed away some 86,000 acres of farmland, 5,000 houses, hundreds of bridges, power dams and a large number of animals.

Plane with dozens aboard crashes in Salang

Zubair Babakarkhel - May 17, 2010 - 17:27

KABUL (PAN): A passenger plane with 36 people on board, including foreigners, is believed to have crashed in the mountainous Salang Pass, north of the capital Kabul, on Monday, officials said.

The Pamir Airways plane, bound for Kabul, went missing after it took off from the Kunduz airfield at 8:30am.

An official at Pamir confirmed the plane had gone missing in the Salang mountains.

He said they had launched a search and rescue mission.

Earlier, Kunduz Governor Muhammad Omar said the aircraft was expected to land at Kabul International Airport 40 minutes after take-off, but did not.

The governor said foreigners were among the passengers on the ill-fated flight. Several international nongovernmental groups have projects in northern Kunduz province.

NATO-led forces said they have been "assisting in the search for the missing aircraft and its passengers", adding the bad weather has made the rescue mission difficult. "It is still unknown where the plane has landed, a situation we are very concerned about," Omar said. An official at Kabul Airport, who did not want to be named, confirmed the plane had not arrived at the airport. Pamir launched its Kabul-Kunduz route last year.

Phone services for all in five years: Sangin

Zainab Muhammadi - May 18, 2010 - 19:14

KABUL (PAN): All Afghans would have access to telecommunication services and 50 percent would enjoy the Internet facility over the next five years, an acting minister said on Tuesday.

At a function marking World Telecommunication Day in Kabul, Amirzai Sangin said 85 percent of Afghans had access to telecommunication services and around 13.5 million had cell phone sets.

Sangin promised telephone services would be extended to remote areas by his ministry, which currently had a budget of 45 million US dollars.

He said \$1.5 billion had been invested in the telecommunication and information technology sector over the last eight years, paving the way for the creation of 100,000 job opportunities.

Following the launch of a fibre optic project, Internet rates had considerably come down, the minister added. "The internet price has decreased 80 percent since the initiation of the project, which provides high-speed Internet services to a million Afghans.

Last year, the Telecommunications Ministry earned about 130 million US dollars, or 20 percent of the overall national revenue, Amirzai Sangin said.

The chief executive of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), Muhammad Qurban Haqjo, said the telecommunication sector had been very successful, offering a lot of job opportunities.

Four private telecom companies -- Afghan Wireless Communication Company, Roshan, MTN and Etisalat -- are presently operating in Afghanistan. Additionally, there are around 30 private Internet service providers in the country.

Economic Headlines

Japanese govt promises \$1 billion for railway

Pajhwok

05/17/2010

By Zabihullah Ehsas

MAZAR-I-SHARIF - Japan has pledged \$1 billion to construct a railway in Afghanistan, the Finance Minister Omar Zakhelal said on Thursday.

Over the past five years, Japan had donated \$5 billion for the development of various sectors, but Zakhelal said this time Afghanistan had specifically requested money for the railway, which would be built from Balkh to western Herat province.

Zakhelal had just returned from Uzbekistan, a country which neighbours Balkh province, where he attended the annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank.

The railway which would link up Afghanistan to Central Asia would be a great economic boom for the region, he said.

Zakhelal also said he was optimistic about his ministry's efforts to collect revenue.

"If the revenue of our country was collected in a disciplined way, we will annually have \$2.5 to 3 billion," he said.

Last year's revenue was just \$1.3 billion, he said, after which about 150 employees were removed due to allegations of corruption.

He said that a dedicated phone number had been circulated among residents who wished to complain and that had been successful.