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The New York Times

Afghan Officer Sought in Killing of 9 Colleagues

By Rod Nordland

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KABUL — An Afghan policeman on late-night guard duty at a checkpoint allowed Taliban insurgents to enter and kill nine other policemen as they slept in their beds, an official in the Ministry of Interior said on Thursday.

The guard, who escaped, was a member of the Afghan Local Police, a unit trained and vetted by American Special Operations troops, according to Brig. Gen. Ali Shah Ahmadzai, who is in charge of the local police program at the Ministry of Interior.

The episode occurred in Oruzgan Province, in southern Afghanistan, around 2 a.m. Wednesday, he said.

General Ahmadzai said he had information indicating the guard was a Taliban infiltrator, though he declined to elaborate, and added that the police were seeking the man.

“He helped coordinate the attack and let the Taliban in, and they killed them while they were in dreamland,” General Ahmadzai said.

The episode is yet more evidence of the challenges the United States faces as it prepares Afghans to take over their own security ahead of the end of NATO’s combat mission in 2014. American and other coalition forces are also being killed in increasing numbers by Afghans in uniform.

Many of those attacks are motivated by animosity between the supposedly allied forces, according to American and Afghan officers, but infiltrators have also been suspected in some of the cases.

The Afghan Local Police program is one way of passing more control to Afghans, and it is controversial. It seeks to take groups of armed men, some of them former Taliban sympathizers, and incorporate them into government service protecting their own communities.

Human rights critics have complained that the program often empowers abusive local militias, but the American military says its training of the police and background checks minimize such risks.

General Ahmadzai said the Oruzgan episode was not typical and called the local police program a success, with 12,041 local officers working in 28 provinces. He said the recruits get three weeks of American Special Operations training and are paid about \$190 a month, substantially less than regular policemen.

According to NATO data cited by the Brookings Institution, 830 police officers were killed in the first half of last year, more than double the number of either Afghan soldiers or coalition troops.

Sayed Hamdard Maruf, a spokesman for the provincial governor in Oruzgan, also confirmed the nine police killings, but said they came after Taliban insurgents stormed the checkpoint and engaged the officers in an hourlong firefight. A 10th officer is missing, he said.

The victims were local policemen stationed at a checkpoint in the Char Chino district of Oruzgan Province, General Ahmadzai said.

Elsewhere, the police were targeted by a bomb in the eastern city of Jalalabad, the fourth bomb attack there in a week, and NATO warplanes killed three people caught trying to plant a roadside bomb in the eastern city of Khost.

In Jalalabad, the bomb was planted in the median strip of a city street and went off around 7:30 a.m. Thursday, wounding 11 people. Seven of the victims were policemen, but the other wounded included a child who was in critical condition, according to Ahmad Zia Abdulzay, a spokesman for the Nangarhar Province governor.

In Khost, the police chief, Sardar Mohammad Zazi, said that the NATO airstrike killed three people caught in the act of planting a bomb in the Mahdikhail area; two other insurgents managed to flee.

Taimoor Shah contributed reporting from Kandahar, Afghanistan, Farouk Jan Mangal from Khost and an Afghan employee of The New York Times from Kabul.