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Taliban Leader Urges Insurgents to Cut Civilian Deaths

By Rob Taylor

Aug 17, 2012

Reclusive Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar has urged insurgent fighters, who he said had successfully infiltrated the security forces, to avoid civilian deaths after a swathe of suicide bombings this week killed 63 people.

In a message to the Afghan people ahead of the Eid al-Fitr festival ending the holy Ramadan fasting month, the one-eyed leader said insurgents should "employ tactics that do not cause harm to life and property of the common countrymen".

"The instructions given to you for the protection of civilian losses are, on you, a religious obligation to observe," Mullah Omar said in a seven-page statement released late on Thursday and translated into five languages.

"Any violation readily incurs loss in this world and in the world to come. Therefore, I urge you emphatically to be careful about the civilian losses and take this on yourselves as an explicit responsibility."

Amid mounting anger among Afghans over civilian deaths caused by both the insurgency and NATO, the statement is probably aimed at presenting a more moderate face for the Taliban as

efforts continue to re-start peace talks which could foster a power-sharing deal for the insurgency.

A recent UN report said the Taliban were responsible for 80 percent of civilian casualties.

Islamist suicide bombers on Tuesday targeted markets crowded with Ramadan shoppers and a provincial hospital in Afghanistan, killing scores and wounding 148 in the worst attack since a series of sectarian bombings against Shi'ite Muslims late last year.

The Interior Ministry said the Taliban had not let up on attacks during Ramadan and security forces had stepped up security ahead of the three-day Eid al-Fitr festival.

But Mullah Omar, who is thought to be sheltering in Pakistan despite government denials there, boasted that his forces had successfully infiltrated Afghan security forces to mount rogue shootings of foreign troops that have killed 39 soldiers in 30 attacks this year.

A police militia member, in his late 60s, on Friday turned his guns on U.S. military trainers in western Farah province, killing two before he was shot dead.

"Mujahideen have cleverly infiltrated in the ranks of the enemy according to the plan given to them last year," he said. "They are able to (safely) enter bases, offices and intelligence centres of the enemy. Then, they easily carry out decisive and coordinated attacks."

So called green-on-blue shootings, which NATO-led forces recently began calling "insider incidents", have so far this year have accounted for 13 percent of foreign troop deaths, according to the Long War Journal website.

The coalition has said most were the result of stress or personal disagreements between NATO mentors and Afghan police or soldiers, rather than insurgent infiltration.

But U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta acknowledged this week that the Taliban had been behind at least some of them, but said they did not "reflect any kind of broad pattern".

"The reality is, the Taliban has not been able to regain any territory lost, so they're resorting to these kinds of attacks to create havoc," Panetta told reporters.

Mullah Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban, urged police, soldiers and government workers to "abandon support of the invaders" and back the Taliban ahead of the departure of most Western combat troops in 2014.

The Taliban, who call themselves the Islamic Emirate, had set up a shadow government organisation called the "Department of Call and Guidance, Luring and Integration", he said, countering Afghan government efforts to reintegrate former insurgents.

The new department has set up branches across the country to "provide you facilities to leave the ranks of the enemy and join the Mujahideen", he said, although the Taliban frequently exaggerate their reach and military successes.

The coming withdrawal has deeply worried many Afghans, with property prices slumping in Kabul and some businesses preparing to flee the country.