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Political

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NATO: 5 Americans killed in southern Afghanistan

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Five U.S. service members were killed on Saturday by a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan, the latest deadly attack against international troops since the Taliban announced the start of their spring offensive this week.

The coalition did not disclose the location of the blast, however, Javeed Faisal, a spokesman for the governor of Kandahar province, said the coalition patrol hit the roadside bomb in Maiwand district of the province, the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban.

Capt. Luca Carniel, a public affairs official for the U.S.-led coalition in Kabul, confirmed that all five were Americans. With the deaths, 47 members of the coalition have been killed so far this year — including 32 Americans.

The renewed violence came as Afghan President Hamid Karzai acknowledged that his government has been receiving funds from CIA for more than a decade as part of regular monthly assistance from the U.S. government.

Karzai told reporters at a news conference that the CIA's station chief in Kabul has assured him that regular funding the U.S. intelligence agency gives his government will not be cut off.

Karzai had earlier confirmed that his government had received such payments following a story published in The New York Times that said the CIA had given the Afghan National Security Council tens of millions of dollars in monthly payments delivered in suitcases, backpacks and plastic shopping bags.

"The help and assistance from the U.S. is for our National Directorate of Security. That is state-to-state, government-to-government regular assistance," Karzai said. "So that is a government institution helping another government institution, and we appreciate all this assistance and help, all this assistance is very useful for us. We have spent it in different areas (and) solved lots of our problems."

Karzai would not say how much assistance his government had received because it was being used for intelligence work, but acknowledged it was in cash and that "all the money which we have spent, receipts have been sent back to the intelligence service of the United States monthly."

He claimed that much of the money was used to care for wounded employees of the NDS, Afghanistan's intelligence service, and operational expenses.

"It is an official government deal between the two governments. This is happening all over the world — such deals between governments — and in Afghanistan, which is a needy country, these sorts of deals are very important and useful," he said.

Karzai confirmed the payments during a news conference earlier this week in Helsinki, Finland. After Karzai's confirmation in Europe, White House spokesman Jay Carney declined to comment on the newspaper report, referring questions to the CIA, which declined to comment on Saturday.

In his gathering with reporters at the presidential palace, Karzai said he had met earlier in the day with the Kabul station chief of the CIA. "I told him because of all these rumors in the media, please do not cut all this money because we really need it," Karzai said. "We want to continue this sort of assistance and he promised that they are not going to cut this money."

He added that negotiations for a new bilateral security agreement with the United States had been delayed because of conditions that Afghanistan had placed on such a deal. The security agreement is to govern a U.S. military presence after 2014 when nearly all foreign combat troops are to have finished their withdrawal from Afghanistan. The talks, which started in late 2012, are set to last up to a year.

President Barack Obama has not said how many troops will remain, although there have been estimates ranging from 8,000 to 12,000. It is unlikely such an announcement will be made until the security agreement is signed. Those troops would help train Afghan forces and also carry out operations against al-Qaida and other militant groups.

Karzai said Afghanistan was ready to sign a deal as long as the American government in exchange for being able to stay on bases in the country agrees to terms of Afghan security, funding assistance and help with training and equipping Afghan security forces. It is thought that the contentious issue of providing U.S. troops immunity from Afghan law is a low priority for the Afghan government in the negotiations.

The Afghan government has not said how much rent it would want for three or four U.S. bases, but it is believed to be in the billions. Afghanistan is also thought to be seeking security guarantees to protect its porous borders, including the frontier with Pakistan that is the main infiltration route for insurgents who retain sanctuary in Pakistan's lawless tribal areas.

"The position of the United States about the security of Afghanistan and relations with neighboring countries, or whatever attacks are happening from the neighboring countries to Afghanistan, should be very clear," Karzai said. "So we are trying our best that the security of Afghanistan should be guaranteed, peace in Afghanistan should be guaranteed, a strengthening of the Afghan security forces should be guaranteed, as well the economy of Afghanistan should be guaranteed."

It was unclear how Karzai expected the United States or any of its allies to guarantee Afghanistan's borders against attack.

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been severely strained in recent months, especially over the delicate issue of the demarcation of their border.

Afghan and Pakistani forces engaged in a nearly five-hour exchange of fire last Tuesday along Afghanistan's eastern border. One Afghan border policeman was killed and two Pakistani soldiers were wounded in the fighting in eastern Nangarhar province.

The main problem is that Afghanistan does not recognize the disputed Durand Line, the 19th century demarcation between present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, while Pakistan does.

"Since the Durand line has been imposed on Afghanistan, it was not acceptable to the Afghans and we cannot accept the Durand line," Karzai said. "No government in Afghanistan will accept the Durand Line."

Violence has spiked in recent weeks as temperatures have risen.

The death of the five Americans on Saturday was the second deadly attack since the insurgency announced their new offensive on April 27. Three British soldiers were killed on April 30 when their armored vehicle hit a bomb in southern Helmand province.