

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

AP News

Taliban: Kandahar bombings a 'warning' to NATO

NOOR KHAN and KAY JOHNSON

Mar 14, 2010 20:27 EDT

The Taliban have called their deadly bomb attacks on the southern city of Kandahar a warning to NATO's top general that the insurgents are ready for the war's next major offensive in their heartland.

The series of bombings Saturday night demolished buildings and killed dozens — including 10 people at a wedding — and prompted the provincial governor to plead for more security in the area. Fearful residents said they had no confidence that either government or foreign troops can protect them.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi said Sunday that the attacks proved the insurgents were still able to operate despite the buildup of Afghan and international troops in preparation for a push into Kandahar province.

A Taliban-linked Web site called the attacks in the south's largest city a "warning" to NATO's Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who has said coalition forces will target Kandahar later this year after driving the insurgents from a key stronghold in neighboring Helmand province.

"Gen. McChrystal has said that soon they will start their operations, and now we have already started our operations," Ahmadi told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "With all the preparations they have taken, still they are not able to stop us."

However, Ministry of Interior spokesman Zemer Bashary said the attacks failed to achieve their main objective, which was apparently to repeat the success of a 2008 suicide bombing at the city's prison gates that freed hundreds of criminals and suspected insurgents. Canadian troops had recently reinforced the lockup with cement block, so Saturday's blast did not break through and no inmates escaped this time.

"They wanted to free the prisoners ... but they failed in their mission," Bashary said.

The multiple explosions — there were at least five blasts, four of them suicide attacks — killed at least 35 people, according to the Ministry of Interior. Another 57 were wounded in the attacks, which hit the prison, police headquarters, a wedding hall next door and other areas on roads leading to the prison.

Kandahar provincial Gov. Tooryalai Wesa told reporters that he had asked the central government in Kabul for more Afghan troops to protect the city in the run-up to the expected offensive in the province, which is the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban. He also said he wants to coordinate with NATO forces to improve security.

Bashary said the government was considering Wesa's request.

Kandahar city, population 800,000, was the seat of government for the Taliban when it ruled Afghanistan, imposing its vision of Islamic theocracy for five years before being toppled by U.S.-backed forces in 2001.

The province of the same name is the insurgents' base, and militants control most villages surrounding the city. Residents said Sunday that Taliban can also operate freely in Kandahar city.

"They can do what they intend and want, and the government can't control the situation," said Javed Ahmad, 40, of Kandahar. "We don't feel secure in the presence of all the forces in Afghanistan, and it's terrible for us to live in this kind of situation. We don't feel safe even at home, and we can't walk around."

Among the dead were 13 policemen and 22 civilians, including six women and three children, the interior ministry said. Most of the casualties occurred at the police headquarters and at the wedding hall.

"Last night was like doomsday for all of Kandahar's people," said Mohammad Anwar, a 30-year-old shopkeeper, whose relative lost a son in the attacks. He said residents blamed the United States and international forces for not battling the militants strongly enough.

"It is difficult for us to bear this kind of situation anymore," Anwar said. "We don't know the aim of these people," he said, referring to the insurgents. "Are they trying to kill civilians or eliminate the system? The government is too weak to control these kind of attacks."

The offensive that U.S., NATO and Afghan forces are planning in Kandahar later this year is a follow-up to the ongoing military operation in Helmand province's Marjah district. The operation is the first test of McChrystal's strategy to rout insurgents from areas, set up new governance and rush in development aid in hopes of winning the loyalty of the residents.

Afghan National Police forces were the first to respond to Saturday's explosions and some Canadian troops later deployed to support them, Canadian military spokeswoman Capt. Cynthia LaRue said.

"The most important part here is to remember that ANP did a very good job and responded quickly," LaRue said of the police, which are traditionally one of Afghanistan's least-trusted institutions.

U.S. and Canadian troops have been working in Kandahar to build up a 2,000-strong local police force. The training has become a priority as international forces try to build trust in the Afghan government, which they hope will eventually be able to take over security.

The 2,800 Canadian troops who oversee operations in Kandahar city and the surrounding province are due to leave Afghanistan next year.

Another roadside bomb Sunday morning targeted a car carrying Pakistani construction workers south of Kandahar in the district of Dand, according to the governor. Four of the Pakistani workers and their Afghan driver were wounded.

In the western province of Herat on Sunday, 30 Taliban fighters handed over their weapons to a government peace commission. Dressed in traditional clothes and surrounded by guns and ammunition, the militants pledged not to fight the government anymore.

President Hamid Karzai has been promoting a plan to peel off lower-level Taliban fighters with promises of jobs, and he has called a peace conference for next month in the capital, inviting top insurgent leaders to negotiate. The Taliban has generally rejected any talks until foreign troops leave Afghanistan