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Taliban attack signals focus on infiltrating security forces

An attack in Kabul on Monday suggests that the Taliban have shifted from direct engagements with NATO and Afghan forces in favor of being able to infiltrate secure compounds and carry out suicide attacks.

By Tom A. Peter

April 18, 2011

A man dressed in an Afghan military uniform entered the Ministry of Defense in Kabul Monday and opened fire, killing at least two people and injuring seven. The incident – which preceded a press conference with the Afghan and French defense ministers – marks the third time in four days that an attacker dressed in an Afghan police or military uniform has infiltrated a secure compound and carried out a lethal attack.

The wave of killings has created speculation that insurgents may be shifting their focus away from direct engagements with NATO and Afghan forces and investing their resources in infiltrating [Afghanistan's](#) security forces so they can carry out complex suicide attacks.

“The enemy has entered every part of the government. They are everywhere, whether it’s government institutions or our villages. The enemy has even infiltrated the Afghan Army and police, working there for years and gaining trust, and now they can carry out attacks whenever they want,” says Noor al-Haq Olumi, a former Afghan Army general. “This year I believe it will be more violent because there will be more attacks like this one today.”

The recent wave of killings began on Friday, when a man dressed as a policeman entered the police headquarters in Kandahar city and detonated a suicide bomb that killed three people, [including the provincial police chief](#), and injured three others. The following day, five NATO soldiers were killed alongside four of their Afghan counterparts when a suicide bomber dressed in an Afghan military uniform detonated himself at a joint NATO-Afghan base in Laghman Province.

Following last summer's military offensive and an active campaign against the insurgency over the winter, NATO officials say they have killed or captured large number of insurgents.

Aside from increasing operations, NATO and Afghan forces also grew by 107,000 personnel last year. This growth has likely cut into insurgents' freedom of movement, making covert, suicide attacks more feasible and easier to carry out than large military-style assaults.

“If they carry out large attacks on the roads and in the mountains, they will lose many people. They are trying to reduce their casualties by carrying out small attacks in more high-profile places,” says Saleh Mohamed Saleh, a member of parliament from Kunar Province.

Mr. Saleh adds that the military has also not done enough to develop the means to collect intelligence about its own security forces, a necessity since a stated goal of the Taliban is to infiltrate security forces. Official military uniforms are also widely available for sale in markets throughout Afghanistan, making it easy for anyone to impersonate a soldier or policeman.

Despite potential losses, reconciliation talks and the announcement of the withdraw of foreign forces in 2014 have likely given insurgents a morale boost, says Malim Mir Wali, a former member of parliament from Helmand and a former Hezb-e-Islami member.

“From one side, the international community announced that they would leave, and from the other side when there are reconciliation talks, the Taliban tries to carry out attacks to show they are strong and winning so people should not negotiate,” he says.