

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

Counterpunch

Are the Taliban Winning?

By Gareth Porter

09/16/2011

Gen. David Petraeus wrote in his 2006 counterinsurgency manual that the U.S. command headquarters should establish a “narrative” for the counterinsurgency war – a simple storyline that provides a framework for understanding events, both for the population of the country in question and for international audiences.

But this week’s Taliban attacks on multiple targets in Kabul, including the U.S. Embassy and U.S.-NATO headquarters, are the latest and most spectacular of a long series of operations that have given the insurgents the upper hand in establishing the narrative of the war as perceived by the Afghan population.

Those attacks and other operations that generated headlines in 2010 have been aimed at convincing Afghans that the Taliban can strike any target in the country, because they have their own agents within the Afghan government’s military, police and administrative organs.

In the wake of the latest attacks, the Taliban war narrative achieved a new level of influence when a political opponent of President Hamid Karzai associated with a prominent Pashtun warlord charged that the Taliban could not have pulled off such a sophisticated set of coordinated attacks in the centre of the capital without help from within the Afghan security apparatus.

The Taliban have mounted three high-profile attacks in Kabul over the past three months involving suicide bombers and commandos with rocket-propelled grenades.

In late June, six suicide bombers attacked the Intercontinental Hotel, the favourite spot in the capital for westerners to hold conferences, which left the hotel in darkness for many hours.

And in August, the insurgents carried out a much more complex attack on the British Council, a semi-governmental agency involved in organising cultural events. The attack involving a suicide bombing at a key intersection in western Kabul followed an attack on the police checkpoint guarding the British Council, and a suicide car bomb that destroyed the wall around the Council and allowed the team of suicide attackers to enter the compound.

Attacks on the capital were supposed to have been made impossible by a “Ring of Steel” around the city. After the Taliban had carried out an attack in downtown Kabul in January 2010, the Afghan police, with funding and advice from the U.S. military, set up a system of 25 security checkpoints around the capital that is guarded by 800 officers of the Kabul City Police Command battalion.

Nevertheless, the insurgents were able to smuggle weapons, including rocket-propelled grenade launchers, through the cordon and sustained an all-day attack on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters.

For the first time, a prominent political figure in Kabul has charged that the attackers must indeed have had help from people within the Afghan government’s security apparatus.

Mohammed Naim Hamidzai Lalai, chairman of the Parliament’s Internal Security Committee and a political ally of powerful Pashtun warlord Gul Agha Sherzai, charged that the “nature and scale of today’s attack” showed that the Taliban had gotten “assistance and guidance from some security officials within the government who are their sympathisers”, according to the New York Times.

“Otherwise it would be impossible for the planners and masterminds of the attack to stage such a sophisticated and complex attack, in this extremely well-guarded location without the complicity from insiders,” he said.

Central to the Taliban strategy has been a series of assassinations of top Afghan government figures that has demonstrated their ability to place their own agents within the most secure spots in the country.

In mid-April, a Taliban suicide bomber wearing a policeman’s uniform was able to penetrate security outside the Kandahar police headquarters and killed the provincial police chief.

On May 28, a Taliban suicide bomber who had been able to gain access to the governor’s compound in Takhar province detonated his suicide vest in the hallway outside a meeting room and killed the police chief for northern Afghanistan, Gen. Mohammad Daud Daud.

In July, Ahmed Wali Karzai, the half-brother of President Karzai and the Mafia-style political boss of Kandahar province, was killed by the long-time head of his security detail, Sardar

Mohammad. Mohammad had been trusted by U.S. Special Forces and the CIA, who had very close ties with Wali Karzai.

But Mahmoud Karzai, another brother of the president, told Julius Cavendish of The Independent a few days after the assassination that Mohammad had made a trip to Quetta and had met with the Taliban, and that he had been getting phone calls in the middle of the night. The Karzai family had concluded that Mohammad had been recruited by the Taliban to kill Wali Karzai, according to the brother.

Perhaps the most important element in building the Taliban narrative has been the constant drumbeat of attacks by Afghan soldiers and policemen on U.S. and NATO troops. According to official NATO figures, between March 2009 and June 2011, at least 57 foreign troops, including 32 Americans, were killed in at least 19 such attacks.

U.S. military and intelligence officials reluctantly concluded that that most, if not all, of the attacks had been the result of recruitment by the Taliban intelligence service of Afghan security personnel to kill U.S. and NATO troops, at obvious risk to themselves.

In June, the U.S. decided to send an unknown number of counterintelligence agents to tighten procedures for identifying troops who might be more likely to be recruited by the Taliban.

Adding to the Taliban war narrative was the carefully-planned breakout of nearly 500 prisoners from the security wing of Sarposa prison in Kandahar City after a few prisoners spent months digging a 1,000-foot tunnel. The breakout was possible only with the help of a Taliban underground agent or sympathiser who provided copies of keys to the cells, with which Taliban prisoners involved in the plan could unlock the cells of their fellow prisoners and so they could escape through the tunnel.

Two weeks later, the Taliban carried out a complex attack on key government targets in Kandahar city, including the governor's office, the Afghan intelligence agency and the police station. The offensive in Kandahar involved seven explosions across the city, six of which were the result of suicide bombers.

The Taliban were able to strike freely in Kandahar despite what Canadian Brig.-Gen. Daniel Menard had called a "ring of stability" – a security cordon that supposed to keep Taliban fighters from getting into the city.

In February 2010, Menard, who was commander of Task Force Kandahar for ISAF, had boasted that, with a total of nearly 6,000 U.S. and Canadian troops deployed against Taliban forces in Kandahar Province, "I can literally break their back."

But the Taliban continued to operate freely in the city. As Peter Dmitrov, a former Canadian military officer who was working as a security consultant to NGOs in Afghanistan, observed last November to The Canadian Press, "The ring hasn't really shut closed in any way, shape or form."

The U.S. war strategy has been based at least in part on convincing Afghans that the United States would remain in Afghanistan indefinitely, and that the Taliban would weaken. But the Taliban war narrative that it is able to penetrate the even the tightest security and cannot be defeated appears to have far more credibility with Afghans of all political stripes than the narrative put forward by U.S. strategists.