

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 roadway attacks spread fear in Afghanistan

Taliban hijackings, bomb attacks on roadways spread path of fear among civilians in Afghanistan

LORI HINNANT

Sep 29, 2009

Taliban militants are sowing fear along Afghanistan's highways with stepped-up checkpoints, hijackings and bombs — including one Tuesday that killed at least 30 bus passengers in the south. Afghan authorities say the attacks, often carried out by only a handful of militants, are part of a psychological campaign to convince civilians that Taliban control is spreading.

"It is quite possible for a group of three to five insurgents to come out on the highway and attack a convoy," said the Interior Ministry spokesman, Zemarai Bashary. "Maybe thousands of people will travel that day and they are watching that convoy burning."

Militants are planting more roadside bombs than ever, killing far more Afghan civilians than Afghan or coalition soldiers. The bombings — and ambushes with automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades — are increasingly taking place on main roads against trucks and buses.

Some attacks are in areas where Taliban have long held sway, such as Kandahar, the group's spiritual birthplace, but others are in regions where militant activity has risen only recently, such as in the north.

Earlier this week, militants at a checkpoint in eastern Afghanistan ambushed a convoy loaded with construction materials, killed six drivers, kidnapped one and left their trucks burning by the roadside. The same day, a crowded van hit a roadside bomb in northern Faryab province, killing six people.

The bomb on Tuesday struck the crowded bus as it was traveling from the western province of Nimroz to Kandahar city, a trip that winds through some of the country's most dangerous districts in Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

The attack, on the outskirts of Kandahar city, killed 30 people and wounded 39 others, said Sardar Mohammad Zazai, Kandahar's provincial police chief. Officials said the bus driver came upon a NATO team clearing mines and pulled off onto a parallel unpaved road where the bomb was hidden.

"An explosion hit the bus. I don't know what happened. When I came to, I got out of the bus and saw that the bus was totally wrecked," Lal Jan, a survivor, said at Kandahar's hospital.

An elderly woman named Zulaikha Bibi wept over the death of her daughter-in-law. Two of her nephews were wounded.

U.S. and NATO troops have long come under criticism for civilian deaths as a result of airstrikes. But U.S. military officials say they believe the Taliban will also face a popular backlash for the civilian deaths caused by roadside bombs.

A U.N. report issued Saturday said August was the deadliest month of the year for civilians because of violence from the insurgency. A total of 1,500 civilians died in Afghanistan from January through August, up from 1,145 for the same period of 2008. About 68 percent of the deaths were due to the insurgents, the report said.

"The enemies of Afghanistan are planting mines on the main highway and killing innocent women and children," Zazai said.

Bashary said the Taliban are trying to carry out attacks "that have a psychological impact, rather than an economic and security impact."

"I see a change of militant strategy," said Gen. Khaliullah Zaiyi, police chief of Kunar, the province where the convoy ambush took place on Sunday. "They know it is very easy for them to come out on the road and attack civilian convoys by burning their trucks, killing innocent people."

He said the attacks give the militants a presence and make the government appear impotent, even in areas that have been relatively secure.

"Everyone will say this road is dangerous because the Taliban came last week," he said. "They don't have the ability to fight our forces directly. But by conducting guerrilla attacks directly against civilians, not security forces, they can kill people, burn down trucks, and they can block the road."

Anthony Cordesman, a military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who advised U.S. Gen. Stanley McChrystal in Kabul this summer, said Taliban attacks

against civilians have been rising sharply since 2003 and have spread in recent months to parts of the north and west.

"It's been a very very sharp geometric increase," Cordesman said. "The Taliban has learned as have other movements how to exploit violence but they've also learned how to exploit presence."

In Baghlan and Kunduz provinces, north of Kabul, militants have periodically grabbed control of stretches of highway outside the provincial capital.

"They will not attack NATO convoys, only poor innocent Afghans," said Amhad Jawid, a 43-year-old car dealer. His companions at the car lot said Taliban checkpoints went up in the late afternoon — only in places where they could be assured of no police.

Sometimes the fear even reaches security forces themselves.

After a recent interview, the deputy police commander of Baghlan asked an American Associated Press reporter and an Afghan colleague where they planned to travel next.

Upon hearing it was the next town up the road — outside the capital Pol-i-Kumri — he smiled. If they went there, he said, they would need an escort of multiple police trucks, equipped with rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns. Then he stopped smiling.

"Please don't go," he said.

The pair turned back to Kabul.