

Taliban attacks in Kabul deepen crisis of US occupation

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The coordinated attacks on government buildings in the heart of the Afghan capital of Kabul Monday morning were another in a series of political and psychological blows to the US and NATO occupation forces and the puppet regime of President Hamid Karzai.

The capital was paralyzed for more than five hours as gun battles continued following attacks by two suicide bombers and a small number of insurgents who used grenades and other weapons. The attack began in the middle of a downtown traffic circle only 50 yards from the presidential palace and equally close to the Ministry of Justice and the Central Bank. According to Afghan officials, the seven attackers were all killed, along with three Afghan soldiers and two civilians. More than 70 people were injured.

During the hours of fighting, a six-story shopping center was destroyed by fire. A suicide attack on the education ministry left extensive damage.

NATO helicopter gunships were used to put down the attacks.

There were indications that the attackers may have had assistance from elements within the Afghan military. Reuters reported that one of its reporters overheard security forces saying over the radio that a car bomber had driven a military ambulance. Some of the gunmen may have been wearing military uniforms, security officers said over the radio. The officers were urging that Afghan army troops be kept away from the scene to prevent confusion or further infiltration by the Taliban.

Hours after the fighting had ended the capital resembled an armed camp, with the center of the city closed off and soldiers at intersections and on rooftops.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the action. A

spokesman for the Islamist insurgency said the attack was an answer to the Karzai government's claim that it was seeking "reconciliation" with Taliban supporters in the countryside. An international conference is scheduled for London on January 28 to announce imperialist strategy, supposedly centered on "winning the hearts and minds" of the Afghans.

The attack was evidently in response to the claim by Karzai spokesman Waheed Omer, made one day earlier, that the government was developing a more effective strategy to induce Taliban supporters to lay down their arms. "We are ready to fight, and we have the strength to fight, and nobody from the Taliban side is ready to make any kind of deal," said Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. "The world community and the international forces are trying to buy off the Taliban, and that is why we are showing that we are not for sale."

The Taliban also claimed that they carried out a missile attack Monday on the airport at Jalalabad, the capital of eastern Nangarhar Province. A Taliban spokesman told the Afghan Islamic Press news agency via telephone that two rockets hit the airport and the terminal was damaged. He claimed there were casualties among foreign and Afghan forces based at the airport.

These attacks follow the recent suicide attack at a base in eastern Afghanistan that killed seven CIA agents, as well as other recent actions by Taliban forces in disparate parts of the country. The action was called the most coordinated assault since the US invasion of more than eight years ago that toppled the Taliban government following the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, DC.

It was designed to drive home the vulnerability and isolation of the Karzai regime. Karzai has often been

labeled the mayor of Kabul, a reference to the lack of central government authority over large stretches of the country. The events of January 18 demonstrated that the Taliban is increasingly able to challenge this discredited government on its doorstep.

David Chater, the *Al Jazeera* correspondent in Kabul, said the latest action showed that the Taliban could act almost anywhere in the country. "It is extraordinary that security has been breached to this extent," he stated.

The US Embassy issued a statement asserting, "The Taliban have claimed responsibility for this attack so clearly aimed at the Afghan government and innocent civilians. Their disregard for Afghan lives is deplorable. We will continue to stand with the Afghan people and their government and with our allies and partners around the world to defeat our common enemy and build a more secure and prosperous future."

These words are hardly likely to persuade the Afghan people, who have seen the consequences of more than eight years of US occupation with no end in sight. A United Nations report issued just last week said that the number of civilians killed in 2009 rose to 2,412, 14 percent more than the previous year. The toll is undoubtedly underestimated, but the report acknowledges nearly 600 civilian deaths in the past year caused by US and NATO forces.

Only days ago, eight protesters were killed in the southern town of Garmsir when they came onto the streets to denounce attacks by unmanned aircraft that are having a devastating impact on innocent civilians.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown added his sanctimonious denunciation of the Taliban. The Labor government is heavily involved, on both the military and diplomatic fronts, in the ongoing occupation and the efforts to shore up the Karzai government. Only two days before the latest attack in Kabul, Foreign Minister David Miliband was meeting with Karzai in the Afghan capital. The January 28 conference will be attended by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the commander of US forces in Afghanistan.

The Afghan people distinguish between the losses suffered as the result of foreign occupation and those that result from the opposition to that occupation. The obvious fact is that the puppet Afghan government

could not survive without the occupation forces. The longer the occupation continues, the more bitter and determined will the opposition to it become.



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