

Nine US military personnel killed in Afghanistan airport shooting

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An Afghan pilot opened fire on NATO forces at Kabul International Airport April 27, killing eight US soldiers and an American contractor. Five Afghan soldiers were wounded.

The shooting is the latest in a series of attacks committed by members of the Afghan security forces or those wearing Afghan military uniforms against occupying troops. The incident is also the deadliest of its kind in the nearly ten-year-old war.

US and NATO officials have released few details of the attack. According to a brief statement by the Afghan Defense Ministry, the shooter was a 20-year veteran of the air force and the pilot “opened fire on foreigners after an argument” during a meeting.

The gunman was identified by fellow pilots as 48-year-old Ahmad Gul Sahebi from Tarakhail district of Kabul province. Sahebi’s brother told the local television station that he had no ties to either the Taliban or al Qaeda, but rather, had seen his life fall apart in the past few years and had recently been forced to sell his house. Sahebi was killed in an exchange of gunfire at the scene.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying Sahebi had been in contact with them for two years. “This attack indicates that we can access any security forces facilities of the enemy we want,” a Taliban spokesman told the *Los Angeles Times*. “We have our infiltrators in all sections.”

Regardless of which version of events is true, certain conclusions might be drawn about the morale of the 305,000-strong Afghan security force under the authority of the country’s colonial occupiers.

Over the past year, the US has escalated its assaults on insurgents and civilians alike through the use of Predator drones, house-to-house raids, and heavy bombing of villages. The violence has reaped

thousands of civilian casualties and fanned the insurgency and social unrest.

The Obama administration has insisted that it will begin “drawing down” an unspecified portion of the 100,000 US troops in Afghanistan in July, who will be replaced with Afghan soldiers. The fifth such attack in April, Wednesday’s shooting calls into question the strategy of training Afghan forces to carry on the bloody counterinsurgency war.

The attack also belies the claim of the US that the escalation over the past two years, in which 30,000 additional troops were deployed to southern Afghanistan, was successful at quelling the resistance and securing strategic areas.

Like other recent targets, the Kabul airport is considered one of the most secure bases in the country because it is used by the Afghan Air Force and is the location of the NATO Air Training Command. According to NATO spokesman and US Air Force Lt. Col. David Simons, the center had “gone through numerous upgrades to secure the facilities, both on the Afghan side and the US side,” including the use of “biometric screening” on 95 percent of Afghan Air Force personnel.

Just two days before the Kabul attack, nearly 500 Taliban insurgents were freed from the high-security Sarposa prison in Kandahar city, in an elaborate jailbreak that was likely coordinated with officials and guards at the facility (see “500 Afghan insurgents escape from high-security Kandahar prison”).

On April 18, an insurgent gained entry to the heavily fortified Afghan Defense Ministry in Kabul, where he opened fire and detonated a bomb, killing two Afghan soldiers and an officer and wounding at least six others.

Two days earlier, an Afghan soldier detonated an explosive vest at Forward Operating Base Gamberi in

eastern Afghanistan, killing six American troops, four Afghan soldiers, and an interpreter. April 15 saw a suicide bomber dressed as a policeman enter the Kandahar police headquarters complex and blow himself up, killing the top police official in the province. At least eight other suicide bombings were carried out or attempted over the course of the week (see “US occupation in Afghanistan hit by string of bombings”).

On April 4, a man dressed in a border police uniform shot dead two American military personnel in Faryab in northern Afghanistan. In another northern Afghanistan attack February 18, a gunman wearing an Afghan army uniform killed two German soldiers and wounded eight others.

At least 36 NATO troops have been killed in 20 “rogue soldier” attacks since March, 2009, half of which NATO officials attribute to “impersonation” of Afghan military personnel, and the others to stress or unexplained reasons.

The increase in such attacks over the past few weeks signals a bloody summer, with the melting of snows in mountain passes allowing the Afghan resistance to better arm and launch attacks. The German press reported Wednesday that President Hamid Karzai called off an annual Victory Day military parade citing fears of Taliban attacks.

Since the beginning of the year, 107 US soldiers have died in Afghanistan. More than 2,400 NATO troops, 1,553 of them American soldiers, have been killed since the October 2001 invasion; over 10,500 American troops have been wounded over the decade.



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