Kabul hotel attack shakes US occupation regime in Afghanistan

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The June 28-29 attack by Afghan insurgents on the luxury Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul has again exposed the ineffectiveness of US-backed Afghan security forces and the political isolation of the US occupation regime in Afghanistan.

On Tuesday night a group of nine fighters, apparently dressed in Afghan police or army uniforms, killed two guards at a side entrance to the hotel. Afterwards, they worked their way through the hotel, firing a machine gun at the swimming pool area and breaking into numerous rooms, apparently in a room-to-room search. Three fighters reached the roof of the hotel, where they were killed by fire from NATO helicopters.

Police at the hotel reportedly refused to fire on the attackers, and Special Forces from the US and New Zealand were brought in to attack the insurgents. Two New Zealander SAS troops were reportedly wounded. The hotel's fifth and sixth floors were on fire after the assault was over.

The Taliban emailed a statement claiming the operation had led to 50 deaths, and implying that the raid targeted Afghan government and foreign diplomatic officials. They declared, "Our people have attacked the Intercontinental Hotel while a gathering of 300 foreigners and Afghan officials met. On each floor of the hotel, our fighters have broken down the door to each room, taking out guests and killing them. Most of them are foreigners."

A spokesman for the regime of US-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai said that the death toll was 21—the nine Afghan fighters and 12 guests or employees of the hotel. Afghan officials issued contradictory reports; Mohammad Zahir, head of criminal investigation of the Kabul police, reported that two foreign officials were among the dead, while Interior Ministry sources said all the dead were Afghans.

The US-led ISAF coalition alleged that the attack was carried out by the so-called Haqqani network, the affiliates in Afghanistan of militias led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin in the North Waziristan region of neighboring Pakistan.

An ISAF airstrike in the Gardez district of Paktia province in Afghanistan killed Ismail Jan—a deputy of the senior Haqqani commander in Afghanistan, Haji Mali Khan—as well as "several Haqqani fighters."

In the 1980s Jalaluddin Haqqani was a leading US- and Pakistani-backed mujahedin commander, fighting Soviet forces during the Soviet-Afghan war. According to US intelligence, his forces retain links to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). He reportedly fell out with US occupation forces after turning down offers of the position of Prime Minister of Afghanistan.

The Intercontinental Hotel attack came on the heels of US President Barack Obama's June 22 speech announcing a limited draw-down of US forces in Afghanistan. The withdrawal of 10,000 US support troops this year, and 33,000 troops at the end of 2012, keeps large numbers of US combat troops in Afghanistan—while giving Obama the misleading appearance of pulling back from a deeply unpopular war. Obama claimed that the goal of this withdrawal was to hand certain military operations in Afghanistan over to the Karzai regime.

This attack exposes the illusory character of Washington's neo-colonial plans. The Taliban—who infiltrated the Kabul regime's forces, penetrated a highly-guarded luxury hotel in Kabul, and were suppressed only by NATO forces—again made quite clear that NATO occupation forces do not even reliably control the Afghan capital.

As for the Karzai regime, it is weak and utterly

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dependent on NATO armies. One guest at the Intercontinental Hotel bluntly told the *New York Times*, "Forty-five countries have troops here, but security is still fragile—you cannot serve dinner in one of the largest and most secure restaurants in Kabul. Now we are hearing about a security transition to Afghan forces. If they give the security responsibility to the current government at 10AM, the government will collapse around 12 noon. They cannot live without foreigners."

The shift in US policy is bound up with intensified negotiations—between the US, the Karzai regime, Pakistani officials, sections of the Taliban, and other regional powers—to broker some settlement acceptable to Washington.

According to numerous press reports, Marc Grossman, the US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, is leading efforts to identify Taliban officials with whom the US will negotiate. Grossman aide Frank Ruggiero and Defense Intelligence Agency official Jeff W. Hayes have been in contact with Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Jawed Ludin, Pakistani Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir, and Tayeb Agha.

Agha is a former aide of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, allegedly captured by Pakistan but negotiating on Omar's behalf. Omar and the main leadership of the former Taliban government of Afghanistan reportedly fled the country after the US invasion in 2001 and have found refuge in the Pakistani city of Quetta.

According to commentator Ahmed Rashid, writing in yesterday's *Financial Times*, the current initiative has involved three US-Taliban meetings, assisted by German and Qatari diplomats. The meetings were held outside Munich in November 2010, in Doha in February, and in Munich in May. A new meeting is planned in Bonn this December, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Bonn meeting that set up the Karzai puppet regime in 2001.

Such negotiations were apparently the target of the recent attack on the Intercontinental Hotel. The British newspaper *Daily Telegraph* wrote, "The insurgents had targeted the hotel as it hosted a number of foreign officials and Afghan provincial governors, who were in the capital for a summit of the International Contact Group of Afghanistan's top aid donors and a meeting of top American, Afghan, and Pakistani officials to discuss the transition to Afghan-led security in the country and peace talks with the Taliban."

Grossman left Kabul after talks with Karzai shortly before the attack began on June 28. The US Embassy in Kabul released a statement on June 29, declaring that its staff was all accounted for despite the attack on the hotel.

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