

“Green-on-Blue” attacks on foreign troops increase in Afghanistan

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Two British soldiers were shot dead last week by Afghan policemen, the latest in a rising tide of “green-on-blue” attacks on foreign forces in Afghanistan by supposed allies in the more than decade-long occupation and counterinsurgency.

Lance Corporal Lee Davies, 27, from 1st Battalion Welsh Guards and Corporal Brent McCarthy, 25, of the Royal Air Force were shot dead Saturday while protecting a meeting with Afghan officials at Patrol Base Attal in the Lashkar Gah district of southern Helmand province.

Two members of the Afghan police force opened fire with AK-47 Kalashnikov rifles on the UK troops. The assailants have since been identified as Sarhad Mohammed, 20, from Deshu district in Nagarhar, and Sardar Wali, also 20, from the Helmand town of Musa Qala, which has changed hands between British and US forces and the Taliban several times in bloody clashes. Afghan officials said Mohammed was the first to start shooting and was then killed by another Afghan policeman. Wali was wounded in the arm but managed to flee.

Earlier claims that the attackers were recent infiltrators of the police were dispelled when it became known that Mohammed and Wali had been uniformed policemen for nearly two years. Fareed Ahmed, a spokesman for the Helmand provincial police, said the behaviour of the two men had not aroused any suspicion.

The rate of green-on-blue incidents—so called due to the colours representing the Afghan forces and NATO-led forces—has been steadily rising even as foreign forces reduce their troop numbers in Afghanistan.

In 2011, there were 35 foreign soldiers killed in 21 attacks by Afghan forces. Within the first six months of 2012, 22 soldiers have been killed in 16 separate

attacks by Afghan forces. These figures do not include green-on-blue attacks that did not lead to foreign troop fatalities.

With the two recent deaths, a total of 414 members of UK forces have now been killed since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. A Ministry of Defence spokesman said around a dozen of the overall UK troop death toll was due to green-on-blue attacks.

Approximately one in every seven NATO soldiers who have died in Afghanistan this year was killed by Afghan forces. These include the execution-style slaying in February of two US officers, a colonel and a major, inside the heavily guarded headquarters of the Afghan Interior Ministry in the heart of Kabul.

In March, at a joint Afghan-NATO base in Kandahar province, an Afghan soldier and a civilian Afghan literacy teacher opened fire on US soldiers, killing two and wounding four. Both men fled, but were hunted down by attack helicopters and killed.

These attacks took place against the backdrop of mass protests that swept Afghanistan following the burning of copies of the Koran by US soldiers. They underscore the huge bitterness and hostility that exists against the foreign invaders.

The US/NATO military strategy in Afghanistan is currently focused on training the national army and police to participate in the suppression of a rebellious population in an open-ended occupation. But green-on-blue attacks are dissolving even the semblance of trust and cooperation between the two sides. According to one press report, following the attack in the headquarters of the Afghan Interior Ministry, US-NATO forces began stationing armed guards to oversee meetings with Afghan officials while other advisers were reported to be limiting their “supervision” to telephone and email contact.

McClatchy News Service cited mounting tensions between Afghan troops and their US trainers. “Afghans hate us, and we don’t trust them. We have never felt safe around them,” one US officer told McClatchy.

Some NATO soldiers have been assigned as “guardian angels” to watch over other troops as they go about their daily duties on joint bases or while they sleep. A more rigorous process of vetting has been enforced, including biometric testing, for recruits seeking to join the Afghan forces, and “counter-infiltration” units established to root out possible Taliban agents or sympathisers.

The other strand of US/NATO policy in Afghanistan, dictated by the deepening quagmire of the occupation, has been towards a political rapprochement with a wing of the Taliban leadership. But just hours before the announcement of the latest “security handover”, Arsala Rahmani, a former Taliban official now involved in the so-called “peace process”, was shot dead in Kabul.

In a highly professional hit, gunmen in a car fired a single bullet to the heart. General Ayub Salangi, the head of the Kabul police force, said, “He died instantly.”

Rahmani was one of several former members of the Taliban hierarchy who were removed from a United Nations blacklist in July 2011 to allow them to engage in negotiations with US-backed officials. His background of serving in Mullah Omar’s government, as education minister, was said to have conferred a degree of credibility on the militants with whom the Afghan government-organised High Peace Council were seeking a deal.

Last year the head of the council, Burhannudin Rabbani, was killed by a suicide bomber with explosives in his turban. The Taliban denied involvement.



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