

“Green-on-blue” attacks continue in Afghanistan

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On Wednesday, a British soldier died in a UK hospital from his wounds, after being shot earlier when his checkpoint came under attack from insurgents in the Lashkar Gah district of Helmand Province in Afghanistan.

The death of David Shaw, 23, from the 1st Battalion The Duke of Lancaster’s Regiment brings to a total of 440 UK service personnel who have been killed in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion in October 2001.

Two British soldiers have been killed so far this month in Afghanistan. On January 7, Sapper Richard Walker, 23, was shot dead and six other troops were wounded by a member of the Afghan National Army, in the continuing rise of “green-on-blue” attacks by uniformed Afghan security forces on foreign troops in Afghanistan.

The assailant, known locally as Mohammad Qasim Farooq, opened fire with an M16 semi-automatic rifle after an apparent row broke out at the fortified Patrol Base Hazrat in Nahr-e Saraj, Helmand Province. After attacking his nearby Afghan counterparts, Farooq turned his weapon on British forces, and was shot dead at the scene. A member of the Afghan National Army in Helmand said the attacker was from Laghman Province and had joined the Afghan army a year ago.

All six previous deaths among British soldiers on the current tour, which began in October, had been the result of green-on-blue attacks. 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. The past year saw a surge in green-on-blue attacks leading to the deaths of more than 61 foreign soldiers in 45 incidents. These figures

do not include green-on-blue attacks that did not lead to foreign troop fatalities.

Approximately one in every seven NATO soldiers who have died in Afghanistan in the last 12 months were 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 literacy teacher opened fire on US soldiers, killing two and wounding four. Both men were hunted down by attack helicopters and killed.

In May, two British soldiers were shot dead in the Lashkar Gah district of southern Helmand province by Afghan policemen using AK-47 Kalashnikov rifles. The attackers had been uniformed policemen for nearly two years.

Attacks on foreign troops dramatically increased following mass protests that swept Afghanistan in reaction to the burning of copies of the Koran by US soldiers in February.

The effects of the brutal occupation are also having an increasingly deadly impact away from the theatre of war as soldiers return home. More US soldiers on active duty committed suicide than were killed in combat last year, with the suicide rate rising by 9 percent over the last three years. An estimated 177 soldiers on active duty killed themselves in 2012—almost one suicide every other day—compared to 176 killed in action.

The toll of soldiers taking their own lives in the British military is highlighted by recent tragic cases. On Thursday, a coroners’ inquest in Kendal heard that 20-year-old Ryan Ward, who served with Alma

Company, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, had been found hanging on October 27 by his mother. His body was discovered the day after he had attended the funeral of Sgt. Gareth Thursby, 29. Thursby, together with Private Thomas Wroe, 18, were shot dead by an Afghan policeman while manning a checkpoint in Helmand province on September 15.

Trooper Robert Griffiths was one of three soldiers to walk away unharmed from a potentially deadly roadside blast in November 2011. The 24-year-old soldier, with the 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards, at the time was driving an upgraded 35-ton Scimitar Mk2 light tank that had been installed with new heavy armour, on routine patrol in Nahr-e Saraj, Afghanistan.

The British military was keen to advertise Griffiths's encounter with the potentially fatal improvised explosive device (IED) in order to counter criticism from many families of soldiers that British patrol vehicles in Afghanistan were underprotected and putting the lives of soldiers at risk. A Ministry of Defence (MoD) online news release was issued headlined: "Soldiers survive IED strike thanks to Scimitar," continuing: "Trooper Robert Griffiths, the Scimitar's driver, said the crew were in high spirits on returning to camp, but appreciated that their survival was due to the vehicle, which has been in service for just over two months."

Griffiths finished a seven-month tour of duty in Afghanistan in April last year. His regiment is based in barracks in Paderborn, Germany, but he was back in the UK on leave over the Christmas period. On December 29, he was found hanging at his parents' home near Swansea, south Wales.

As always, it is the civilian population, and the most vulnerable among them, that suffer the full force of any foreign military occupation. The winter months, which see a traditional lull in fighting and military operations in Afghanistan, offer no such respite in the suffering and social misery of the poorest Afghans. The BBC carried a report January 12 from Qambar refugee camp on the outskirts of Kabul where around 10,000 displaced people, mostly from Helmand province, live.

Last winter, more than 100 children died during the cold weather in the numerous refugee camps that surround the Afghan capital. Children have already begun to perish in the present harsh winter weather.

The BBC spoke to Taj Mohammad, whose three-year-

old son, Janan, died recently of the cold after tottering out of a mud shelter with a makeshift tarpaulin roof when Mohammad had gone in search of firewood. Janan was barefoot and did not have enough clothing for the freezing temperatures outside. He developed a high fever, and despite his father's attempts to keep him warm, he died that evening.

"Last night, I had no food," he said. "I swear to you, we did not eat. There are a lot of people in the camp who don't have food."

Mohammad says that he did not have time to mourn for his son or his uncle, who also died as a result of the cold a few days before. "I have to worry about those who are alive," he said, pointing to his children. "We need help. If help doesn't come, more children will die."

According to the UN refugee agency, there are around 460,000 internally displaced people across Afghanistan—almost 35,000 of these are in 54 camps in the Kabul area. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Protection Officer Douglas Di Salvo admitted to the BBC: "The most vulnerable Afghan citizens continue to live on the edge of survival...very much on the border and in the margins."

The camp is less than 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the presidential palace, the US embassy, NATO headquarters and the offices of international organisations officially overseeing billions of dollars in aid.



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