

Taliban mounts “spring offensive” in Afghanistan

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A wave of attacks in Afghanistan last Friday and over the weekend followed the Taliban’s announcement last month that it was preparing a “spring offensive.” These bombings have demonstrated the weakness of the Afghan regime, against which Taliban forces can launch attacks at will.

Early Saturday, a suicide bomber blew himself up in Kabul, and yesterday a US soldier was reportedly killed in eastern Afghanistan.

Above all, last Friday’s Taliban attack in a heavily-fortified area of Kabul showed that the US puppet regime of Afghan President Hamid Karzai cannot even protect the capital city itself.

At about 4 p.m., a group of attackers with suicide vests, guns and grenade launchers blasted their way into a residential compound of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a UN-affiliated agency. The gun battle between the Taliban team and hundreds of Afghan police officers lasted more than six hours.

All the attackers and four others, including an Afghan policeman and Nepalese Gurkha guard who apparently served at the IOM compound, were killed.

The IOM compound is close to the UN’s main premises in Kabul, and also to guesthouses and offices used by employees and officials of international organisations, a post of the Afghan Public Protection Force, and a hospital for the National Intelligence Service.

Claiming the responsibility for the attack, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told the media over the phone that the building they targeted was a CIA training centre. Afghan police denied this. However, the CIA normally does not publicly acknowledge the location of their training centres.

Other bombings, by Taliban and other insurgent

groups, have targeted US forces and international organisations in recent months. Just eight days before the Friday assault, a suicide car bomb attack, claimed by another Islamist group, Hezb-e-Islami, on a US military convoy killed two US soldiers, four American contractors and nine Afghan bystanders. Dozens were injured.

Over the previous week, the Taliban mounted bomb attacks in Kandahar, Ghazni and Baghlan provinces, killing dozens, including the head of the Baghlan Provincial Council.

Later on Friday, another blast in the east killed 12 people at a mosque during evening prayers. According to the Ghazni provincial authorities, explosives transported by suspected Taliban cadres accidentally detonated while they stopped at the mosque.

Despite the official deadline of end of 2014 for the withdrawal of its forces, Washington has repeatedly indicated it will keep large numbers of troops in Afghanistan indefinitely, ostensibly to train the Afghan military at the “request” of the Afghan government. In a speech delivered at Kabul University on May 9, Karzai himself revealed that US wants to maintain nine of its military bases in Afghanistan after the 2014 deadline.

The attacks by Taliban and other Islamist insurgents highlight the deep political crisis of the Karzai government, which is despised as a US puppet regime. Tensions between his regime and neighbouring Pakistan have also escalated, with a series of recent border clashes. Under those circumstances, Karzai has turned for support to India, seeking military collaboration to fight Islamist insurgency and to counter pressure from Pakistan.

These developments show how bitter conflicts between the regional powers are now becoming

inextricably linked to the bloodshed NATO has unleashed in its attempt to crush Afghan popular opposition to imperialist occupation.

During his three-day Indian visit last week, Karzai mainly sought to strengthen military collaboration with New Delhi to bolster his corrupt regime against the insurgency.

During Taliban rule in Afghanistan, India was completely cut off from that country—while Pakistan, as the Taliban’s main patron, enjoyed influence there. The ousting of Taliban in the US-led war in late 2001 and the installation of the Karzai regime allowed India to re-establish direct ties to Kabul.

Talking to the media before his departure on May 22, Karzai said he submitted a “wish list” to the Indian government, but refused to reveal its contents. Quoting an anonymous senior official, the *Business Standard* reported that during his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Karzai sought an arms deal—including purchases of military weaponry such as aircraft, missiles and field guns—under the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed between two countries in 2011.

Because of the sensitive nature of the issue India’s military collaboration with Afghanistan and the tense geo-political situation in the region, particularly the rivalry between India and Pakistan, both sides decided not to reveal the content of discussions—what Karzai requested or what New Delhi agreed to provide.

However, according to media reports, India’s offers fell short of Karzai’s expectations. Unnamed Indian officials suggested that New Delhi is ready to send transport helicopters as well as trucks and “non-lethal” equipment. India is currently involved in training Afghan security personnel in Indian defence training centres and supplying limited military equipment, including small arms and vehicles.

Pakistan sees the growing ties between Kabul and New Delhi, and particularly any military collaboration, as a threat. Responding to reports that Karzai was seeking more Indian military aid, Pakistani Foreign Secretary Jalil Abbas Jilani told a media briefing on Friday: “As a sovereign country Afghanistan can pursue its own policies, but we hope that it would mind the overall peace and security situation.”

Exploiting conditions favourable to its interests following the fall of Taliban rule, India has been

working to develop its ties with Kabul and counterattack Pakistani influence in Afghanistan.

India has invested more than \$US2 billion in Afghanistan in various sectors, including highways, roads, ports, hospitals and rural electricity. Facing Islamabad’s refusal to provide transit facilities for Indian exports to Afghanistan, New Dehli has held talks with Iran and Afghanistan to develop Chahbahar port in Iran and various road and rail linkages to by-pass Pakistan.

While working to expand its ties with Karzai, India did not fully commit itself to supporting his regime, whose future is increasingly uncertain due to massive popular opposition to the US occupation and to Karzai as a US puppet. New Delhi is also attempting to keep the option of working with any other regime following elections to be held in next year, and also with various regional warlords who emerge from a collapse of Karzai regime.



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