

Six US soldiers killed as Taliban overruns Helmand district

By Bill Van Auken
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A Taliban militant riding a motorbike loaded with explosives attacked a US-Afghan foot patrol Monday killing six American soldiers and wounding three others, two of them Americans and one Afghan.

The attack, which took place near Bagram Air Base, about 28 miles north of the capital of Kabul, claimed the highest casualties suffered by US forces in a single attack since a roadside bombing in July 2012 killed seven American soldiers.

The Taliban took responsibility for the attack, declaring in a statement that “the US makes every attempt either to deny or keep a lid on such reports on their fatalities to pull wool over the nation’s eyes so as to make it appear as if the US invading troops are never at war.”

Several hours after the attack, Kabul was struck by three rockets, two of which landed in the city’s diplomatic quarter.

In the face of a mounting insurgency against the US puppet government in Kabul, President Barack Obama last October reversed his administration’s plans for the withdrawal of nearly all US forces from Afghanistan, instead leaving nearly 10,000 troops in place, at least until the end of 2016.

The attack on the US military follows by just days the surprise visit to Afghanistan by US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter. Landing unannounced at a US military base near Jalalabad city in the eastern province of Nangarhar, Carter met with American military commanders to discuss the deteriorating situation in the country. At a press conference afterwards, he acknowledged, “The Taliban’s advances in some parts of the country, even if only temporary, underscore that this is a tough fight, and it’s far from over.”

Earlier this month, the Pentagon issued a statement outlining the crisis confronting the US military after 14

years of occupation in Afghanistan. The report said that casualties for Afghan security forces had set new records, rising by 27 percent compared to last year, when a senior US commander had described the number of dead and wounded as “unsustainable.”

The document commented that the Afghan army and police “will require more time and assistance to develop into a capable, credible and independent force.”

“Insurgents are improving in their ability to find and exploit [Afghan forces’] vulnerabilities, making the security situation still fragile in key areas and at risk of deterioration in other places,” the report said.

It added that weaknesses within the US puppet forces allowed “the Taliban to foster the impression that the ANDSF cannot control key population centers.”

Last September, Taliban fighters overran the city of Kunduz, the most important city in the north of Afghanistan. Afghan forces were able to retake the city only after 15 days of fighting and the direct intervention of US Special Forces troops and warplanes.

In the course of this intervention, an American AC-130 flying gunship carried out a sustained and devastating attack on October 3 against a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, inflicting a death toll that now stands at 42, including both patients and medical staff. Human Rights Watch last week joined the call for an independent investigation into the attack as a war crime.

It appears that the rout suffered by Afghan security forces in Kunduz is now being repeated on an even larger scale in southern Helmand province, long a stronghold of the insurgency. American Special Forces units have been rushed to the area in an attempt to prevent the fall of the provincial capital of Lashkar

Gah.

Taliban fighters stormed the district center of Sangin in Helmand Sunday, seizing government buildings and taking control of most of the surrounding district.

In a measure of the fear and desperation gripping Afghan officials, the deputy governor of the province, Mohammad Jan Rasulyar, used his Facebook page Sunday to appeal to President Ashraf Ghani to intervene to prevent the entire province from being overrun.

Rasulyar reported that more than 90 members of the Afghan security forces had been killed fighting in Helmand in just the previous two days.

“Your Excellency, Helmand is standing on the brink and there is a serious need for you to come,” Rasulyar wrote. “Please save Helmand from tragedy. Ignore those liars who are telling you that Helmand is secure.”

Muhammad Kareem Atal, the head of Helmand’s provincial council, painted an equally grim picture. “Around 65 percent of Helmand is now under Taliban control,” he told the Associated Press. “In every district either we are stepping back or we are handing territory over to Taliban, but still, until now, no serious action has been taken.”

Atal reported that more than 2,000 members of the Afghan security forces had been killed in the fighting in Helmand over the course of this year. He added that a major reason that the government forces were losing to the insurgency was that large numbers of soldiers and police were deserting.

During a Taliban attack on Sangin last month, for example, it was reported that 60 Afghan soldiers were killed while 70 more quit their posts and joined the insurgency.

Washington is continuing to spend more than \$4 billion annually to sustain the Afghan security forces, while the Afghan government provides just \$400 million.

The United Nations representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, issued a year-end report Monday outlining the grim conditions prevailing in the country with increased fighting and an economy spiraling downward as the result of reduced international aid.

“Civilians, as ever, continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, as casualties rise at an ever increasing pace and more people have been displaced from their homes by the conflict,” Haysom said. He added that the

contraction of the country’s already dismal economy has led to a sharp increase in unemployment and poverty.

The UN ranked Afghanistan as 171 out of 188 countries on its human development index and placed it last among the countries of Asia. This after 14 years of occupation and Washington’s spending of more than \$110 billion on aid to Afghanistan, the lion’s share of it going to the Afghan security forces.

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