

Bagram air base bombing kills four US personnel in Afghanistan

By Bill Van Auken
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The US Embassy in Kabul announced that it was shutting down routine services Sunday in response to the sense of growing insecurity following a devastating suicide bombing at Bagram Airfield, the largest US military base in Afghanistan.

The suicide attack on the heavily fortified US facility north of the Afghan capital of Kabul killed two American troops and two US private military contractors, while wounding 16 other American troops and one Polish soldier.

The Taliban, the Islamist movement that the US toppled from power 15 years ago, only to fight a war with it and other Afghans opposed to foreign occupation ever since, claimed responsibility for the bombing.

In a statement praising the attack, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the bombing targeted “a sports ground where more than 100 military officers, important people and soldiers were busy exercising.”

A NATO coalition official told CNN that the bomber detonated his explosives in an area where people were preparing for a run.

The attack came just two days after another attack on a German consulate killed at least six people and wounded 100 more in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, which had long been described as the safest city in Afghanistan. The Taliban described the action as a “revenge attack” for recent US airstrikes.

Last week, US bombings in the northern district of Kunduz killed at least 32 civilians, most of them women and children, and wounded 19 more. The airstrikes were called in after two US special forces troops were killed while carrying out a targeted assassination operation in the area.

The German consulate personnel were moved from their facility to a nearby German military base. The day

after the attack in Mazar-i-Sharif, German troops shot and killed two civilians at a roadblock they had set up in the area. German officials alleged that the two, both on motorcycles, had failed to obey an order from the German soldiers to stop.

The incidents underscore the increasingly precarious situation in Afghanistan after a decade and a half of US war and occupation, and Washington’s pouring some \$115 billion in US aid into the country. The Taliban reportedly controls roughly one-third of the country, the largest amount of territory since the 2001 US invasion.

Meanwhile, the US-backed puppet regime of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has been thrown into deeper crisis by parliamentary votes over the weekend to remove key members of his cabinet.

The lower house of parliament, known as Wolasi Jirga, voted on Sunday to sack the transportation and education ministers. This followed an earlier vote Saturday to dismiss Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani and two other ministers.

Under the Afghan constitution, the parliament has the right to remove members of the president’s cabinet.

The dismissals came amid charges that the government has failed to spend its development budget and that at least part of the funding appears to have been embezzled.

Ghani shares power with his rival for the presidency in the disputed 2014 presidential election, Abdullah Abdullah, who was installed as “chief executive” under an arrangement brokered by the US State Department.

A two-year deadline has come and gone for the government to call new parliamentary elections and convene a constitutional grand council, or Loya Jirga, leaving Afghan’s puppet regime with steadily decreasing legitimacy.

Both the Afghan media and government officials have expressed concern over a potential shift in US policy with the inauguration of US president-elect Donald Trump, whose “America first” rhetoric and vows to get Washington out of the “nation-building business” has aroused fears within a regime that would collapse without US military backing.

Despite the Obama administration’s claim two years ago that US combat operations had ended, roughly 10,000 US troops remain in Afghanistan.

The Afghan media Saturday reported on an open letter sent by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Afghan warlord and leader of the Islamist Hezb-e Islami movement, to Trump, calling on him to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan. The letter urged Trump to ask US generals what 15 years of war and occupation had accomplished outside of massive casualties and huge financial losses for the US itself.

Hekmatyar was one of the main recipients of CIA funding when the US orchestrated the mujahideen war against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul in the 1980s. This same CIA operation gave rise to Al Qaeda, whose leader Osama bin Laden worked closely with US and Pakistani intelligence.

Known as the “butcher of Kabul” for his slaughter of civilians during the civil war that devastated Afghanistan in the wake of the fall of the Soviet-backed regime, Hekmatyar led an insurgency against the US occupation until earlier this year. In September, he was pardoned by the Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani, who promised the warlord an honorary post in his government in return for a cessation of hostilities.

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