

MULTIPLE ATTACKS IN KANDAHAR AREA INCLUDE AT LEAST TWO BY ATTACKERS IN AFGHAN POLICE UNIFORMS

The last 24 hours or so have seen multiple attacks carried out in the Kandahar area. It appears that at least two of them were carried out by men wearing Afghan police uniforms. Only one of these two attacks is now being described as a “green on blue” attack, while the other is described as being carried out by insurgents wearing Afghan police uniforms.

ISAF has released this terse statement about the confirmed green on blue attack that occurred yesterday:

KABUL, Afghanistan (June 19, 2012) – The International Security Assistance Force confirms that three individuals in Afghan Police uniforms turned their weapons against coalition service members in southern Afghanistan yesterday, killing one ISAF service member.

The three individuals immediately fled the area and are currently being sought.

The incident is under investigation.

That statement, however, is indicated to be an “update” to an earlier statement which reads:

An International Security Assistance Force service member died of wounds following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan today.

Note that the initial report merely cites “an insurgent attack” while the follow-up says the attack was by “three individuals in Afghan police uniforms”. That sequence of events is important for considering the current reports on the additional attacks around Kandahar.

Here is the New York Times description of the attack today which is described as involving Afghan police uniforms:

Taliban insurgents wearing police uniforms attacked a checkpoint in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday, killing three police officers, local officials said.

NATO confirmed the attack and said fighting was continuing.

The militants’ attack on a police checkpoint in the southwestern of Kandahar city near a major prison left another seven officers wounded, according to the Kandahar governor’s office. Javed Faisal, a spokesman for the governor of Kandahar, said four of the insurgents were killed in the fighting.

A police officer who said he witnessed the fighting said Taliban insurgents first attacked the Afghan police checkpoint and then attacked nearby NATO troops, who returned fire. The police officer did not want to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

How do “Taliban insurgents” come to be in possession of Afghan police uniforms? Are these personnel who trained as police and then went over to the Taliban, taking their uniforms with them? Have the Taliban somehow found a supply of Afghan police uniforms other than from those who leave the police force?

At any rate, given how yesterday’s attack went

from being merely an insurgent attack to an attack by individuals in Afghan police uniforms, it will be very interesting to see what additional information comes from the investigation into those involved in today's attack.

But today's attack that involved Afghan police uniforms appears to be just one of at least three attacks in the Kandahar area. From the Washington Post:

Under the cover of darkness and armed with heavy weapons, a group of Taliban fighters, including suicide bombers, launched an assault on a NATO camp in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar on Tuesday.

The attack in the outskirts of Kandahar city was carried out before dawn by seven assailants who were killed by coalition forces after a gunbattle lasting 15 minutes, according to Afghan and coalition officials.

There was no immediate report of any deaths among the NATO soldiers, but some working at the camp, including a foreign contractor, were wounded in the attack, an Afghan official said. The strike caused some damages to the facilities inside the camp, he added.

The article then notes that the attack by those in Afghan police uniforms was a few hours later. Here is the description of the third attack, citing a spokesman for Kandahar's governor:

Police foiled a separate Taliban attack on another police post, resulting in the deaths of two assailants, he said by phone.

That makes a total of at least four attempted attacks on NATO or Afghan forces, at least two of which were carried out by attackers in Afghan

police uniforms in the past 24 hours or so in the Kandahar area alone. Despite the government's attempt to retroactively classify the report on cultural clashes that lead to green on blue attacks, it now appears that we may be moving beyond the pattern described in that report of individual Afghan force members becoming enraged and killing a NATO force member with whom he is serving to an overall wider movement of Afghan forces acting in concert with the Taliban to attack NATO forces. A key to understanding if this is the case will be to determine the source of the Afghan police uniforms in today's attack. If Afghan police are joining the Taliban in groups rather than individually, then we may be seeing a very significant and destabilizing blow to NATO plans for handing over security functions prior to exiting Afghanistan.

Update: Dawn is now carrying an AFP article with more details on today's attack by those in Afghan police uniforms:

Police witnesses said the attackers all had the uniform and equipment of regular officers, and were led into the base by a police captain who fled afterwards. Two other officers were arrested over the assault.

/snip/

An increasing number of Afghan troops have turned their weapons against Nato soldiers as the decade-long insurgency has progressed.

Some of the assaults are claimed by the Taliban, who say they have infiltrated the ranks of Afghan security forces, but many are attributed to cultural differences and antagonism between the allied forces.

It now appears that at least three who were active duty Afghan forces are believed to at least have helped those who attacked while

wearing Afghan uniforms. This is coming closer to looking like there may be defections of Afghan forces in large blocks. If so, NATO is in serious trouble.