

TALIBAN ATTACK CIA HEADQUARTERS IN KABUL

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Yesterday, I noted that the more moderate faction of the Taliban in Afghanistan was beginning to gain more visibility in the wake of moves to decrease inflammatory aspects of the Taliban office opened in Qatar ahead of planned peace negotiations. Early this morning, the militant faction of the Taliban launched a sophisticated attack in Kabul that targeted the CIA's Kabul headquarters in the Ariana Hotel.

As the attack unfolded, it was late Monday night in the US. Gary Owen, who Tweets as @ElSnarkistani, accurately deduced from the early reports that false papers were used to get past initial checkpoints into the more heavily fortified district surrounding Afghanistan's Presidential Palace and ISAF headquarters. See this Twitter conversation and this subsequent one for the details he was able to provide on the location where the attack took place and what it would take for insurgents to gain access.

Using tactics that the Washington Post compared to the successful attack last September on Camp Bastion that destroyed six fighter jets, the attackers wore ISAF uniforms and had coalition markings on their vehicles. From today's Washington Post:

Gen. Abdul Zaher Cid of the Kabul police, citing security forces who witnessed the attack, said the insurgents wore uniforms that resembled those of the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force and the two

armored vehicles bore ISAF emblems.

One of the vehicles was able to get past a security barrier using fake documents, while the second was stopped, deputy police chief Mohammed Daud Amin said, quoting security officials present at the scene.

That bit about armored vehicles with ISAF emblems on them gave me quite a start at first, because I recalled that the US is in the process of destroying about 2000 of the heavily armored MRAP vehicles that it is not massing in other places for shipment to alternate US military sites. However, the New York Times identified the vehicle (or did two make it through?) that made it through the initial checkpoint as a Land Cruiser:

"Three suicide bombers were driving a land cruiser packed with explosives with a fake vehicle pass and they wanted to enter the presidential palace area but they were stopped at the gate," the police chief, Gen. Ayoub Salangi, said in a brief telephone call. "We don't know their main target."

Once the guards realized that the pass was fake, the suicide bombers got out of the explosive-laden car and one of them detonated it, killing one of the attackers. The others got into a firefight with the guards, General Salangi said. However, people in the Afghan security forces who asked not to be identified said that there were two vehicles that got through a heavily guarded gate used only by ministerial-level officials.

Considering that this was a ministerial-level gate, the Land Cruiser makes more sense as the vehicle less likely to raise suspicions. In fact, armored Land Cruisers are even pitched to

diplomats as available for rent in Afghanistan, so obtaining one of these and slapping an ISAF logo on it would seem to be a relatively easy task. However, with so many MRAPS being demobilized, we can only wonder when or if one will fall into Taliban hands and what damage they can do with it.

For a final exercise, it is very entertaining to read the coverage of this attack while looking at how each media outlet handles the question of whether to identify the Ariana Hotel as the location of CIA headquarters in Kabul. Both Reuters and Khaama Press come out and definitively say it is. The New York Times and Washington Post dance around the issue much more carefully, as does ToloNews.

The reporting at this time is uniform in saying only the insurgents (numbering from three to seven, depending on the source) and three Afghan troops were killed. Considering how long it took for the news of how damaging the attack at Camp Bastion was, it seems likely that we may never know how much damage was done to CIA headquarters in this attack, despite uniform reporting of a number of fairly large explosions in the area.