LETHAL EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN BECOME EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO DECIPHER

Events on Wednesday, Thursday and early Friday in Afghanistan stand as a stark reminder that killings now take place for such a variety of reasons and by such a variety of groups that assigning blame and motivation becomes extremely difficult.

The dead include two British troops and one Afghan soldier on Wednesday, two American servicemembers in one Thursday event and three Afghan policemen in another, and a large number of Afghan police, soldiers and civilians early on Friday. It would appear that the killing of the US soldiers is the event best understood at this point. From AP in the Washington Post:

> A man in an Afghan police uniform shot and killed two American service members Thursday, in what appeared to be the latest in a rash of attacks on international forces this year by their Afghan partners.
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> /snip/
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> In Thursday's shooting, authorities had yet to determine if the attacker was an Afghan police officer or an insurgent who had donned a uniform to get close to the Americans, said Maj. Lori Hodge, a spokeswoman for U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The assailant escaped after killing the service members while they were out on a late morning patrol in the southern Uruzgan province, she added.

This same article goes on to partially describe the deaths of the two British troops:

> It was the second suspected insider attack in two days. On Wednesday, two British service members and an Afghan police officer were killed in an "exchange of gunfire" in Helmand province, the British Ministry of Defense said in a statement. The Afghan officer was not wearing his uniform and the statement said it was not clear who started shooting first.

There appears to be considerable disagreement at this point on just what took place in this encounter. Afghanistan's Khaama Press has two articles released a little over three hours apart that provide very different explanations. From the first article:

> The pair are thought to have been killed by insurgents, though the BBC said an Afghan source claimed the deaths were from a "green on blue" attack – where coalition troops are killed by their Afghan allies.

The later article provides a very different description:

> According to local authorities in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan, British troops based in southern Helmand province killed two of their comrades in a friendly fire in this province.
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> Provincial security chief spokesman Farid Ahmad Farhang confirming the report said the incident took place in Greshk district while British troops were patrolling in the area.
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> Mr. Farhang further added, "A group of British troops opened fire on an Afghan national police and killed him."
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> He said, "British troops were then attacked by a group of other British

> soldiers who were also patrolling in the area, killing two service members."

The first description describes the British deaths as from insurgents or as green on blue. The second description first says there was a blue on green killing followed by blue on blue friendly fire. BBC is still agnostic on this event, choosing to quote ISAF:

> BBC defence correspondent Caroline Wyatt, in Kabul, said earlier that an Afghan source reported the Britons were killed by an Afghan ally but other locals disputed this.
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> /snip/
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> The MoD said the UK patrol was "not working with any Afghan partners at the time".
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> "At this stage we do not know what initiated the exchange of gunfire and an investigation is ongoing," a spokesperson said.
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> On Wednesday morning, Maj Martin Creighton, spokesman in Kabul for Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), outlined what was known about Wednesday's incident.
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> He told the BBC: "Initial reports, and current operational reports, indicate that this was an insurgent attack in which the British soldier and Royal Marine were killed, but we are aware that there are other interpretations of what happened and Isaf officials are currently working to determine what exactly did happen."

Meanwhile, it would seem odd on first glance that a suicide bomb in Afghanistan would be aimed at a mosque on one of the holiest days of the year, since most such bombings are initiated by the Taliban. However, it appears that the

blast was targeting local political figures and although it missed most of them, it did kill a large number of policemen and soldiers. From Dawn:

> A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a mosque in northern Afghanistan on Friday, killing 36 people and wounding 23, officials said.
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> The attack in the town of Maymana, capital of northern Faryab province, came as people were gathering at the mosque for Eidul Azha prayers.
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> Top provincial officials, including the governor and the police chief, were inside the building when the bomber set off his explosives outside, where a large crowd had gathered, officials said.
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> The officials were not hurt, but most of the dead were police officers and soldiers.
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> ”The targets of the bomber were all the officials inside the mosque,” Deputy Governor Abdul Satar Barez said.
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> He said the dead included 14 civilians.

Besides these events, which were covered in many of the usual world press outlets, there is one more skirmish noted by Khaama that should be considered in the context of the complexities of who is killing whom in Afghanistan at the current time:

> According to local security officials in northern Baghlan province of Afghanistan, heavy clashes took place between Afghan national police forces in this province on Thursday afternoon.
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> Central Baghlan district security Chief Mohammad Kameen confirming the report said the incident took place at the central city of central Baghlan

> district, killing at least 3 Afghan police officers.
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> Mr. Kameen further added the incident took place around 2 pm local time after a group of special police forces did not pay attention towards the city police forces instructions, which triggered clashes among the police forces.
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> In the meantime reports suggest that bodyguards of an irresponsible commander were using uniforms of the special police forces which forced city police to open fire.

This event appears to me to be the direct result of the very rapid expansion of Afghan security forces while providing only minimal training. Add in the lack of a national identity to drive a national police force and local clashes such as this one are virtually guaranteed.