

AFTER DELAYING RUNOFF, AFGHAN TALIBAN ANNOUNCE START DATE OF FIGHTING SEASON, TARGETS

One of the most enduring formulas throughout the nearly 13 year US quagmire in Afghanistan has been the persistent claims by our military and their fans that we are making tremendous progress and that the Taliban has been weakened significantly. That formula held true in spectacular fashion for the Afghan election, with broad instant claims of how successful and peaceful voting was. But alas, once real information started coming out, it turns out that election day was in fact extremely violent. Even less noticed is that the facilities of the Independent Election Commission have been attacked since the day of the vote and now it appears that there will be a delay in the runoff election because of that attack. As if that blow is not enough, the “weakened” Afghan Taliban has now announced the date for the start of their spring offensive and have provided a long list of the types of targets they will attack.

Here is ISAF patting itself on the back on the day of the elections because those ANSF troops they trained did so well:

The International Security Assistance Force congratulates the people of Afghanistan on today’s historic election. Today’s success clearly demonstrates that the Afghan people have chosen their future of progress and opportunity.

As the world watched, Afghan National Security Forces provided the opportunity for the Afghan people to choose their

new President, securing over 6,200 polling centers across the country. Soldiers and policemen confidently patrolled the cities and countryside to protect innocent civilians and prevent insurgents from disrupting today's elections. Afghan voters displayed confidence in their army and police, turning out in unprecedented numbers to cast their ballot for the future of Afghanistan.

"The people of Afghanistan can be proud of their security forces," said General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., ISAF commander. "For months, they've conducted planning and security operations to ensure that the conditions were set for inclusive elections. What we saw today as a result of that effort was extraordinary. In addition to their physical performance, what equally impresses me is the sense of responsibility and determination they had in ensuring the Afghan people had a secure environment in which to vote and determine their own future."

Ah, but that carefully crafted narrative of peaceful elections was bullshit that took several days for the media to pierce. Ten days after the election, the Washington Post had this to say:

But on voting day, the country seemed **unusually calm**, prompting Afghan politicians to speculate that the Taliban had intentionally allowed the election to proceed.

"I don't think the other side put too much pressure," said Hedayat Amin Arsala, a presidential candidate. "They even prevented some people from attacking."

The statistics tell another story. Data

released Monday by the U.S. military in Kabul show that April 5 was, in fact, an unusually violent day, spiking far above the norm, although falling 36 percent short of the peak number of attacks during the 2009 election, one of the bloodiest days of the war.

Of the 286 insurgent attacks during this election, the vast majority (226) occurred in eastern Afghanistan, followed by 21 in the Kandahar area of southern Afghanistan, 17 in the west, 14 in the north, seven in the Helmand region and just one in Kabul.

It now turns out that the fallout from Taliban attacks after the election could be huge, with the runoff possibly delayed:

Independent Election Commission (IEC) Chairman Ahmad Yusuf Nuristani admitted on Wednesday that the runoff round expected between Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai could face delays.

A runoff is required by Afghan law if no presidential candidate gets over 50 percent of votes in the first round. As of now, no one has passed that threshold. Although the runoff round was originally scheduled for May 28, election officials have said a number of setbacks have made it more likely that the round will be delayed.

Mr. Nuristani cited the Taliban's attack on the IEC's headquarters in Kabul as the cause of the delay.

"The election law says that a run-off must be held two weeks after the final results' announcement, but the Taliban launched a rocket attack, and as a result of the attack we lost some of our critical materials, therefore, we will not be able to hold a run-off after two weeks," he explained.

So the Taliban, despite the early claims of a hugely successful election, has now managed to get a crucial delay in the runoff election. Remember that Hamid Karzai has refused to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement that would allow US troops to stay in Afghanistan after the end of this year. Although both Abdullah and Ghani have said that they would sign the agreement, a delay in the winner taking office increases the odds that the US will simply withdraw completely if they feel there isn't sufficient time to plan for the number of troops to leave behind.

And the Taliban are pressing ahead, announcing the start of their spring offensive:

A statement from the "Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate" says 'Khaibar' operations will formally start across Afghanistan from May 12 at 5am.

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"In order to fully complete our religious obligation and in defence of our Islamic homeland, we once again announce our annual spring operations under the name of 'Khaibar' with the onset of the new military year against invaders and their backers," a statement from the Taliban stated.

The Taliban said the main target of the operations would be foreign invaders and their backers including spies, military and civilian contractors, and everyone working for them such as translators, administrators and logistics personnel.

In a veiled reference to some of the US troops staying in Afghanistan beyond 2014, the Taliban said their struggle will continue even if a small number of foreign forces stayed.

The council said the year 2014 holds critical importance as fighters will "exert greater effort and utilise

complex military techniques in planning their current year spring operations as compared to the past.”

That’s pretty brazen. They announce the start date and time. They provide a detailed list of the types of targets they will attack. And they even brand the offensive with a name that has historical significance (see here for the Islamic significance and here for the version from those who oppose Islam).

Another version of the list of targets can be found in the Khaama Press article on the announcement:

Taliban said foreign invaders and their backers under various names like spies, military and civilian contractors and everyone working for them like translators, administrators and logistics personnel will be targeted in their operations.

The group said all high ranking government officials, cabinet ministers, members of parliament, security officials, occupation backing officers in the Interior and Foreign Ministries, attorneys and judges that prosecute Mujahideen as well as agents in the National Directorate that pursue and torture Mujahideen will also be targeted.”

Taliban said the military gatherings of foreign invading forces, their diplomatic centers and convoys as well as the military bases of their internal mercenary stooges, their convoys and the facilities of foreign, interior, intelligence and Arbaki militia will be their main target.

“The plans for upcoming spring operations entitled ‘Khaibar’ have been drawn up by the specialists and courageous military commanders of the

Islamic Emirate while also paying heed to the environmental and seasonal conditions of each region of the country and so will be launched in each area according to the laid out plans," Taliban said.

"Arbaki" are local tribal militia groups.

The Taliban also called for Afghans to help them and to stay away from the targets:

Taliban also called on Afghan people to aid the group's fighters and "avoid working with the enemy, to keep away from their military and intelligence gatherings and bases."

It will be very interesting to see if this is mostly bluster from the Taliban or if they are able to carry off a significant offensive at a crucial time.