



Written by on May 18, 2010

Taliban Bomb Attack on NATO in Kabul

A Taliban suicide car bomber struck a NATO convoy in Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, on May 18, killing six military personnel — five Americans and one Canadian — the AP reported, citing a statement from military and Afghan officials.



The *Washington Post* reported that the blast overturned a heavy military truck and that five vehicles in the convoy were heavily damaged, along with more than a dozen civilian cars and a passing bus. About 12 Afghan civilians were killed in the blast most of whom, it is believed, were passengers on the public bus.

The attack was the first major bombing in the Afghan capital since February and the deadliest since October 2009, when Taliban attacked two U.S. military outposts in Nuristan province.

"This sort of desperate brutality and aggression reminds us of the pessimism of an enemy who seeks to kill the innocent and to stop the progress of securing a better future for this country," International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) spokesman Brig. Gen. Josef Blotz said.

The *Post* also quoted NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who said the bombing would not deter the alliance from its mission to "protect the Afghan people and strengthen Afghanistan's ability to resist terrorism."

A CNN report quoted Zabiullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, who confirmed the attack and said the bomber was able to "destroy five foreign vehicles and damage one more."

A spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul called the attack a "deplorable act of violence," and said the strike demonstrates the Taliban's "callous disregard for the well being of the Afghan people."

British Foreign Minister Alistair Burt condemned the strike and said the British and international commitment "to support the Afghan government and people to work for a political solution through the peace jirga [assembly of tribal elders] at the end of this month will not be shaken."

An article about the attack posted by Jason Ditz at antiwar.com on May 18 observed the frustrating tendency of seeming victories against the Taliban, only to find that they — like the unstoppable, multiplying broom in Walt Disney's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* — keep coming back to inflict even greater damage:

This might mark a serious downside to the capture of Taliban "moderate" Mullah Baradar in Pakistan in February. Baradar had spearheaded previous efforts by the Taliban to limit civilian casualties, a PR coup at a time when both the U.S. and Taliban forces continue to kill large numbers of civilians. With Baradar locked away in an ISI jail, his replacement does not appear to have the same qualms about "collateral damage" in such attacks.

Those who still have hopes that the superior forces of NATO will defeat the Taliban in another year or



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two, leave things in the capable hands of Afghanistan's own military, and then go home, would be wise not to allow those hopes to produce unrealistic expectations. Such hopes may have been fed by reading only the headlines — e.g., from a May 12 CNN report, "[Obama: U.S. can start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in July 2011](#)" — but failing to read further.

In this case, the operative word is "start."

After reporting that President Obama said on May 12, after meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai at the White House, that he is "confident" his administration will meet its self-imposed deadline to start a U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2011, CNN continues with "the rest of the story" — which is not nearly so encouraging:

There's "going to be some hard fighting" over the next few months, [Obama] warned. Taliban and other extremist forces are "tough," he said.

He also stressed that the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan will continue long after the deadline.

"We are not suddenly, as of July 2011, finished with Afghanistan," he said after a meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. "This is a long-term partnership."

CNN also quoted ISAF commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who stated: "We will encounter increased violence as our combined security forces expand into Taliban-controlled areas," observing that McChrystal "offered no specifics on when the offensive might start, but said securing control of the region is a goal of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan."

Putting the President's prediction that our involvement in Afghanistan will be "a long-term partnership" into perspective, we must consider that U.S. forces have already been there since October 7, 2001 — close to nine years. As for how long it should take to subdue insurgent forces in the mountainous country, we can look at the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which lasted almost 10 years (1979-1989). At the time, the Soviet Union was a highly militarized nation and committed 118,000 well equipped, disciplined troops to Afghanistan, 14,453 of whom would be killed.

What is also interesting is a description of the Soviet Union's eventual "exit strategy" in a [Wikipedia](#) article about the Soviet war: "The first step of the exit strategy was to transfer the burden of fighting the mujahideen to the Afghan armed forces, with the aim of preparing them to operate without Soviet help."

With a few minor edits, we might write today: "The first step of the exit strategy was to transfer the burden of fighting the Taliban to the Afghan armed forces, with the aim of preparing them to operate without U.S. and NATO help."

Though it is impossible to accurately estimate the strength of the Taliban, the movement is generally believed to number between 25,000 and 45,000 members. The Taliban's close allies, al-Qaeda, are far less numerous, perhaps numbering as few as 1,000 members.

In contrast, during World War II, the last military operation in which the U.S. Congress issued a declaration of war, as the Constitution prescribes, our enemies numbered approximately (according to the source) 17,000,000 Germans, 7,400,000 Japanese, and (before Italy deposed Mussolini and joined the Allies) 4,500,000 Italians.

Comparing World War II to Afghanistan also illustrates the folly of "dabbling" in a war (especially an undeclared war), by committing insufficient resources to it. The Soviet Union committed 29,000,000 troops during World War II, the United States 11,490,000, France 5,600,000, the UK 4,600,000, India,



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2,400,000, and the other allies many more.

U.S. involvement in World War II lasted less than four years, after which most of our forces returned home victoriously.

Whereas the numbers sent to Afghanistan by the last two “superpowers” were 118,000 for the Soviets and 102,554 currently deployed by ISAF. We have seen the results (or lack thereof) following each intervention, which have thus far lasted a combined total of nearly 19 years. Even the fact that one intervention was for domination and the other for liberation has not altered the results. The science of warfare ignores motives.

Our military conflicts since then, in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, illustrate the inherent flaws in an internationalist foreign policy that advocates intervening everywhere (even where we are not wanted), declaring war on no one, and then disregarding proven military formulas for victory.

It is a policy only a member of the Council on Foreign Relations could love.

Photo: The mangled remains of a vehicle lies at the place of a suicide attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, May 18, 2010 :AP Images



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