

GROUP BEHIND DEADLY KABUL BLAST UPSET BY NEGOTIATIONS ON US TROOPS REMAINING IN AFGHANISTAN

There was a deadly blast in Kabul yesterday, shattering what had been several months of relative peace in the capital. The suicide blast targeted a convoy of US vehicles. From the New York Times:

Hezb-i-Islami, a relatively small insurgent faction that often competes with the Taliban for influence, claimed responsibility for the attack, which also wounded more than three dozen Afghans. Haroon Zarghon, the group's spokesman, reached by telephone in Pakistan, said the bombing was carried out by a 24-year-old man who had grown up south of Kabul.

More attacks against Americans will come soon, Mr. Zarghon added, saying that Hezb-i-Islami was dismayed by the current talks between Afghanistan and the United States about a long-term security deal under which thousands of American soldiers could be based in Afghanistan for years to come.

Hezb-i-Islami has a complex history and has been around Afghanistan for a long time. Even Kimberly Kagan's Institute for the Study of War admits that the CIA funneled significant support to this group in fighting the Soviets:

Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is an insurgent group active in Afghanistan. It is a splinter group of one of the prominent , and the most radical of the seven

mujahedeen factions fighting the Soviets in the 1980s. Hekmatyar , a favorite of the CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, received the greatest portion of foreign assistance to the mujahedeen. Hekmatyar trained Afghan and foreign guerilla fighters in the refugee camps of Shamshatoo and Jalozai in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and also ran numerous schools and hospitals in NWFP. His organization also received funds from Saudi charity organizations, Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, and other wealthy Arabs.

The political side of the group, however, is active in the current government and is contemplating fielding a candidate for the upcoming Presidential elections:

The party's deputy chief Ghairat Bahir said that a delegation of four senior party figures are in Kabul meeting local members to discuss the election and possible presidential candidates.

"We have sent a delegation to Kabul. The delegation is led by Mohammad Rassoul. Its purpose is to visit and discuss [sic] with Hezb-e-Islami members in Kabul, not to talk with [Afghan] government officials," he told TOLOnews via telephone from Pakistan.

"The delegation has talked with the party members about the election and the party decided to introduce a candidate or support a competent candidate. We will soon make a final decision on this. I cannot name the candidate but our party's nomination will be a prominent person in the country," Bahir said.

The presence of US troops in Afghanistan is the

primary concern for the group:

Hezb-e-Islami is calling for the foreign forces to leave Afghanistan, saying that a proper election is not possible with them in the country.

"We hope the foreigners leave Afghanistan. We stress as our first position: it will be impossible to hold a fair, transparent and free election in the presence of the foreign forces," he said.

Note the coverage of the bombing in ToloNews:

President Karzai condemned the suicide attack and called it inhuman and a non-Islamic act.

Meanwhile, in an exclusive interview with TOLONews at the blast site, the Afghan Interior Minister, Mojtaba Patang talked only about the civilian casualties.

"At around 8:30 AM a suicide bomber in Corolla car exploded himself. Unfortunately the attack had casualties. Six civilians were killed and around 30 injured," Patang said.

Karzai's condemnation of the attack as non-Islamic appears to be calling out HIG for their previous claim that they would cease targeting civilians. In Pakistan Today the group attempted to claim there were no civilian casualties:

A spokesman for Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan headed by Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has claimed responsibility for a deadly suicide attack in Kabul on Thursday, contradicting reports of civilian casualties.

"There were no civilian or Afghan nationals targeted in the suicide attack in the heart of Kabul," the Peshawar-

based spokesperson of HIA Hekmatyar told *Pakistan Today*. He said the target of the suicide attack was a convoy of NATO troops. "All killed and injured were foreigners," he added.

It appears, however, that the spokesman forgot that the group had also condemned suicide attacks:

Recently, HIA chief Hekmatyar had not only denounced targeting civilians during resistance, but had even termed it *haram* (prohibited) per Islamic injunctions.

Hekmatyar and his group also denounced suicide attacks in Pakistan.

HIG has promised more attacks on the US in their drive to prevent a US presence after NATO operations conclude at the end of next year. It would appear, however, that these attempts at attacks will be made more difficult not only by efforts by US and Afghan forces to defeat them, but by the Taliban as well. Less than a month after Hamid Karzai called for the expulsion of US Special Operations Forces from Maidan Wardak province due to reported attacks on civilians in the Nerkh district, a high-ranking HIG militant was killed by the Taliban there:

Provincial governor media office following a statement announced that the Hezb-e-Islami party commander was killed following a roadside improvised explosive device blast.

The source further added, the incident took place on Friday in Nerkh district, killing commander Khanji along with his other companions.

According to reports the IED was planted by Taliban militants.

In the meantime Wardak provincial government following the statement added

that Hezb-e-Islami militants started clashes with the Taliban militants in Nerkh district following the incident.

Afghanistan's constitution bars participation by political groups that engage in violence. That is why the coverage above goes back and forth between terming Hekmatyar's group HIG and HIA. In theory, HIA is the political-only operation, but it is clear that Hekmatyar controls both and remains as committed to violence as ever.

In the meantime, look for more attempts by HIG to carry out spectacular attacks. Gosh, who could ever have anticipated that a group the CIA helped to fund and arm would some day turn against us?