

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	359
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
Titel:	Alarm at Wave of Attacks in Herat
Udgivet:	9. november 2010
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	15. december 2010

Title	Alarm at Wave of Attacks in Herat
Publisher	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
Country	Afghanistan
Publication Date	9 November 2010
Cite as	Institute for War and Peace Reporting, <i>Alarm at Wave of Attacks in Herat</i> , 9 November 2010, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4cdd265b1a.html [accessed 13 December 2010]

Alarm at Wave of Attacks in Herat

A wave of attacks across Herat province in the last three months has alarmed residents and officials alike in this formerly stable part of Afghanistan.

Herat has been one of the more secure provinces of Afghanistan since the fall of the Taleban in 2001, and the insurgent presence used to be limited to a few outlying areas.

However, security officials now say the insurgents are active in at least ten districts of the province, with roadside bombs in particular causing increasing numbers of casualties among Afghan security forces and their international allies, as well as among civilians.

Militant groups appear to be moving into previously secure areas and even extending their operations into Herat city, officials warn.

In the most recent major attack, the office of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, was struck on the morning of 22 October by four suicide bombers who got inside the compound. All the attackers were eventually killed, while various reports suggested that between two and four Afghan policemen had been injured.

In a press conference convened soon after the attack, Herat governor Mohammad Daoud Sabah hailed the police's response to the attack as a great victory, and in a visit to the city the following day, UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura also praised the Afghan security forces.

"Such incidents will not compel the United Nations to close down its offices in Afghanistan," the UN official said.

Police in the province warn that the rise in violent incidents needs to be taken seriously.

Nur Khan Nikzad, the media spokesman for the Herat provincial police command, told IWPR that in the last three months there had been an estimated 30 per cent increase in the number of attacks, especially roadside bombs. The latter represented a particular problem for Afghan police, which lacked the equipment to detect and defuse such devices, he said.

"Every week we're seeing roadside mines targeting government forces, which have wounded and killed a number of police," Nikzad said, adding that he could not provide accurate casualty figures.

He said the anti-government forces present in Herat had been supplemented by fighters from neighbouring Badghis and Farah provinces.

Brigadier-General Ziauddin Mahmudi, deputy chief of the Western Police Zone, which includes Herat, also noted a rising presence of insurgents, adding that some had come from as far away as Kandahar. He said security officials had devised a plan to combat the infiltration, and this would be implemented shortly.

Taleban spokesman Qari Yusuf Ahmadi told IWPR that his forces had stepped up attacks in Herat province and increased their presence in most districts there.

"People are tired of the puppet government and its foreign masters, they have sympathy with the Taleban, and we are continuing our jihad with the blessing of God and the support of the people," he said.

The raid on UNAMA, he said, was carried out because "this organisation is working against the people of Afghanistan and the Islamic emirate".

As well as the Taleban, other insurgent groups are also active in Herat, including Hizb-e Islami.

Mohammad Rafiq Shahir, head of the committee of experts and political analysts in Herat, blamed the instability on a lack of coordination among the various security agencies in the province.

"The anti-government forces use this vacuum to cross over from neighbouring provinces and prove they have the capacity to destabilise peaceful areas of Afghanistan," he said.

Others argue that turbulence in Herat's political establishment has contributed to the instability. The current governor, Sabah, took over from Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani ahead of the September parliamentary election.

"The rise in instability is directly related to changes made to the top leadership in this province," Herat resident Gul Ahmad said.

Meanwhile, the violence is hurting Herat's position as a key economic and trade hub.

Taimour Shah of the Pamir Cola soft drinks company said the last three months had seen a massive fall in sales.

"The volatile situation across this province has led us to halt 20 per cent of our business activities," he said, adding staff were no longer able to travel freely around the province.

Journalism graduate Aryan Sahil said he was planning to stop working in the media and look for another job to avoid retaliation by the insurgents.

"I fear that some of my reports and articles might not go down well with some people, and will create a risk to my life," he said.

Another Herat resident, who did not want to give his name, said that he was so sick of the situation that he just wanted to leave the country.

"People often tire of the same repeated joy and happiness – aren't we allowed to be tired of continued war and misery?" he asked. "What hope should we live for, when we realise that this country will never be peaceful and will never be rebuilt?"

Shahpoor Saber is an IWPR-trained reporter in Herat.

