



Taliban Insurgents Attack an Afghan Intelligence Compound

Taliban insurgents killed eleven people during an attack on an intelligence compound in Afghanistan's northwest city of Aybak earlier this week. The attack began with a car bomb detonated at the entrance of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security in Aybak, which cleared the way for insurgents to enter the facility. Afghan security forces responded and fought the intruders for a number of hours to re-take the compound. Eleven people were killed and a further sixty were injured during the fighting. The attack on the National Directorate of Security is the latest during a spate of violence by the Taliban in Afghanistan, despite a peace agreement between the group, the Afghan government, and the United States.

A spokesman for the provincial government of Samangan said the Taliban conducted a "complex attack" and four of the insurgents were killed during the fighting with security forces. The car bomb that initiated the attack was powerful enough to break the windows of homes in a civilian area of Aybak three kilometers away. Coordinated attacks by the Taliban have decreased in recent months after the group signed agreements to negotiate peace in Afghanistan, but the Taliban remains active in Samangan province, where Aybak is the capital. Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said the group was behind the attack and that they had "no option but to continue the war" due to the Afghan government's alleged delaying of formal peace negotiations with his organization.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani strongly condemned the attack and accused the Taliban of strategically planning it to gain an upper hand in the upcoming peace talks. Local Afghan officials have also accused the Taliban of attacking various security checkpoints across the country and killing twenty-five Afghan security personnel. The violence is the latest in a recent surge that has occurred due to disagreements between the Taliban and Afghan government over prisoner releases mandated by the original peace agreement signed in Doha in February of this year.

The February agreement in Doha was negotiated between the United States, the Afghan government, and the Taliban and sought to end the nearly two decades of violence in Afghanistan. According to that deal, all international military forces would withdraw from Afghanistan before intra-Afghan talks would occur between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Additionally, the Taliban pledged to not attack current American positions in Afghanistan, and both the Taliban and the Afghan government would release prisoners in a show of good faith. The Taliban has recently increased its targeting of Afghan government facilities over a perceived breach of the agreed upon prisoner release process. The Afghan government has released 4,199 Taliban prisoners, but has refused to release certain individuals detained for crimes including drug trafficking, kidnapping, sexual assault, and stoning of women. The Taliban believe this is a violation of the peace accord, and have refused to begin formal negotiations until an additional 600 prisoners are released. The intra-Afghan attacks were scheduled to begin on March 10th, 2020, but they have been delayed and the recent spate of violence is unlikely to motivate either side to begin negotiating.