

Airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan destroy Islamic State radio station

American and Afghan officials say airstrikes on a remote eastern region of [Afghanistan](#) have destroyed a radio station operated by the Islamic State group.

An official with the US military said today the strike had destroyed “Voice of the Caliphate” radio operated by IS near the border with Pakistan. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to media on the subject.

In an official statement, US Army Col Mike Lawhorn, spokesman for the US-NATO mission in Afghanistan, said “two counter-terrorism airstrikes took place in Achin district” in Nangarhar province yesterday.

Lawhorn had no further details.

The Islamic State group emerged in Afghanistan in the past year. The radio station was broadcasting illegally across Nangarhar, in an attempt to boost recruitment.

Pakistan, Afghanistan need to work together to tackle Taliban: White House

Pakistan and Afghanistan need to work together to effectively overcome the Taliban challenge, the White House said, a day after the militant group massacred 21 people, mostly students, at a popular Pakistani university.

“The conclusion that we’ve drawn here is...that the Taliban poses a security threat to both countries, and that the nations of Afghanistan and Pakistan are going to be able to more effectively confront that threat if they’re able to more effectively cooperate,” White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters yesterday.

Earnest said the US has long been supportive of the reconciliation process between the Afghan government and the Taliban. He said the US is hoping to facilitate better co-operation between the two South Asian neighbours.

As part of that role, US Vice President Joe Biden held a tri-lateral meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Davos yesterday to discuss the recent reconciliation efforts.

During the meeting, Biden reaffirmed US support for reconciliation and improved bilateral ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan. “Any sort of decisions about how the continuation of those talks and any sort of agreement that could be produced by those talks about whether or not that’s in the interest of those countries to pursue – those are decisions that will be made by the leaders in those two countries, as it should be,” he said.

But the US will continue to play the role that it has played for some time now in supporting reconciliation talks that are led by those individual countries, he added.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the US have called on all Afghan Taliban groups to start talks with Kabul to find a political solution to the long-running conflict in the war-torn country.

On Wednesday, heavily-armed Taliban militants stormed the Bacha Khan University, named after the iconic Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, in Pakistan’s Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and opened fire

on students and teachers, killing 21 people.

Suicide bomb attack, gunbattle near Indian Consulate in Afghanistan kills seven security personnel

A suicide bomb attack and subsequent gunfire outside the Pakistani Consulate in Jalalabad killed at least seven Afghan security personnel on Wednesday.

The attack took place not far away from the Indian Consulate located in an area which houses foreign missions.

The suicide bomber blew himself up outside the Pakistani consulate and the bombing was followed by gunfire from unidentified terrorists.

Afghan security forces swiftly responded to the attack and engaged with the gunmen barricaded in a house near the Pakistan Consulate.

The gunbattle continued for nearly four hours.

“Seven of our security forces were killed and seven others wounded as a result of the terrorist attack,” Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said on Twitter.

It was not clear how many terrorists had been killed.

Witnesses earlier said heavy gunfire and a series of explosions could be heard and residents and children from a nearby school had been evacuated.

Attallah Khogyani, a spokesman for the provincial governor, had earlier said a suicide bomber tried to join a queue of people seeking visas to Pakistan and blew himself up after being prevented from entering the building.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.

Indian interests have been targeted twice this month – an attack on the Indian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif (Afghanistan), and a raid by Islamist insurgents on an Air Force base in Punjab.

A small bomb also exploded near the Indian consulate in Jalalabad last Tuesday, but no casualties were reported.

(With agency inputs)

Blast close to foreign consulates in Jalalabad in Afghanistan

An explosion was heard in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad on Wednesday close to foreign consulates including those of India, Pakistan and Iran, witnesses told Reuters.

There was no immediate confirmation of the cause of the blast or of any casualties or damage. There have been several bomb blasts in Afghanistan over recent weeks at a time when efforts are underway to restart a peace process with the Taliban and ease diplomatic tension between Pakistan and India.

Pakistan opposes preconditions for Afghan-Taliban peace talks

Pakistan on Monday said that no precondition should be attached for talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, as a key meeting of a quadrilateral group involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US began here aimed at reviving the stalled peace process.

“It is important that no preconditions are attached to the reconciliation process, as it will create difficulties in bringing Taliban to the negotiating table,” PM Nawaz Sharif’s Advisor on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said at the meeting.

The group was set up last year to facilitate the reconciliation process in the war-torn country.

“The primary objective of the reconciliation process is to create conditions to bring Taliban to the negotiating table and offer them incentives that can persuade them to move away from using violence as a tool for pursuing political goals,” Aziz said.

“It is therefore important that no preconditions are attached to the reconciliation process,” Aziz added.

“Proper sequencing is required in the negotiating process,” he said, adding that “threat of use of military action against the group will cause hindrances and cannot proceed the offer of talks to all groups.”

He said that it was important to undertake a realistic assessment of the opportunities as well as anticipated obstacles in the process and then develop clarity on how to proceed further.

“I want to reaffirm that Pakistan values its brotherly and neighbourly relations with Afghanistan, and is firmly committed to continue serious efforts for long term peace and stability in Afghanistan,” he added.

Afghanistan hoped that Pakistan will share a list of insurgents who are ready for peace talks.

The first round of talks was held in July but the process was suspended in the same month after news of Taliban chief Mullah Omar’s death was announced.

Officials from Pakistan, China and US were present when representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan government met in Murree near Islamabad during the first round.

According to officials, the second round may take place towards the end of January if the four nations agreed on the minimum agenda of talks.

It is believed that the process of peace in Afghanistan will be testing for all parties due to strong opposition within Afghanistan towards any peace with the Taliban.

Pentagon warns ISIS offshoot growing in Afghanistan, 'operationally active'

The Pentagon delivered a warning Tuesday about the growth of the Islamic State offshoot in Afghanistan, saying the branch has become “more operationally active” there by carving out territory and openly fighting the Taliban.

[The Defense Department report](#) also said violence in Afghanistan overall is on the rise and the security situation has worsened since June, with more effective attacks by insurgents and increased casualties among Afghan security forces. The DOD said advances by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – Khorasan Province (IS-KP) in particular could stoke “increased violence” with other extremist groups in 2016.

IS-KP “has progressed from its initial exploratory phase to a point where they are openly fighting the Taliban for the establishment of a safe haven, and are becoming more operationally active,” the report said.

The warning comes as President Obama tries to assure the public about the administration’s strategy for fighting the Islamic State, a military operation that focuses on Iraq and Syria.

“We are squeezing its heart and making it harder for them to pump out its propaganda,” Obama declared Monday at the Pentagon.

But the recent Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., attacks demonstrate the reach of ISIS’ ideology and threat beyond the Iraq-Syria warzone. The offshoot’s presence in Afghanistan represents another unstable area where the group is trying to establish a foothold.

The commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, confirmed to The Associated Press on Tuesday that ISIS allies in Afghanistan indeed are trying to establish a regional base in the eastern city of Jalalabad

Campbell said that “foreign fighters” from Syria and Iraq had joined Afghans who had declared loyalty to the group in the eastern province of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan.

He said there were also “indications” that the ISIS supporters in Nangarhar were trying to consolidate links with the group’s leadership in Syria and Iraq.

This comports with the findings in the DOD report, which said IS-KP has “seized pockets of terrain from the Taliban in Nangarhar Province.”

The report also said the Taliban-led insurgency has been emboldened by the U.S.-led coalition’s transition this year from direct combat operations to a train-and-advise role. The U.S. now has about 9,800 troops in Afghanistan.

The report noted IS-KP claimed responsibility for an IED attack against a United Nations vehicle in September and conducted an attack later that month against as many as 10 checkpoints.

According to the DOD, the offshoot is growing by recruiting “disaffected Taliban” and others.

During the summer months, Taliban and ISIS loyalists fought fierce battles in the far eastern districts of Nangarhar, with residents reporting a range of atrocities, including arbitrary imprisonment, forced marriages for young women, and beheadings.

Campbell stressed that “they don’t have the capability right now to attack Europe, or attack the homeland, the United States. But that’s what they want to do, they’ve said that’s what they want to do.”

[News Source](#)

Pakistan wants durable peace in Afghanistan: Sartaj Aziz

Pakistan desires durable peace in Afghanistan and instability in the region is not in the interest of the country, Pakistan prime minister's advisor on foreign affairs Sartaj Aziz said on Tuesday.

While addressing a meeting prior to the Heart of Asia conference here, Aziz said Pakistan will continue to support all endeavours aimed at strengthening peace and security in Afghanistan.

Aziz said the Heart of Asia conference is an effective platform for promoting regional economic cooperation and connectivity, with Afghanistan at its centre.

It provides an opportunity for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, and a secure and prosperous region as a whole.

Aziz said that as the process matures, "our focus should be on strengthening engagements and collaboration to effectively combat challenges in the field of security and promoting regional economic collaboration".

Afghanistan deputy foreign minister Hikmat Khalil Karzai called for a united and collective approach to counter the menace of terrorism and violent extremism.

He said the conference was taking place at a critical juncture when the region was confronted by many challenges, including terrorism.

He also said that his country attaches importance to having strong relations with all the regional countries for promotion of economic relations and meeting the challenges.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, US discuss stalled Afghan peace talks

Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US began deliberations here on Wednesday on the resumption of the stalled Afghan peace process.

The deliberations, on the sidelines of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process conference, saw Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani leading their respective country's delegations while Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken led the US delegation at the meeting, the Daily Pakistan Urdu newspaper reported.

The trilateral meeting was being held in the aftermath of a brief dialogue between the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan in which they took up several issues of mutual interest, including the resumption of talks with the Afghan Taliban.

Ghani is on a daylong visit to Pakistan for the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process conference which aims to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan and strengthen regional economic cooperation and connectivity. Nawaz and Ghani jointly inaugurated the process in Islamabad.

The trip follows a trilateral meeting between Sharif, Ghani and British Prime Minister David Cameron in Paris where the three agreed on cooperation-based regional relationship.

Ghani had, however, maintained that Kabul will not compromise its sovereignty and independence

at any cost.

Relations between the two neighbours received a hit after Ghani blamed Pakistan of supporting the Afghan Taliban for carrying out suicide blasts in Kabul.

His statement was followed by Islamabad's accusation that an attack on Pakistan Air Force's Badaber airbase was planned and controlled from Afghanistan.

The governments of both the countries were communicating through 'backdoor channels' to get bilateral ties back on track.

The Heart of Asia conference was a platform to repair the stalled relations between the two neighbouring countries.

Indian External Affairs Minister also arrived in Islamabad to attend the conference which was established in 2011 at the initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey.

Sushma will later on Wednesday hold bilateral meetings with Sharif.

[News Source](#)
