

Attacks in north Afghanistan kill 15 Afghan security forces

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Kabul: Separate attacks in northern Afghanistan on Tuesday killed at least 15 Afghan troops, including 10 soldiers who died in an "insider attack" when a fellow soldier smuggled insurgents inside a checkpoint to kill his colleagues, officials said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the assaults. The so-called insider attacks "are incidents when an Afghan soldier or policeman turns his gun on fellow troops" have been a serious problem in recent years.

In Tuesday's assault, deputy provincial police chief in northern Zawzjan province, Abdul Hafiz Khashi, said that before dawn, a traitor allowed an unspecified number of insurgents into the compound at the checkpoint in Qush Tepa district, where they killed 10 soldiers. Khashi identified the soldier who enabled the attack as Mohammad Alim, saying he had obviously joined insurgents in the area.

The attackers and Alim fled the scene and security forces were pursuing them, he added.

Also Tuesday, a roadside bombing in northern Balkh province killed five police officers, including a district police chief, according to Sher Jan Durani, spokesman for the provincial police chief in Balkh.

The five were on patrol in a vehicle in Dawlat Abad district when their car struck the bomb. Three officers were wounded in the explosion.

Meanwhile, the new Taliban leader released a message ahead of the major Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, saying that for peace in Afghanistan, it is necessary to "end the occupation" of the country by all foreign forces "a reference to NATO troops.

Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor also said that all existing military and security deals between the Kabul government and other countries must be revoked.

His message was likely an attempt by the newly appointed Mansoor to reassure followers that he is keeping in tradition with his predecessor, the late Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, in releasing messages ahead of Eid al-Adha.

"If the Kabul administration wants to end the war and establish peace in the country, it must end the occupation and revoke all military and security treaties with the invaders," Mansoor said in the statement.

Mansoor also urged the Taliban to unite and ignore "futile enemy propaganda" about disunity among their ranks. There are still some Taliban commanders who oppose Mansoor's leadership. Last week, after almost two months of differences, Mullah Omar's family announced their support for Mansoor.

Mullah Omar's brother, Mullah Abdul Manan, and eldest son, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoub, declared their support for Mansoor's leadership in a gathering of senior Taliban officials, according to a statement posted on the Taliban website.

Manan also confirmed to The Associated Press that he and Yaqoub were now pledging their allegiance to Mansoor. The pair, along with several other senior Taliban commanders, initially rejected Mansoor's ascension.

In recent months, the Taliban have stepped up their attacks on Afghan soldiers and police. U.S. and NATO forces

formally ended their combat mission at the end of last year, leaving Afghan security forces in charge of public safety in the country.

- AP