



In Brief: Afghanistan – insider attacks

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'Green on Blue' or 'insider' attacks are when Afghan security forces, or those disguised as security forces, attack International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) personnel serving in Afghanistan.

Six ISAF soldiers, including two British soldiers, were killed in two such incidents over the weekend of 15/16 September 2012, bringing the total number of soldiers killed this year to [51 soldiers](#). The [rising number](#) of such attacks – there were 2 deaths in 2007 rising to 31 deaths in 2011 - has drawn considerable attention to the threat.

The Government described insider attacks as a “serious concern” in its July/August [monthly progress report](#) and the Defence Secretary, [Philip Hammond](#) MP, said they were at the top of his agenda during his visit to Afghanistan on 13 September. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the United States, [Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#), described insider attacks as a “very serious threat to the campaign” while [General John Allen](#), Commander of ISAF, called them “very complex” and said his command is doing everything it can to reduce the threat. The US Secretary of Defence, [Leon Panetta](#), sees them as a “last gasp effort” by the Taliban to try to “create chaos”.

ISAF issued a [Tactical Directive](#) in March 2012 with specific measures to improve force protection, including close-quarter combat and active shooter training for personnel at increased risk of an insider attack (e.g. mentors) and for coalition force units to create safe zones inside Afghan security force compounds where they can defend themselves if necessary. Individual soldiers are tasked to watch over their colleagues during interactions with Afghan forces, becoming known as “guardian angels”. The [Truthout website](#) published an unclassified copy of a US Army guide “Inside the Wire Threats – Afghanistan Green on Blue”, dated February 2012, which makes suggestions for such incidents, including on prevention, indicators and action to take during and after an attack.

[Other steps](#) taken by the Afghans include: doubling in size of the counter-intelligence unit; re-vetting of National Army soldiers returning from leave; establishing an anonymous insider threat reporting system; outlawing the sale of military and police uniforms and embedding of National Directorate of Security agents at recruiting centres. Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have recruited [religious and cultural affairs officers](#) to train and educate members of the Army on cultural differences, to mitigate the risk of insider attacks caused by disagreements, grievances or perceived offences.

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Vetting arrangements have in particular been sharpened. The ANSF has implemented an [eight step vetting process](#) and embedded counter-intelligence officers across the services. [Philip Hammond](#), the Defence Secretary, noted that with the benefit of hindsight the vetting process “may not have been entirely adequate” and a re-vetting process is underway of the ANSF with a particular focus on those returning from leave for signs they have been radicalised.

In a 6 September statement on insider attacks, [Gen. Allen](#) announced plans to slow the training of new recruits for the Afghan Local Police (ALP). All 16,000 ALP personnel throughout Afghanistan are to be re-vetted. He ordered a new executive oversight group of senior Afghan and Coalition leaders “to monitor, direct and drive our threat mitigation initiatives” supported “by a combined multi-agency working group whose only task is to tackle the insider Threat problem”.

ISAF said media [reports](#) after the 15/16 September attacks that NATO is scaling down joint patrols with Afghan forces in response to the number of insider attacks were “not accurate”. ISAF did say it was reducing operational tempo and increasing force protection. The [Defence Secretary](#) said this means a change “in the level at which advising and partnering is scrutinised and authorised.” The [MOD](#) explained that partnering “with Afghan forces will now take place at kandak (battalion) staff level and above, and that the need for partnered operations below kandak-level will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and will require approval from Regional Command commanders.” After an attack on NATO mentors in February 2012, ISAF briefly suspended its mentoring scheme with the Afghan Ministry of Interior.

[The Government](#) says “analysis does indicate that there is no single overriding factor which triggers insider-threat attacks.” This is either because the perpetrators are killed or escape or because “it is simply not possible firmly to attribute a motive with any certainty”. [Mr Hammond](#) suggested there are four groups of attack motivators: infiltrations organised by the Taliban; radicalisation; personal or cultural factors; Taliban operatives who have stolen or obtained uniforms. The ISAF deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, [Brigadier General Roger Noble](#), said in September that ISAF is forming a profile and identifying characteristics of inside threat shooters. A joint investigation commission between ISAF and the ANSF has been established to study incidents in order to “identify lessons and required actions”, according to [Gen. Allen](#).

[Mr Hammond](#) acknowledged the rising number of insider attacks is sapping morale in ISAF-contributing nations. The Pentagon’s [April 2012](#) report to Congress on Afghanistan noted “Green-on-Blue attacks have a significant negative operational and strategic impact on the coalition mission in Afghanistan.” Colonel [Richard Kemp](#), former British Commander in Afghanistan, says it means the soldiers have no respite and are always on alert.

A [number of MPs](#) have expressed concern about insider attacks with some calling for the withdrawal of British troops by the end of the year. The Defence Secretary responded to two separate urgent questions on the matter on [17 September](#) and 18 September. He expressed commitment to the strategy of mentoring and training the Afghan army and police to deliver security to enable British forces to first withdraw into a support role and then to return home. [Mr Hammond](#) the Taliban are seeking to “wreck” this strategy through insider attacks. Shadow Defence Minister [Kevan Jones](#) MP said that the increasing frequency “demands a response of proportionate strength”.

Further reading: SN05851 [Afghanistan: The timetable for security transition](#) (9 July 2012)