

The World; Afghan Battles Heat Up in Spring

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

The fighting occurred late Tuesday as militants fired four rockets at the U.S. military base near the southeastern city of Khowst. The clash left at least 12 insurgents dead. There were no American casualties, the military said.

Tuesday's clash was preceded by fighting in Zabol province on Monday that left 17 rebels dead. Last week, U.S. forces reportedly killed a dozen militants near the city of Khowst.

Another sign Taliban and Al Qaeda remnants could be reorganizing was the recent announcement the Taliban had started a pirate radio station airing commentaries condemning the Afghan government.

FULL TEXT

U.S. troops fired artillery and called in airstrikes as they battled Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters this week, another sign that spring weather might bring stepped-up attacks against American forces.

The fighting occurred late Tuesday as militants fired four rockets at the U.S. military base near the southeastern city of Khowst. The clash left at least 12 insurgents dead. There were no American casualties, the military said.

"They shot at us with rockets and we responded with artillery, fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft," Army Maj. J.R. Mendoza said in a statement.

"We were able to see the launching point of the rockets and we brought everything we had to bear on it."

The military said two 500-pound bombs, 10 rockets and hundreds of artillery shells were fired at the rebels.

"We are on the border of Pakistan, and the rockets could have easily been fired from there. We could see more of these types of attacks," a security official from Khowst province said.

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Over the weekend, Army Lt. Gen. David W. Barno, commander of the 17,000-strong U.S. force in Afghanistan, warned that militants might launch a large-scale attack in the coming months.

Such a surge in violence may be tied in part to the warm spring weather, which has allowed militants to leave the mountain hide-outs they use during the freezing winter.

Another sign Taliban and Al Qaeda remnants could be reorganizing was the recent announcement the Taliban had started a pirate radio station airing commentaries condemning the Afghan government.

Shariat Shagh, or the Voice of Islamic Law, reportedly has been on the air in several southern provinces, including Kandahar, the group's stronghold when it ruled the country.

"We have all heard that the radio is broadcasting for two hours a day, but no one I know has actually heard the station on the air," said Khalid Pashtun, a spokesman for Kandahar's governor.

Officials in the province say the announcement may be part of a publicity effort as the rebels try to rebuild support in southern Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, two former Taliban leaders returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan, taking up Afghan President Hamid Karzai's offer of amnesty.

The pair – identified by the Associated Press as Mohammed Nazim, a former governor, and Akhtar Mohammed, a former police chief – swore allegiance to the Afghan government during a ceremony in Helmand province.

Credit: Special to The Times

DETAILS

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