

## Hard-core Taliban using more insidious tactics in Kandahar

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Hard-core elements of the Taliban that moved into Kandahar have imported more insidious tactics to sow confusion among NATO and Afghan forces, according to former insurgent fighters and Canadian army documents.

They are also building bigger roadside bombs to meet the expected crush of American armour vehicles surging into southern Afghanistan as part of U.S. President Barack Obama's renewed emphasis on the war-torn region.

While there are signs some moderate elements of the Taliban are worn down and ready to talk peace, more hard-core terrorist organizations are stepping into the breach.

They are frequently masquerading as either Afghan Uniformed Police or local uniformed private security contractors who have sprung up all over Afghanistan to protect civilian agencies and international aid groups.

The tactic would have the effect of allowing insurgents to move around more freely during the day. And if they fire at NATO troops, they could bring down a withering response on what is ostensibly a civilian convoy.

The military police investigation into the death of Canadian Master Cpl. Josh Roberts last summer provided a brief glimpse into what has become a worrying trend for NATO.

As the National Investigative Service tried to determine whether Roberts died as the result of friendly fire from private Afghan security, officers discovered that the organization under suspicion had faced problems with impostors.

"Compass (international security service) had been experiencing problems with (BLANK) (an independent and unrecognized operator/proprietor of an Afghan security company) embedding themselves in their convoys against their will and masquerading as Afghan National Army and Afghan (dressed in their uniforms)," said a copy of the military police investigation obtained by The Canadian Press.

Officials with Compass in Kandahar refused to be interviewed.

Insurgents disguising themselves in police uniforms and even burkas is not new, but the scale, sophistication and effort put into it over the last few months have grown, said a former Taliban fighter.

Insurgents once bought cloth and sewed their own knock-off police uniforms, but now they are relying on a growing black market of stolen uniforms and high-quality tailors.

"At my time we were not using police uniform very much, but these days it is being used a lot for different attacks," the former insurgent told The Canadian Press in an interview this week.

The young man, who presented the official card that guarantees him amnesty, is part of the government's peace and reconciliation program. He asked that his name not be used for fear of retribution by the Taliban.

"The uniforms can be bought anywhere," he said. "It is not a big deal."

As NATO's determined campaign to kill mid-level and senior Taliban commanders paid dividends last year, groups of hard-core and highly-trained terrorist cells began moving into southern Afghanistan.

These groups of more committed fighters who had previously operated in the eastern regions and northern Pakistan brought with them better training, bigger bombs and more sophisticated terror tactics - some imported from Iraq.

It has been groups such as the Haqqani Network which Afghan officials in Kandahar have blamed for a series of spectacular attacks, including the spraying of acid in the face of 15 young school girls and the assassinations of three moderate religious leaders.

The Canadian military would not comment on the threat, but battlefield commanders and troops have mentioned that roadside bombs have become larger and more powerful.

Around the barracks, some soldiers have been speculating on the possible impact of the bigger bombs on armoured vehicles including Leopard tanks. But the commanding officer of their regiment dismissed the chatter.

"They have been building bigger bombs, but we're as vital or as much of a target as any other out there," said Maj. Ian MacDonnell.

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