

Why the Indian embassy in Kabul was targeted again

It may be a coincidence that the Indian embassy in Kabul was targeted for the second time by militants again in 15 months Thursday, a day after India asserted that it has made up its mind to 'invest and endure' in Afghanistan. But it gives a revealing clue about the motives of the attackers.

Three Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) troopers were injured, but no Indian was killed, as opposed to the July 7, 2008, bombing that claimed the lives of two Indian diplomats in what was the first attack on an Indian mission abroad.

The Taliban has reportedly claimed responsibility for suicide bombing, saying that the target was India. The message is loud and clear: they will do anything to deter India from carrying out the various reconstruction activities that have earned the country enormous goodwill among Afghans.

'The attacks were a clear message to get India out of Afghanistan. It is an old battle over the control of Afghanistan,' Satish Chandra, former deputy national security adviser, told IANS.

While Chandra refused to speculate on the identity of the attackers, he pointed out that Pakistan has not severed links with the Taliban. 'Terrorism from Pakistan and Taliban will continue.'

Ajai Sahni, an expert on terrorism, said the attack was planned well in advance to keep pressure on India to stay away from Afghanistan.

The attack, he said, bore the hallmark of last year's attack on the Indian embassy that was executed by the Haqqani group of the Taliban in close coordination with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

'It's been well-documented not only by Indian intelligence agencies but also by American intelligence agencies which found proof in the form of wireless intercepts between Taliban militants and their ISI handlers,' Sahni told IANS.

'This time also, it's another proxy of Pakistan. The motive is to drive India out of Afghanistan,' he said.

Sahni also feels that the attacks on Indian interests in Afghanistan are linked to the larger power game in the subcontinent.

India has forged close links with the Afghan government since the 2001 ouster of the Pakistan-backed Taliban regime, and scaled up its reconstruction activities to shield it from Pakistani designs to use that country to create its strategic depth vis-a-vis India.

Pakistan has deeply resented India's decision to open four consulates in Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Mazaar-e-Sharif after the fall of the Taliban.

Thursday's attack comes a day after India asked the international community to put 'effective pressure' on Pakistan to crack down on terrorists within its territory and to maintain long-term commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

'The international community should put effective pressure on Pakistan to implement its stated commitment to deal with terrorist groups within its territory, including the members of Al Qaeda, Taliban's Quetta Shura, Hizb-e-Islami, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other like-minded terrorist groups,' Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said Wednesday.

Rao also warned that the failure to pressure Pakistan on terrorism could lead to a situation similar to what prevailed prior to Sep 11, 2001.

The Taliban, allegedly backed by Pakistan, has relentlessly opposed India's presence in Afghanistan.

India's involvement in Afghanistan, straddling all the socio-economic sectors of development that includes large infrastructure as well as around 100-odd small and quick-gestation social projects, has created much resentment among Taliban and their Pakistani backers who fear a loss of influence in the country they have regarded as their backyard.

India has pledged developmental assistance of \$1.2 billion for Afghanistan, making it the sixth largest bilateral donor in that country.

Three months ago, President Hamid Karzai had inaugurated the Pul-e-Khumri-to-Kabul transmission line and the sub-station at Chimtala built by India which is now supplying round-the-clock electricity to Kabul.

The critical 218-km Zaranj-Delaram Road was opened in January this year. It will reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan for overland access.

Two big-ticket India-assisted projects -- including the Salma Dam on the Hari Rud river in Herat and the Afghan parliament building -- are expected to be completed by the end of 2011.

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