

Suicide bomber injures four Canadians

Much of insurgent activity this spring has been one-off attacks against Canadian and Afghan soldiers

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PANJWAI DISTRICT, AFGHANISTAN — Soldiers based at Masum Ghar, a Canadian forward operating base southwest of Kandahar, call it the "coward hour."

It's a certain time of the day, when, like clockwork, Taliban insurgents will launch rockets or rocket-propelled grenades into the hilltop base from nearby farm fields.

Farther south in the stubbornly volatile Panjwai district, soldiers stationed at a tiny outpost adjacent to the rural village of Zangabad call this same time of the day the "witching hour."

Indeed, much of the insurgent activity this spring in the Panjwai district, as well as other parts of Kandahar province, has been mainly one-off attacks against Canadian and Afghan soldiers, a dangerous game of cat and mouse.



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A medevac Blackhawk helicopter brings back wounded Canadian soldiers at Kandahar Airfield following a suicide attack on the convoy on the outskirts of Kandahar Sunday. (REUTERS/Peter Andrews)

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"The frustrating part is that you often don't actually see them. They fire at us and then they are gone," Warrant Officer Devin Ramos explained. The soldier has been deployed in the Panjwai district since February.

Yesterday, on the northwest outskirts of Kandahar city, four Canadian soldiers were lightly injured after a military convoy they were travelling in was targeted by a suicide bomber. One young Afghan boy was killed and two other children were injured in the explosion.

Earlier this month, two Canadian soldiers were wounded and one Afghan soldier was killed after a young male suicide bomber - who was between 12 and 14 years old - approached them on foot near the village of Nalgham, about 40 kilometres southwest of Kandahar.

A few days before that attack, Canadian soldiers based at an outpost near the village of Mushan were tipped off by another young boy, who had been offered \$200 (U.S.) by insurgents to attack soldiers while wearing a suicide vest fitted with explosives.

"You can't let your guard down, not for a minute," Warrant Officer Tony Orr said. "You're always looking around because you don't know what's going to happen next."

However, despite concerns that the Taliban are now using children as bait to kill soldiers, WO Orr said that won't stop him and others from interacting with them during patrols in the turbulent area.

"We just have to be a lot more careful before we go up to them," he explained.

The Taliban is also continuing to use propaganda to win public support for its campaign against the Afghan government and coalition forces.

After militants blew up a compound earlier this month in the Zhari district, they bragged to locals that the attack had killed and injured 28 Canadian and Afghan soldiers. In fact, only one Canadian soldier sustained minor injuries.

Many locals caught in the middle of the fighting are frustrated by how long it is taking Canadian soldiers and other NATO forces to bring security to the region. Land mines and improvised explosive devices planted by insurgents make it difficult to travel safely around the district

the subject.

"If you give me these good weapons and that big amount of money, I could finish this fighting in three months; but why can't they?" said Lal Mohammed, a 40-year-old farmer from Zangabad. "If we compare Taliban with foreign troops, it's like ants fighting against the elephants."

Haji Agha Lalai, a provincial council member from Panjwai district who also serves as head of the Peace Through Strength program, said long-term security will only be achieved if Canadian soldiers in the area keep supporting and training Afghan soldiers and police.

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