

Incident Update

ISK Terrorist Kill Civilians in Ghor Province

October 26, 2016

Factual Updates

On Wednesday, October 26, 2016, the militants associated with Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) killed 36 civilians in Ghor Province of Afghanistan. The killing occurred on Tuesday evening in a remote village near Ferozkoh, the provincial capital¹. According to Mr. Nasir Khazeh, the governor of Ghor Province, the victims were collecting wood for winter when ISK gunmen abducted them. “The gunmen executed the hostages while Afghan security forces were trying to rescue them with the help of local civilians”,² added Mr. Nasir.

Situational background

The incident took place in the northern part of Ghor Province, which is one of Afghanistan’s poorest and least developed provinces, with many areas outside Ferozkoh, the provincial capital, believed to be under Taliban control³. The abduction took place near Ferozkoh where intense fighting was underway between the militants and Afghan security forces on Tuesday. According to government officials, former Taliban militants, now affiliated with the self-styled ISK, attacked Chaghacharan district of central Ghor Province gain control of the district⁴. The Afghan security forces responded to the attack and killed two important commanders of the militant group. “Mullah Farooq, the commander of ISK and the son of another commander were killed in the clash,”⁵ said the governor of Ghor province. The militants, in retaliation to the casualties suffered in the hands of security forces, abducted and killed 36 civilians including children.

¹ Sputnik International, “36 Civilians killed in Daesh first major offense in central Afghanistan”, *Sputnik International*, October 26, 2016

² VoA, “Afghan Official Say Militants have Killed Hostages”, *Voice of America*, October 26, 2016

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ International Business Times, “Isis militants abduct and kill dozens of civilians in Afghanistan's Ghor province”, *International Business Times*, October 26, 2016

⁵ VoA, “Afghan Official Say Militants have Killed Hostages”, *Voice of America*, October 26, 2016

Analysis

Security situation in Afghanistan has significantly deteriorated as Afghan Taliban during the past few years have stepped up their activities across the country. In this backdrop, the emergence and expansion of Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) in the region, in early 2015, is posing serious threats to the already precarious security situation in the country. The recent killings of 36 civilian in Ghor Province⁶ represent the escalation in ISK activities, which was previously confined to the eastern province of Nangarhar. Earlier, in July, the group also claimed responsibility of a high profile suicide attack that struck a peaceful rally by Afghanistan's ethnic Hazara community, in which 80 people were killed while hundreds of others were wounded,⁷ the first major assault by ISK in the country's capital since its emergence in Afghanistan.

Afghan security forces, backed by NATO airstrikes, are conducting intensive military operations against ISK which, according to government officials, have largely dismantled their network in the Nangarhar province⁸ – the strong hold of ISK. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced that the terrorists had been defeated after local security forces claimed victory in a months-long operation against the militant group in Nangarhar province. However, the recent incident in Ghor province and a high profile suicide attack in Kabul city not only overturn the government claims but also signify the growing presence and operational capacity of ISK in the country, particularly in the central and Northern provinces.

Implications

ISK, international terrorist group, since its emergence in Afghanistan in 2015, has been trying to establish and expand its network in country. Although due to the intensive military operations against ISK, the group's influence was waning as it steadily lost territory, with its fighters largely confined to a couple of districts in Nangarhar, however, the militants associated with the group had been able to penetrate and carry out deadly attacks in other provinces of the country. Apart from the terrorist attacks against civilians and security forces, the group also engaged in infightings with Afghan Taliban particularly in eastern and north eastern parts of the country in which both the groups suffered considerable number of casualties. In this context, if not

⁶ VoA, "Afghan Official Say Militants have Killed Hostages", *Voice of America*, October 26, 2016

⁷ Reuters, "Islamic State claims responsibility for Kabul attack, 80 dead" *Reuters*, July 24, 2016

⁸ Daily Times, "IS militants abduct, kill 30 Afghan civilians", *The Daily Times*, October 26, 2016

contained, the growing operational capacity of ISK can pose formidable threat to the already fragile security situation in the country and in the region at large.

Location Map



Photo Gallery



Afghan men gather around the bodies of several civilians who were killed by ISK fighters after abducting, in Ferozkoh, Ghor province, Afghanistan, ECONetDaily, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2016.



Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) militants in Afghanistan, IRIA News, November 05, 2016