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Assassinations on rise in Afghanistan

Kay Johnson, Associated Press
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During his two years as a provincial governor in Afghanistan, Arsalah Jamal survived four suicide attacks.

Once, a Taliban bomber dressed as a doctor struck as Jamal dedicated a hospital wing. Twice, car bombs slammed into his convoy. Another time, an attacker blew himself up at a funeral Jamal was attending for a fellow governor killed in another blast.

Jamal, 45, escaped harm each time, but he resigned late last year as governor of the eastern province of Khost and moved his family to Canada - a victory for the Taliban and its campaign to intimidate and assassinate Afghan officials.

Assassinations have intensified this year, with more than 100 officials and pro-government tribal elders attacked - half of them fatally. Echoing a strategy of insurgents in Iraq, such killings sow fear, undermine the already weak government and make it difficult to fill official posts with educated and competent Afghans.

"The Taliban know that if you kill one guy in the government, it discourages another 10 from being in that job," said Jamal, who returned to Kabul this year to work for President Hamid Karzai's re-election.

The campaign of fear is another indication of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, where a record number of U.S. and NATO troops have also died this year. Fear of being targeted also cuts off many officials from the people they are charged with serving. Several district chiefs around Afghanistan said they've hired private security but still cannot leave the main towns in their district because insurgents control the countryside.