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Taliban claim obtaining Afghan security plans

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The Afghan Taliban claims to have obtained highly classified documents detailing the security plan for next week's Loya Jirga, a traditional assembly of elders called to discuss a crucial strategic agreement with the United States.

In an email sent out to journalists from a verified Taliban account, the group's spokesman said that "with help of infiltrators, we have obtained the security plan, maps, and some other important documents for the so called Loya Jirga."

The claims were immediately denied by Sediq Seddiqi, spokesman for the Afghan ministry of interior, saying the Taliban were desperate for attention.

"The plan is highly classified, with only four or five members of the assembly's security committee having access to it," Seddiqi told Al Jazeera.

"This is a continuation of their baseless propaganda and it is an indication that they are under tremendous pressure from the Afghan security forces."

Lieutenant Colonel Jimmie Cummings, a spokesman for the NATO-led military coalition, told Al Jazeera the coalition was aware of the Taliban's claim but could not confirm its accuracy.

The consultative Loya Jirga, scheduled to begin on November 16, brings together representatives from Afghan provinces, ethnic groups, and civil society to discuss the future of the stalled peace talks with the Taliban as well as a crucial agreement with the United States.

Both the US and the government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai are hoping this meeting will provide the legitimacy necessary to sign the agreement, paving the way for relations beyond 2014, when US forces are scheduled to withdraw.

The Taliban has not been invited to take part.

Opposition members as well as a number of parliamentarians boycotted the assembly, calling Karzai's move to hold such a meeting illegal.

Leak plausible

In their email, the Taliban also circulated the content of the alleged security plan, totalling 20 pages, with purported signatures of an ISAF commander, Lieutenant-General Curtis Scaparrotti, the deputy minister of interior, General Abdul Rahman Rahman, and the army chief of staff, General Sher Mohamed Karimi.

But a NATO official told Al Jazeera that the signature of Scaparrotti was not authentic.

In great detail, the document also charts the deployment of various forces, including the special force protecting the president, the police, the army, and the national intelligence agency.

It goes as far as giving the alleged number of soldiers in each security belt extending far into the city, and the names and phone numbers of commanders leading the various divisions.

Al Jazeera called several of the names mentioned in the report. The phone numbers were authentic, but none answered their phones.

Analysts believe leaking the plan is plausible, but it might not help the Taliban. It may, however, give them a propaganda victory.

"The plan is circulated to ministries and many government organisations," General Hadi Khaled, a former deputy minister of interior, told Al Jazeera. "It is very easy for someone to get a photocopy."

Khaled said he believed that even if the Taliban's claims turned out to be true, it would not help them in carrying out attacks.

"Such security plans only map the physical details of who will be deployed where, but no operational information of intelligence."

He said he had been impressed with the security arrangements around the city.

Tight security

Amid increasing threats, Afghan forces have deployed extra layers of security across the city. Reports also suggest that the government has banned the selling or renting of houses around the assembly areas, with fears of Taliban attackers moving in.

Reports also emerged that some members planning to attend the assembly had received threat letters from the Taliban, warning them not to attend the meeting.

Infiltration of Afghan security forces by the Taliban has long been a concern, and if the authenticity of the plan is verified, this could be the latest and most remarkable of it so far.

In the most recent of such an incident, on October 31, an Afghan soldier opened fire on his Australian trainers, killing three of them.

The Taliban targeted last summer's Loya Jirga with suicide bombers and rockets as the president addressed the assembled crowd of nearly 1600 leaders.

Loud explosions were heard outside as security forces engaged suicide bombers in the vicinity of the meeting, but Karzai tried to laugh off the incident, broadcast live on national television.

"Sit down, nothing will happen," Karzai told the leaders, some of whom left their seats, "I have become used to this".

The minister of interior and the chief of intelligence were fired immediately after the Jirga for failing to protect it.

It is impossible to verify the Taliban's claims that the document is authentic.