

# Targeting PRINCE HARRY

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## The Prince Would Be a Trophy? By Michael Yon

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Afghan forces are infested with Taliban suicide killers. Two more “green-on-blue” attacks have occurred in the last few days, killing six more troops.

Days ago, the Taliban executed an audacious attack on Camp Bastion in southern Afghanistan where Prince Harry is stationed. Under darkness without moon, at least 15 attackers breached the wire, killed two U.S. Marines and wounded numerous other people.

They badly damaged two jets and destroyed six more Harriers with a reported price tag of about \$30 million each. The Harrier is no longer produced. This is not the way our force should be downsized. This loss is reportedly affecting ground operations.

The enemy also destroyed or damaged other facilities. In addition to lives lost, the total destruction could easily tally \$200 million.

Camp Bastion is remotely situated in the Dasht-e-Margo (Desert of Death). The first time that I drove to Camp Bastion from Lashkar Gah, workers were barely scratching the base from the desert and there were no serious defenses. No airplanes had yet landed at Bastion. My friend Steve Shaulis was building the runway. As we drove to Bastion, a suicide bomber blew himself up behind us at the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Lashkar Gah, too far back for us to hear. We had just left the PRT. That attack is noteworthy because it was the first reported suicide bombing in Lashkar Gah. Poppies were growing just outside the walls of the PRT.

We drove from Lash through undisputed Taliban country. We were not traveling with soldiers, who were getting hammered throughout the area. Opium crops were growing everywhere. Afghanistan was already a narco-state.

This was 2006 and most people believed that the Afghanistan war had been won, though clearly it was going badly.

More than six years later, the area remains hostile. Open warfare continues, and we just permitted the Taliban to destroy about \$200 million dollars’ worth of assets. Short of digging an epic tunnel, there is no way to approach Bastion unseen. The Taliban still managed to breach what should have been one of the most heavily guarded military facilities in the world. Someone needs to be fired.

Many wonder how the enemy could have conducted reconnaissance for the airfield attack. This war is mature and more than 11 years old. The Afghan military is infested with Taliban, not to mention the Afghan workers on the bases.

As for current and granular imagery of Camp Bastion and other bases, commercial flights come in from various direc-

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**Top: Camp Bastion, Afghanistan, is a magnet for Taliban suicide squads. Michael Yon has spent more time embedded with ISAF troops than any other reporter. He is former Special Forces.**

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tions, including from Dubai. Big-T Taliban has money. If they want the latest imagery, they can send agents to land there, and have them snap away from the air, and while landing take a long panorama of the parked aircraft and the defenses on the aprons. At Kandahar Airfield, commercial flights land, including 747s. When planes land and taxi on the runways, passengers snap away. The same thing happens at Bagram, Kabul, and Jalalabad. Pilots can photograph many bases at their leisure, and can provide near real-time imagery.

The Afghan military is loaded with turncoats, moles, infiltrators, and drug-addled lunatics. They prove this practically weekly. Last year, a long-time Afghan Air Force colonel, a helicopter pilot, went berserk and killed nine Americans.

The Afghan Air Force might as well be the National Reconnaissance Office for the Taliban. One crewmember with a camera can get all of the latest imagery from many bases in his area. But aside from that, what if another rogue Afghan pilot decides to go lethal? We have been training their M-17 helicopter pilots to fire rockets.

The MI-17V5 helicopters that we have been buying for the Afghans will hold about three dozen fully armed troops. Nothing prevents a rogue pilot from diverting from a normal mission, landing quickly outside a base, picking up three dozen Taliban, and dropping them onto an airfield amidst a billion dollars' worth of jets and helicopters. Such a pilot could literally drop Taliban commandos on top of Prince Harry's bed.

Pakistan has MI-17 helicopters. Remember the guys who harbored bin Laden? Remember Mumbai? Nothing is to stop Taliban commandos from training in Pakistan using life-sized mockups of Bastion targets. Nothing would look more normal than an Afghan pilot parking amongst other Afghan Air Force aircraft. He could land normally and Taliban wearing American uniforms could casually walk out the back. The Taliban wore American uniforms in Friday's attack.

If the rogue MI-17 is armed with rockets, the pilot has more options. Once the attack has begun he could loiter over the base firing machine guns, and if he is not shot down, he could kamikaze his American-bought Russian helicopter into the

HQ. Or he could fly back out and pick up another three dozen commandos and drop them off on another part of base, and then crash into HQ. If the enemy works hard and luck is on their side, they could take out dozens of aircraft.

The MI-17V5 will carry about 10,000 pounds of cargo. If they wanted to play it differently, the rogue MI-17 pilot could land and quickly have a 10,000-lb. bomb loaded, something they might have practiced and perfected in Pakistan. They could fly over the airport and wipe out a billion dollars worth of aircraft, Prince Harry, and some generals. Especially so if they had two rogue helicopters at once. The first could be a giant bomb, and a minute later three dozen commandos dressed like Americans could pile out, and the surviving helicopter could continue to ferry in commandos until he is shot down or out of gas. Bastion is not impenetrable.

If a rogue used a helicopter bomb in Kabul, it could flatten our Embassy. Anyone who does not know that the Taliban and the Pakistanis have the will, the intelligence and the resources to pull off such an attack, or worse, is detached from realities. Both natural and unnatural alliances can align for the worse.

Aside from the fact that six jets were just destroyed while parked on a remote base, and two more badly damaged, this wraps back to our most famous Apache pilot, Prince Harry. When you land at Bastion, it is easy to see where the Harriers, the Apaches and other aircraft are parked. An Afghan pilot would know

the area well. With the intelligence network that the Taliban has developed, there is little doubt that they will, or already have, figured out where Harry lives and works. The Taliban has no shortage of fighters who are ready to swap lives on a one-for-one exchange rate. They are good at infiltrating sleepers. Nobody should doubt that moles are on Bastion.

The chance that Harry could be killed is significant. On a previous deployment, the threat was deemed so serious that the UK took pains to keep his presence in the country secret. This deployment is even more dangerous. This time, UK authorities have publicized his presence. Harry is an easy guy to identify. For an enemy that just killed two Marines and wiped out about \$200 million dollars' worth of assets, all within a short distance of the spot where Harry's Apache is parked, it would be foolish to think that ISAF can protect such an easily recognizable target of such high value. For the Taliban, killing Harry would be a bigger coup than us killing bin Laden after hunting him for 10 years. There is no doubt that they will do everything possible to make this happen.

The Afghan war is not make-believe, yet there seems to be some fairy tale surrounding Harry. There is no doubt that our enemies are plotting. They have the means and the motive. Making Harry's deployment into a media extravaganza could cost him his life. That the Taliban will try is obvious. But will they succeed? 