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Taliban Fighters Suspected in the Killings of a Cleric and 2 Soldiers

By CARLOTTA GALL

KABUL, Afghanistan, July 30 — Gunmen suspected of being Taliban supporters killed a senior cleric and two soldiers at a remote roadblock in separate attacks on Tuesday, Afghan officials said today. Both were calculated killings aimed against supporters of the government, they said.

The shootings occurred just as Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was making a one-day visit to Afghanistan and declared that the security situation had improved since the spring when the Taliban began a resurgence.

There have been almost daily attacks on the American-led forces in Afghanistan and Afghan government forces in recent months. Six Afghan soldiers were killed in an attack in southern Afghanistan this week.

In one attack on Tuesday, Mullah Jinab, a respected member of the provincial council in Kandahar, was gunned down on his way to evening prayers by two men, who escaped. The governor's spokesman, Khalid Pashtun, blamed the Taliban, pointing out that Mullah Jinab had supported the government.

The two government soldiers were killed mid-morning Tuesday when gunmen created a roadblock and stopped travelers on a remote road in northern Kandahar, on the way to Oruzgan Province. The soldiers were not in uniform but wore waistcoats designed to carry ammunition clips and also had government identification cards, according to the director of a local charity.

The attackers immediately took the soldiers aside and shot them, according to the director, Dr. Kabir, who works with the Afghan Health Development Service. His employees were also held up. Two of his vehicles were seized; one was burnt and one was used as a getaway car, the director said in a telephone interview this evening.

In another development today, in Kabul, the education minister and national security adviser, Yunis Qanooni, denied accusations in a report by Human Rights Watch that he had threatened violence against a local political leader last year. While he commended Human Rights Watch, he suggested that Afghan researchers working for the group had distorted the story for political reasons.