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Suicide bombers kill 9 at Kabul police station

By Mark Magnier

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Three suicide bombers attacked a police compound in Kabul's old city Saturday, killing four police officers and five civilians before they were overcome by police.

The attack by militants disguised as Afghan soldiers -- a pattern that has become increasingly common -- started around 1:30 p.m. in a neighborhood dense with small vendors and shoppers. As the attackers approached the station, police reportedly noticed one acting suspiciously and shot him.

The second attacker then detonated his vest, killing nine people, including an intelligence officer, who happened to be standing near the entrance. The blast also wounded two policemen and 10 civilians.

Taking advantage of the diversion, the third attacker then slipped into the compound and entered one of the buildings, where he battled police for over two hours before they managed to kill him.

"It was very crowded, so there could be more injured we don't know about," said Gen. Mohammad Zahir, chief criminal investigator with the Interior Ministry.

A text message identified as coming from Taliban spokesman Zabullah Mujahid and sent to reporters while the attack was underway claimed responsibility for the attack.

As the attack unfolded, a wave of panic swept over a nearby bazaar, where shoppers were buying provisions on the first working day after the Afghan weekend.

With the first shots, shopkeepers reacted almost immediately in what has become an all too well-practiced routine, pulling down metal gates, inserting locks, collapsing street stalls and hiding along with their customers in any available alley. About two minutes after the initial shots, the sound of the explosion rang down the street.

Pedestrians, unaware at this point how the attack was unfolding and whether armed militants were restricted to the police compound or headed their way, bunched in shops with metal doors, barged into other people's houses or tore up the street in the opposite direction of the gunfire.

The attack came as Afghan President Hamid Karzai confirmed at a National Youth conference that the United States has held ongoing negotiations with militant groups in an attempt to reach a political solution to protracted violence in the troubled central Asian state.