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## Dozens Injured in Anti-American Protests in Kabul

By Adam B. Ellick

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KABUL — A clash between anti-American protesters and the Afghan police injured 35 police officers and 12 civilians here on Wednesday, as both sides accused each other of indiscriminately firing shots, police officials and witnesses said.



Afghan protesters chant anti-U.S. slogans in Kabul September 15, 2010. (REUTERS/Ahmad Masood)

It was still unclear whether anyone had died in the violence, the latest in a series of outbursts around the country protesting the canceled plan of an American pastor to burn copies of the Koran last week.

Many of the recent protests are widely believed to be organized by political candidates who are trying to gain political clout by rallying around anti-American sentiments ahead of Saturday's parliamentary elections.

"The people are being misused," said Mir Ahmad Joyanda, a member of Parliament from Kabul Province. "Maybe it's not the candidates themselves, but their agents, their people are motivating the illiterate, uneducated who are very strong Muslims and love the Koran."

He continued: "They can say, 'We're defending Islam, we're defending religion, so you have to support us.' "

On Wednesday, thousands of protesters carrying the white flag of the Taliban gathered at 6:30 a.m., chanting anti-American slogans and burning tires, according to Fareed, a car salesman who witnessed the clash from his showroom in Company, a neighborhood in western Kabul.

In an effort to diffuse the aggressive crowd, the police fired shots into the air. The protesters retaliated by throwing rocks at the police and beating officers with sticks, said General Khalil Dastyar, the deputy police chief of Kabul Province.

An intelligence official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in line with standard policy, said some of the protesters were carrying weapons and fired at the police.

A witness said about 15 civilians with severe bleeding were taken away in ambulances. "They were all shot by policemen," he said.

Noor Oghli Kargar, the spokesman for Ministry of Public Health, said the injured civilians were recovering "in good condition." He added that it was still unclear "if these people were shot."