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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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AP News

Suicide bombing at Afghan police HQ kills 12

RAHIM FAIEZ

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Two suicide bombers wearing police uniforms blew themselves up at an Afghan police headquarters Saturday, killing at least 12 officers in a deadly border region that has long been a refuge for Islamist extremists from around the world.

In a statement e-mailed to the media, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks in the eastern Paktika province.

The attackers made it through three security gates before reaching the main building on the police compound, said Nawab Waziry, the provincial council head. One attacker detonated his explosives inside the police headquarters building, while the other blew himself up near the entrance about 20 minutes later, Waziry said.

"The site was covered with blood," Waziry told The Associated Press.

Gen. Daud Andarabi, the spokesman for the regional police commander in southeastern Afghanistan, said the blasts killed at least 12 officers and wounded 16. Meyawer Khan, chief of the criminal investigation department for Paktika province, confirmed 12 people were killed. The compound was also used as a police training center.

The attack took place in one of the most violent areas of Afghanistan, where NATO and Afghan forces fight daily against the Haqqani network, a Pakistan-based Taliban faction closely tied to al-Qaida. The area, about 90 miles (150 kilometers) south of Kabul,

borders the Pakistani region of North Waziristan and has been the target of numerous drone strikes against the insurgents.

A NATO service member also was killed Saturday in a bomb attack in eastern Afghanistan, but the military coalition did not give any further details, so it was unclear if there was any connection to the Paktika bombing.

President Hamid Karzai condemned the Paktika attack in a statement, saying that the Afghan police are trying to serve the people of Afghanistan.

The ongoing violence and intransigence of Taliban militants has led Western officials to advocate more strongly this year for a negotiated solution that would allow insurgents to have some sort of role in the government. That push hit a roadblock this week, however, as a man believed to be a high-ranking Taliban representative was exposed as an impostor.

Afghanistan's intelligence service issued a statement Saturday saying that it had discovered the man posing as Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour was a fake and blocked him from entering Afghanistan from Pakistan for a planned meeting with Afghan government officials.

"He was about to come to Afghanistan, then during a meeting with the intelligence service near the border, it was made clear that he was not Mansour, so the intelligence service did not bring him in to Afghanistan for the negotiations," the statement said.

According to the New York Times, which first reported the ruse, the impostor met with Afghan and NATO officials three times — including once with Karzai — before they discovered he was not Mansour. He was allegedly paid to attend.

Karzai's office, however, has insisted the president never met with a man named Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour.

However, the Afghan intelligence agency did confirm talks of some sort with the Taliban leadership, saying "there have been several contacts and negotiations in the several circles in the leadership of the Taliban and they are ongoing."

Although NATO forces have poured troops into the southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand and have been making progress in rolling back the Taliban, fighting has continued apace in the eastern provinces where the Haqqani network holds sway. Violence also has broken out in other provinces — Baghdis in the northwest, Kunduz and Baghlan and Takhar in the north. A bombing in a packed mosque last month killed Kunduz's governor and 19 others.

Elsewhere, Afghan and coalition forces killed at least 15 insurgents during an overnight search for a senior Taliban leader in remote eastern Afghanistan, NATO said Saturday.

Security forces came under attack near a compound in Sherzad district of Nangarhar province on Friday night, sparking a battle that killed the insurgents. NATO also used airstrikes in the operation. The alliance said insurgents were the only casualties.

Authorities were trying to determine whether the wanted Taliban leader was among those killed. The leader was not identified, but NATO said he helped foreign fighters, raised money and planned attacks against Afghan and coalition forces.

Also Saturday, NATO said Afghan and coalition forces called in an airstrike to destroy a network of tunnels and underground bunkers in a Taliban-occupied area of Musa Qala district in Helmand province.

In Kandahar province on Friday, three Afghan civilians — believed to be ages 10, 15 and 20 — were killed by a roadside bomb in Zhari district, NATO said.

In the northern province of Takhar, 16 family members who were heading to a funeral died Friday when their driver lost control of their vehicle, said Faiz Mohammad Tawhedi, spokesman for the provincial governor.