Beat: News

Taliban fighters attack U.S. Consulate in Afghanistan, killing 4 Afghans

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USPA News - Suspected Taliban insurgents attacked a U.S. Consulate in western Afghanistan, killing at least four Afghans and injuring a number of others, officials said on Friday, just days after the first anniversary of a deadly assault on a U.S. diplomatic facility in Libya. The coordinated attack began at approximately 5:30 a.m. local time on Friday when a truck carrying seven insurgents drove up to the front gate of the U.S. Consulate in Herat, located in a province that carries the same name and which is part of Afghanistan`s relatively peaceful western region.

The attackers first exited the truck before detonating it, causing an enormous explosion that extensively damaged the front gate, said U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf. They then opened fire with assault rifles at Afghan guards and fired a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at the Consulate, after which a second car exploded. Harf said several suicide bombers attempted to breach the compound, where U.S. officials live, but were neutralized by Afghan security forces, U.S. security personnel and contracted security personnel as American Consulate workers took shelter in safe havens. "The Consulate`s interior compound was not breached," she said. There were conflicting reports on the number of casualties, but no Americans were killed or injured. Among those killed were three Afghan guards and one local International Development Solutions (IDS) interpreter, but some officials indicated that the death toll could be as high as 10. Also killed were nine insurgents, seven of which were lying at the scene while the remains of two others were recovered from the detonated vehicles. "Our security measures here were effective," Harf said. "The attackers were neutralized, our internal perimeter was not breached, and no American lives were lost." Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf claimed responsibility for the attack and said most of the attackers were from eastern Ghazni province. "The attack began when a martyrdom-seeker of Islamic Emirate (Taliban), Sayed Amin Hilal from Gelan district of Ghazni province, detonated a truck laden with some 8 tons of explosives at the gate of the Consulate, which damaged the targeted building and removed all barriers," he said. U.S. and Afghan officials rejected Yousuf`s exaggerated casualty figures and claims that the attackers were able to enter the Consulate and take positions inside. "All the involved Mujahideen (Muslim fighters) later attained martyrdom after causing the enemies heavy losses," Yousuf said. U.S. Ambassador James B. Cunningham strongly condemned the attack and described the response of Consulate staff as "superbly." "We are grateful for the quick response of the Afghan and ISAF security forces who secured the facility and kept our personnel safe," he said. "We are reminded again of the very real human toll exacted by terrorism. The perpetrators of this attack have shed Afghan blood on Afghan soil." Friday`s attack came just days after the first anniversary of the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in the Libyan port city of Benghazi, which also occurred on the anniversary of the 2001 attack on the United States. The assault in Benghazi resulted in the deaths of four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador John Christopher Stevens. In a statement issued late on Friday, the members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council also strongly condemned the attack in Herat. "The members of the Security Council condemned acts of violence against diplomatic and consular representatives, which endanger or take innocent lives and seriously impede the normal work of such representatives and officials," the Council said, expressing their "deep sympathy and sincere condolences" to the families of the victims.

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