

CIA Officers Are Killed in Afghan Attack

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Eight Americans, including officers of the Central Intelligence Agency, were killed Wednesday in a suicide attack on a U.S. compound in Afghanistan, current and former U.S. officials said, in what could be the biggest loss of American intelligence personnel since the war here began.

“There was some tremendous talent lost,” a former intelligence official said.

A U.S. military spokesman said none of the dead in the attack on Forward Operating Base Chapman, a U.S. military installation in the southeastern province of Khost, were soldiers. Some of the deaths could be contractors or other civilians. If it turns out all eight deaths were CIA officers, it would be the equivalent of “Pearl Harbor for the agency,” the former intelligence official said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility Thursday for the suicide bombing at the base, the worst loss of life for the U.S. in Afghanistan since October.

Also Thursday, Afghan police said militants beheaded six Afghans for cooperating with government authorities. Juma Gul Hamit, police chief of Uruzgan province in south-central Afghanistan, said the men were beheaded near the provincial capital of Tarin Kot. He says a seventh Afghan man is being treated for serious neck injuries.

According to a military official who works on Afghan issues, Chapman has grown substantially in recent months and is a base for both military and intelligence operations. Because of its size, the officer said, the suicide bomber is likely to have been able to penetrate multiple layers of security before detonating the explosives.

The attack came on a day of deepening dispute between Western and Afghan authorities over whether an international raid earlier this week had killed Afghan civilians, including children.

On Wednesday, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization disputed Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s claim that international forces over the weekend had removed civilians, including school-aged children, from their homes in northeastern Afghanistan and shot them. NATO said troops had come under attack and returned fire.

Also Wednesday, NATO said four Canadian troops and one journalist from Canada were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb on a patrol a few miles outside the southern city of Kandahar. The journalist, Michelle Lang of the Calgary Herald, was on assignment covering Canadian military operations, said Major Steven Cole, a spokesman with the NATO-led forces.

The Taliban also claimed responsibility for the roadside bomb that killed the Canadians. It was the bloodiest single incident suffered by Canada's military in 2009.

Much about the attack at Forward Operating Base Chapman remained uncertain Wednesday night. Officials variously said the blast had occurred as the bomber exited a car, or after the bomber had reached the base's gym or its cafeteria.

The attack also wounded four Americans, a U.S. official in Afghanistan said. U.S. authorities said an investigation is under way.

Forward operating bases typically house hundreds of soldiers, and Afghan forces and private contractors also often live on such bases. FOB Chapman is just outside the provincial capital of Khost and is close to the Pakistani border.

The attack appeared to be the worst against foreigners since October, when 10 Americans — seven troops and three civilians — were killed in a helicopter crash following a firefight with insurgents.

Eight Americans are killed in an explosion at a U.S. compound in Afghanistan, officials say. Reporting from Kabul, WSJ's Anand Gopal joins the Hub to discuss.

It would also mark the first time a suicide bomber managed to strike inside a U.S. facility in the country, a sign of the insurgents' growing sophistication. Insurgents have been staging increasingly complicated assaults in recent months, including one where a militant infiltrated the country's police force and killed five British soldiers.

Wednesday's blast came amid heightened tensions between NATO and Afghan officials over the U.S.-led raid in the northeastern province of Kunar over the weekend. An investigation ordered by Mr. Karzai found that 10 civilians were killed, including eight schoolchildren.

"A unit of international forces descended from a plane Sunday night into Ghazi Khan," Mr. Karzai said in a statement, and "took 10 people from three homes — eight of them school students in grades six, nine and 10, one of them a guest, the rest from the same family — and shot them dead."

A NATO statement questioned that. "A joint Coalition and Afghan Security force entered the village of Ghazi Khan," the group said, and "came under fire from several buildings and in returning fire killed nine individuals. Several assault rifles, ammunition and ammonium nitrate used in bomb-making were discovered."

There was "no direct evidence" to substantiate the Afghan claims that unarmed civilians were killed, the statement added.

The Afghan Defense Ministry denied that its forces had any role in Sunday's operation.

The Afghan allegations could deepen tensions between Kabul and Washington at a time when the insurgent reach is growing. Mr. Karzai has frequently criticized Western forces for civilian casualties, which he says gives the insurgency a propaganda boost and turns people against the government. U.S. officials say that such criticism undermines Western efforts to win popular support in the country.

A demonstrator in Kabul on Wednesday rallied against a recent U.S.-led attack in

Afghanistan that protestors and the Afghan government say killed children. NATO disputed the claim.

The government's allegations sparked protests in eastern Afghanistan on Wednesday, one of the largest the country has seen this year. Hundreds of demonstrators blocked the city of Jalalabad, chanting anti-U.S. slogans and burning an effigy of U.S. President Barack Obama.

"We went out [to the streets] to show our anger against the barbarity of the Americans," said Moharam Moeed, a 25-year-old protester from Nangrahar University.

Many of the demonstrators were university students, said Noor Agha Zwak, the provincial spokesman. Some shouted "death to Obama" and "death to the foreign troops," witnesses said.

A coalition of students leading the demonstrations issued a statement saying "the government must prevent such unilateral operations otherwise we will take guns instead of pens and fight."

There have been a number of other anti-U.S. demonstrations this year. Earlier this month, hundreds of demonstrators blocked roads in the eastern province of Laghman after U.S. forces killed nearly a dozen civilians there. Afghan officials said that the protests are adding to a growing feeling of anti-Americanism in many rural parts of the country's east and south, where the insurgency is the strongest.

Anand Gopal, Peter Spiegel, Siobhan Gorman and the Associated Press contributed to this article.

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