

## Taliban attack across Kabul, target U.S. embassy

 **REUTERS** By Mirwais Harooni and Hamid Shalizi | Reuters – 3 hrs ago

KABUL (Reuters) - Taliban suicide fighters launched a multi-pronged attack in the Afghan capital on Tuesday, firing rockets toward the U.S. and other embassies and sending three suicide bombers to targets in the city's west and near the airport.

At least two civilians and two policemen were killed and 22 people were wounded in the attacks, as more than a dozen explosions echoed through the upmarket and heavily guarded diplomatic district, and NATO and Afghan helicopters roared overhead.

The Taliban have launched high-profile attacks on multiple targets in Kabul in the past, but this is the first time they have organized simultaneous assaults on such separate areas.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attacks which

NATO said were an attempt to derail plans to hand over security to Afghan forces.

Near the heavily fortified diplomatic district, insurgents took over a multi-storey building under construction and fired rockets and automatic rifles at several embassy and NATO compounds.

The gun battle continued into the early evening, with two attackers killed and two or three more still at large, the Ministry of the Interior said on twitter, adding that one policeman was killed.

One civilian was killed and 16 wounded there, said Kargar Norghuli, a spokesman for the Health Ministry.

A journalist from Radio Television Afghanistan was among the wounded, and Iran's English language Press TV news channel said its office "has come under attack and several people have been injured," without giving further details.

In western Kabul, just a few kilometers away, a suicide bomber detonated explosives at the entrance to a building belonging to the city's civil order police, killing a policeman and wounding two.

A second suicide bomber killed a civilian at the regional police center, near the Habibia high school, and wounded four, Asadullah Ludin, a senior police spokesman.

And at a road near the airport, a suicide bomber was killed by police and 7 kg (15.5 lb) of explosives were seized, the office of the Kabul police chief said in a statement.

The Taliban claimed responsibility. Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the fighters were armed with rocket-propelled grenades, suicide bomb vests and AK-47 rifles, and was targeting government buildings, the U.S. embassy and the headquarters of NATO-led forces.

### HEART OF THE CAPITAL

Explosions were interspersed with gunfire all afternoon, and at least two rockets landed in upmarket Wazir Akbar Khan district, home to the U.S., British and other embassies.

One hit a school bus, but it appeared to have been empty at the time of impact. Two NATO helicopters circled the building in central Abdul Haq square, which the attackers had taken over.

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The U.S. embassy said its personnel were safe while British Ambassador Sir William Patey confirmed the nearby U.S. embassy had been a target.

"Aware of attack on US Embassy. All UK Embassy staff accounted for," Patey said on Twitter.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the assaults were aimed at thwarting plans to hand over security to Afghan forces but they would not succeed.

"We are following the events closely; we have confidence in the Afghan authorities' ability to deal with this situation," Rasmussen told reporters in Brussels.

President Barack Obama has announced a plan to gradually draw down the 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan and hand over all security responsibilities to Afghan forces by the end of 2014.

But violence in the country is at its worst since U.S.-backed Afghan forces toppled the Taliban government in late 2001, weeks after the September 11 attacks on the United States, with high levels of foreign troop deaths and record civilian casualties

The assault was the second major Taliban attack in the city in less than a month after suicide bombers targeted the British Council headquarters in mid-August, killing nine people.

In late June, insurgents launched an assault on a hotel in the capital frequented by Westerners, killing at least 10.

"This incident is one of the rare occasions that militants have demonstrated the capability to get extremely close to the heart of the Western military and intelligence presence in the Afghan capital," global intelligence consulting firm STRATFOR said of Tuesday's attack.

"The ability to get numerous operatives armed with explosives and heavy guns into this area could not have been possible without the Taliban obtaining aid from Afghan security personnel posted in high-security areas."

(Additional reporting by Emma Graham-Harrison, Mohammad Ibrahim; Writing by Sanjeev Miglani; Editing by Robert Birsell)

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