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Attack on NATO convoy kills 4 civilians in Afghanistan

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KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide car bomber killed four Afghan civilians and wounded dozens Thursday in the southern province of Helmand, local officials said.

The attack, which took place midmorning at a busy market in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, targeted armored vehicles that belonged to the U.S.-led NATO coalition. No group immediately claimed responsibility, but the attack bore the hallmarks of the Taliban, which have their roots in southern Afghanistan.

Thirty-one people were wounded, including three women who were visiting a doctor, said Daud Ahmadi, a spokesman for Helmand's governor. He said a child with one of the women was among those killed.

Three foreign civilians who were traveling in the vehicles — which belonged to a British-led provincial reconstruction team — were injured. The teams are made up of diplomats, civilian specialists and military personnel who work on development projects meant to increase support for the government of President Hamid Karzai.

Ahmadi said most of the Afghan victims were shopkeepers and staff at the nearby provincial education department.

Raz Mohammad Khan, 45, said he was in a meeting in the education building when the bomb exploded. "Fifteen of us were injured by glass from the shattered windows," he said.

Karzai, who was in Italy as part of an official visit to Europe, condemned the bombing in a statement as "inhuman and un-Islamic" and attributed it to "the enemies of the people of Afghanistan."

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul said the attack was a reminder "that the Taliban and other insurgents have no respect for the lives of innocent Afghan civilians."

Helmand has long been one of Afghanistan's most restive provinces. Responsibility for security there was transferred in July from NATO troops to Afghan security forces.