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Al Jazeera

'Afghan civilians killed' in NATO airstrike

NATO says only two light injuries to civilians during operation in Logar province, but local official reports 17 killed.

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A local Afghan official has said that 17 civilians have been killed in a NATO airstrike in eastern Afghanistan.

In a statement, NATO said it knew of only two light injuries to civilians during the pre-dawn incident on Wednesday.

The target of the strike was the house of a tribal elder in Baraki Barak district of Logar province, the head of the Logar provincial council said.

He said the tribal elder and 16 members of his family, including women and children, were killed.

Six Taliban fighters, who were nearby, were also killed.

"That story in part is being corroborated by the governor's office which also says some civilians have been killed, as well as six armed people," said Al Jazeera's Bernard Smith, reporting from the Afghan capital Kabul on Wednesday.

"NATO is sticking to the line at the moment that it was targeting a Taliban leader and it called in the airstrike and only two women suffered light injuries," Smith added.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) joint command issued a statement, and confirmed it conducted an operation to detain a Taliban leader in Logar.

Major Martyn Crighton, a spokesperson for the NATO forces, said no civilians were killed in the pre-dawn operation.

He said ISAF soldiers, which included both international and Afghan troops, came under fire while trying to capture the local Taliban leader and called in an airstrike.

Suicide attack

"During the operation, insurgents attacked the Afghan and coalition troops with small-arms fire and a grenade," NATO's statement said.

"The security force returned fire and requested a precision airstrike."

It said "multiple insurgents were killed" and two women who were wounded were taken to a military base for treatment.

The incident occurred at about 2:00am local time (22:00GMT on Tuesday).

Elsewhere on Wednesday, two suicide bombers claimed the lives of at least 22 civilians at a market area in the southern city of Kandahar, authorities said.

"We have just been told of a suicide attack in Kandahar in a car park next to a restaurant. The suicide bomber seems to have been targeting fuel tankers," our correspondent said.

"The restaurant is used by truck drivers who deliver fuel to the Kandahar airfield, one of NATO's biggest bases. And we are being told that 22 people have been killed in that suicide attack and another 50 injured," Smith said.

Javid Faisal, a spokesman for Kandahar province, said one suicide bomber detonated his motorbike filled with explosives first. Then, as people rushed to assist the casualties, another suicide bomber on foot walked up to the area and blew himself up,

Four provincial governors from the south were at a meeting at the nearby NATO base at the airport when the attack took place, General Abdul Hameed, Afghan army commander for the southern region, told the Reuters news agency.

The explosion occurred 500m from an Afghan military base and about 5km from the main gate to the NATO airfield.