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<http://dailytimes.com.pk/world/27-Oct-16/afghan-spy-agency-confirms-militant-leaders-deaths>

Afghan spy agency confirms militant leaders' deaths

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Two senior leaders of Al-Qaeda were killed by a United States' drone attack in Afghanistan – the nation's spy agency confirmed on Thursday.

Washington said that it was a major blow to the group as it seeks to re-establish safe havens in the country so the strikes on Sunday targeted Farouq al-Qahtani – Al-Qaeda's emir for northeastern Afghanistan – and his deputy Bilal al-Utubi.

The US calls it 'the most significant attack against the group in several years' as multiple 'Hellfire missiles' demolished two different compounds in Kunar where the men were believed to be hiding, US officials said on Wednesday – without confirming if the strikes were successful.

Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS) confirmed their deaths on Thursday – adding that a third senior member of the group had also been killed. "The attack was carried out in coordination with NDS," the spy agency said in a statement – without naming the third leader.

"Eliminating these 'core' leaders of Al-Qaeda will disrupt efforts to plot against the United States and our allies, reduce the threat to our Afghan partners and assist their efforts to deny the terrorist groups' safe haven in the country," Cook said.

Pentagon's Press Secretary Peter Cook had earlier said the three leaders' demise would deal a strong blow to the militant group. The Pentagon had been actively hunting for Qahtani for four years because he had longstanding ties with Osama Bin Laden before his death.

Qahtani has operated in Afghanistan since at least 2009 and led an Al-Qaeda battalion since at least mid-2010, officials said. “He was seeking to re-establish (Al-Qaeda’s) control in Afghanistan,” the US official said.