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Afghan intelligence official killed in suicide bombing

By Laura King

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February 25, 2011 An Afghan intelligence official was killed and about two dozen people were injured in a suicide bombing Thursday near the border with Pakistan in a confrontation authorities believe averted a potentially larger strike by the bomber and a companion.

The blast occurred in the district of Spin Buldak in strategic Kandahar province, where the Western military has been making a concerted effort in the last six months to dislodge the Taliban. Insurgents have suffered a series of setbacks, but have been fighting back with suicide bombings and assassinations of government officials, tribal elders and other prominent figures.

Afghanistan's main intelligence service, the National Directorate for Security, said its officers encountered a car carrying two men not far from the Pakistani frontier and became suspicious. A gunfight ensued, and one of the men was killed, but the other got out of the car, fell to the ground and played dead.

When the intelligence officers approached him, he set off his explosives, killing one of them and injuring three, the agency said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying the two "martyrs" had targeted a convoy of intelligence officials.

Afghan officials said they believed the two men had planned to attack either a government compound in Spin Buldak or to make their way north to Kandahar city, the south's main urban hub.

In a separate suicide attack this month, gunmen and bombers killed at least 19 people and injured scores in the heart of Kandahar, and the city has been on edge since.

In addition to the security personnel killed and wounded in Thursday's bombing, about 20 bystanders were injured, said Haji Abdul Ghani, Spin Buldak's district chief.

President Hamid Karzai and the Western military condemned the attack. U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Victor M. Beck, a spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force, called it "yet another example of insurgents wantonly killing" and injuring Afghan civilians.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization force has also been sparring with Karzai's government, however, over civilian deaths in fighting between Western troops and insurgents.

Last week, Afghan officials said about [50 civilians had been killed](#), including women and children, together with more than a dozen insurgents, in clashes in Kunar province, which borders Pakistan. Western military officials said they were investigating but that preliminary evidence pointed to the deaths of three dozen armed militants, not civilians.

That dispute escalated sharply this week when Afghan officials accused U.S. Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of Western forces in Afghanistan, of suggesting in a closed-door meeting that the injuries of some hospitalized children might have been caused by parents disciplining them by burning their hands and feet. A Petraeus spokesman contested that account but acknowledged that the general had alluded to past reports concerning the practice of scalding children as punishment.

The NATO force said it was looking into allegations of an unspecified number of civilian casualties caused by its troops Thursday during an "air-to-ground engagement" in Kapisa province, northeast of the capital, Kabul. The provincial police chief, Abdul Hamid Irkan, said it had not yet been determined whether those killed and injured were civilians or insurgents.