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## US, British nationals hurt in deadly Afghan car bombing

by Nasrat Shoib Nasrat Shoib

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US and British nationals were among several people wounded in a suicide car bombing in a volatile city in southern Afghanistan that killed three Afghans, officials said Friday.

The US embassy in Kabul said "at least two" Americans were hurt in the blast late on Thursday in Kandahar, while the foreign office in London said one British national was also injured, although not seriously.

An Afghan civilian and two security guards were killed when the car slammed into a compound used by foreign security firms, said Kandahar provincial governor Torkel Wesa.

A total of 26 people -- 10 foreigners and 16 Afghans -- were injured in the attack, he told reporters, adding that three Americans and a South African were among the overseas nationals wounded.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the incident saying that "the terrorists, by conducting such attacks, have repeatedly proved their hostility to the innocent people of Afghanistan".

The US embassy in Kabul described the bombing as "a senseless act of violence", with a spokeswoman adding that there were "no foreign fatalities as far as we are aware".

The attack came just hours after another bomb exploded in an abandoned car near a hotel used by Afghan journalists. At least six people were wounded.

The first blast blew out windows and damaged up to six cars parked nearby while the powerful suicide car bombing that followed partially destroyed neighbouring buildings.

A spokeswoman for Britain's foreign office said: "The nationalities of all the casualties is not yet clear but one of those injured was British.

"We understand his injuries were not severe and that he did not require hospital treatment."

She added: "There were a number of internationals amongst the casualties, who we understand were working as contractors for ISAF (International Security Assistance Force).

"The international casualties have been taken to the ISAF hospital in Kandahar where they are being treated."

Kandahar and the surrounding province of the same name is seen as the key battleground to reverse more than eight years of escalating conflict in Afghanistan, which is taking an increasing toll on foreign forces.

Four German soldiers were killed and five wounded on Thursday when their patrol came under attack as they were travelling from the northern city of Kunduz to Baghlan, a Taliban stronghold.

The patrol came under fire from anti-tank grenades or missiles in an attack following a visit to Afghanistan by German Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg.

Afghanistan is in the grip of a deadly insurgency led by remnants of the Taliban, whose regime was overthrown in late 2001 in the US-led invasion.

Suicide bombings and other attacks are a part of daily life in Kandahar, which was the Taliban's capital during their brutal 1996-2001 rule, and form part of the militants' arsenal in their fight against foreign forces.

US and NATO forces are gradually increasing troop numbers from the current 126,000 to 150,000 by August as part of a major push against the Taliban in the south, which is also the hub of the country's opium production.

Karzai recently visited Kandahar with the head of foreign forces in Afghanistan, US General Stanley McChrystal, to gauge support for the offensive among local tribal elders.

McChrystal defended Friday his decision to pull forces out of the notorious Korengal Valley, despite Taliban commanders claiming victory there.

McChrystal, in Paris to discuss strategy with NATO officers, told reporters US troops had been unwelcome among Korengal's fiercely independent tribesmen and would be more useful elsewhere.

The latest attacks came ahead of the first full meeting of US President Barack Obama's Afghan war cabinet since his administration publicly sparred with Karzai.

Obama met top foreign policy advisers including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke.