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Seven Afghan forces, 16 Taliban killed in latest violence (1st Lead)

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Three Afghan army personnel and 16 insurgents were killed in separate clashes in Afghanistan, as Taliban militants beheaded four pro-government militiamen, officials said Sunday.

A suicide squad and other fighters planned to attack a US military base in Shindand district of the western province of Herat on Saturday, Zeinudin Sharifi, an army commander for Afghan regional commandos, said.

The militants 'by chance encountered' a group of pro-government fighters, who are locally hired to protect their villages, Sharifi told the German Press Agency dpa.

'The militants beheaded four of the community defence forces, but the fifth one is still missing,' he said

Afghan commandos and US forces stationed in a nearby military base were deployed to the area and killed 10 Taliban fighters, he said.

'Four of them were suicide bombers, who were killed when their suicide vests were detonated by bullets during the fighting,' Sharifi said, adding that there were no casualties among the combined forces.

The incident came five days after nine Taliban suicide bombers stormed government installations in the western province of Nimruz, killing four people including a provincial lawmaker. The nine bombers were also killed either by their own explosives or by Afghan police.

Separately, three Afghan soldiers were killed on Saturday when Taliban militants attacked their unit in Sangin district of southern province of Helmand, the Afghan Defence Ministry said in a statement Sunday.

In south-eastern provinces of Paktia and Paktika, Afghan and US-led coalition forces killed six Taliban militants in two separate operations on Saturday, the army statement said.