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Associated Press

8 NATO troopers killed in 1 day in Afghanistan

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NATO forces say an international service member has been killed in an insurgent attack in Afghanistan, making it the eighth person killed in one day.

NATO had previously reported three other service members died in fighting on Saturday. And the coalition said another four were killed in a vehicle accident.

NATO did not provide details on the incidents or the nationality of the dead, in keeping with a policy of waiting for national authorities to released such information.

The latest death brings the total to 38 NATO service members killed so far this month, and 244 for the year.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — President Hamid Karzai acknowledged that the U.S. and Afghan governments have held talks with Taliban emissaries in a bid to end the nation's nearly 10-year war, even as suicide attackers launched a bold assault in the heart of the country's capital, killing nine people.

The attack Saturday, which occurred just blocks from Karzai's office, shows the parties have a long way to go to reach a political settlement as the Obama administration weighs a major withdrawal of its forces. The White House neither directly confirmed or denied Karzai's statement.

Three men wearing camouflage fatigues that are frequently worn by Afghan soldiers stormed a police station near the presidential palace, with one of them detonating an explosives vest just outside the gates as two others rushed inside and began firing, an Interior Ministry statement said.

The crackle of gunfire echoed through the usually bustling streets for about two hours before security forces killed the two remaining attackers. Insurgents killed three police officers, one intelligence agent and five civilians in the attack, according to the ministry statement.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack in a text message to The Associated Press.

Attacks in the Afghan capital have been relatively rare, although violence has increased since the May 2 killing of Osama bin Laden in a U.S. raid in Pakistan and the start of the Taliban's annual spring offensive.

The last major attack in Kabul took place late last month when a suicide bomber wearing an Afghan police uniform infiltrated the main Afghan military hospital, killing six medical students. A month before that, a suicide attacker in an army uniform sneaked past security at the Afghan Defense Ministry, killing three people.

Kabul is one of seven areas scheduled to begin to be handed over to Afghan security control in July — part of NATO's efforts to begin transferring security responsibilities ahead of its planned 2014 withdrawal from the country.

The assault occurred shortly after Karzai announced during a speech to youth at the presidential palace that members of his peace council and the U.S. have begun preliminary peace negotiations with the Taliban. It ruled Afghanistan for five years and sheltered al-Qaida before being driven out of power in the U.S.-led invasion in late 2001.

Reports about such talks have surfaced in recent months, but Karzai's statement was the first public confirmation of U.S. participation. Publicly, the Taliban say there will be no negotiations until foreign troops leave Afghanistan.

"In the course of this year, there have been peace talks with the Taliban and our own countrymen," Karzai said Saturday. "Peace talks have started with them already and it is going well. Foreign militaries, especially the United States of America, are going ahead with these negotiations."

President Barack Obama is weighing a range of options for starting the withdrawal of some American forces.

The U.S. has roughly 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. When the president sent an additional 30,000 U.S. forces to Afghanistan at the end of 2009, he did so with the caveat that some of those troops would start coming home in July.

U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner said only that the U.S. has "consistently supported an Afghan-led" peace process.

"Over the past two years, we have laid out our red lines for the Taliban: They must renounce violence; they must abandon their alliance with al-Qaida; and they must abide by the constitution of Afghanistan," Toner said. "This is the price for reaching a political resolution and bringing an end to the military actions that are targeting their leadership and decimating their ranks."

Karzai said some Taliban emissaries who have met with members of the peace council he set up last year were only representing themselves, while others were speaking for the broader movement. The exact nature of the contacts was not immediately clear, and Karzai said no government official outside of the council had contact with them.

Karzai's rambling speech was the latest tweak to the U.S.-led coalition trying to control a message about a war grinding toward the decade mark. It likely overstates the progress of the delicate negotiations both his government and others face in identifying and wooing potential Taliban leaders.

Many of the movement's leaders remain either unknown or underground since fleeing Kabul at the start of the U.S.-led invasion. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's one-eyed leader, has not been seen publicly since 2001.

Officials also have been duped before. Late last year, a Quetta, Pakistan, shopkeeper posed as the Taliban's former aviation minister, Mullah Mohammed Akhtar Mansour, and met twice with Western officials before they realized they had been tricked.

However, such talks may be gaining momentum after the U.N. Security Council voted unanimously Friday to treat al-Qaida and the Taliban separately when it comes to U.N. sanctions, a move aimed at supporting the Afghan government's reconciliation efforts.

Meanwhile, violence persists. Insurgents attacks targeted three convoys ferrying fuel and supplies to NATO troops in western and eastern Afghanistan over the weekend, killing nine Afghan security guards and torching at least 15 fuel tankers, officials said.

In the eastern city of Jalalabad, insurgents kidnapped a provincial council member for Logar province and three of his family members.

Seven NATO service members were killed Saturday. Three died in fighting — two in southern Afghanistan and one in the east, according to the alliance. Four others were killed in a vehicle accident in the south. At least 37 international soldiers have died in Afghanistan so far this month, raising the death toll for 2011 to 243