

Taliban kill at least 43 Afghan troops as they storm base

Afghan security forces stand guard at the site of a Taliban-claimed deadly suicide attack (file photo)



Kabul

The Afghan Taliban stormed a military base in the south of the country killing at least 43 troops yesterday, the Defence Ministry said, with the militants saying they had killed 60.

Of 60 soldiers manning the base in the province of Kandahar, 43 were killed, nine were wounded and six were missing after the militants attacked in the middle of the night, the ministry said in a

statement.

At least 10 Taliban were also reported killed in the battle, which occurred in Maiwand, a district that neighbours volatile Helmand province.

The attack will underscore worries about the ability of the Afghan security forces to deal with a relentless insurgency which they have struggled to contain since most foreign troops left at the end of 2014.

U.S. President Donald Trump committed to an

open-ended military mission in Afghanistan in August despite criticism that it is no closer to peace despite billions of dollars in aid and nearly 16 years of U.S. and allied operations.

The attack began when a suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden American-made Humvee armoured vehicle, likely captured from Afghan security forces, into the gate of the base, an army official told *Reuters*.

That began an hours-long assault by Taliban gunmen, which was interrupted by a second Humvee breaking all the way into the base and detonating inside, he said.

The base itself was left in ruins, officials said.

Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, a spokesman for the militant group, said the attack began with a suicide car bomb followed by an assault that overran the base.

The militants had killed at

least 60 Afghan soldiers and wounded many, he said.

The Taliban have been waging an insurgency for a decade and a half in an attempt to overthrow the Western-backed government in Kabul and re-establish a fundamentalist Islamic regime.

The United States and its allies maintain thousands of troops across Afghanistan, including in Kandahar, to advise and assist Afghan

forces as well as conduct strikes against suspected militants.

When asked whether U.S. forces provided any support for the besieged Afghan base, a spokesman at the coalition military command in Kabul said: "We can confirm that U.S. forces conducted an air strike during an operation in the Maiwand district of Kandahar province, October 19, under counter-terror authorities." (Reuters)

100,000 Kurds flee Kirkuk since Iraqi army takeover

Baghdad

About 100,000 Kurds have fled the Kirkuk region for fear of persecution since Iraqi armed forces retook disputed territory after a Kurdish independence vote rejected by Baghdad, Kurdish officials said yesterday.

The United Nations voiced concern at reports that civilians, mainly Kurds, were being driven out of parts of northern Iraq retaken by Iraqi forces and their houses and businesses looted and destroyed, and urged Baghdad to stop any such abuses.

In the first incident of deadly violence, a Kurdish man was killed and six wounded by Iraqi security forces while protesting at the army's takeover of their town, Khanaqin, by Iraqi forces, local Mayor Mohammed Mulla Hassan said.

Kurdish troops had left Khanaqin, near the border with Iran, on Tuesday to avoid clashing with advancing Iraqi forces. Central government forces swept into Kirkuk, a multi-ethnic city of more than



Iraqi soldiers celebrate their capture of an oil field near Kirkuk

1 million people and the hub of a major oil-producing area, largely unopposed on Monday after most Kurdish Peshmerga forces withdrew rather than fight.

Iraqi forces also took back control of Kirkuk oilfields, effectively halving the amount of output under the

direct control of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in a serious blow to the Kurds' independence quest.

Baghdad's recovery of Kirkuk, situated just outside the KRG's official boundaries on disputed land claimed by Kurds, ethnic Turkmen and

Arabs, put the city's Kurds in fear of attack by Shi'ite Muslim paramilitaries, known as Popular Mobilisation, assisting government forces' operations in the region.

Nawzad Hadi, governor of Erbil, the KRG capital, told reporters that around 18,000 families from Kirkuk and the

Kurdistan asks int'l help to spur dialogue

Baghdad

The semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq welcomed yesterday a call by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi for talks to resolve a crisis triggered by a Kurdish referendum on independence last month.

Abadi spoke on Tuesday, saying he considered the Sept. 25 referendum, in which Kurds voted overwhelmingly for independence despite

Baghdad's opposition, "a thing of the past". The day before, the Iraqi army retook the oil-producing Kirkuk area from Kurdish Peshmerga forces on his orders.

"It will not be possible to resolve the issues through military operations," the KRG cabinet said.

"(We have) asked the international community to help both sides start a dialogue to solve the outstanding issues based on the Iraqi constitution."

town of Tuz Khurmatu to the southeast had taken refuge in Erbil and Sulaimaniya, inside KRG territory. A Hadi aide told *Reuters* the total number of displaced people was about 100,000.

Hemin Hawrami, a top aide to KRG President Masoud Barzani, tweeted that people

had fled "looting and sectarian oppression" inflicted by Popular Mobilisation militia.

U.N. relief officials said they had received allegations that 150 houses had been burned and 11 blown up in Tuz Khurmatu and offices of Turkmen political parties in Kirkuk assaulted. (Reuters)