

Beat: Local

Afghan, NATO forces kill 23 insurgents during hostage rescue

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USPA News - More than 20 insurgents were killed and two Afghan soldiers were rescued during a joint operation between Afghan and coalition forces, military officials said Wednesday. Two civilians were wounded, but there were no reports of military casualties.

The operation began Monday in the Baraki Barak district of eastern Logar province and ended late Tuesday evening, according to Den Mohammad Darwish, the spokesman for the governor of Logar province. The operation was led by the Afghan National Army but supported by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). U.S. Army Captain Leslie Reed, a spokeswoman for ISAF's Regional Command East, said the joint operation was launched after two Afghan soldiers were abducted on Sunday. She said the soldiers were kidnapped after being stopped by insurgents while traveling from the capital Kabul to Forward Operating Base Shank in Logar province. The multinational alliance confirmed 23 insurgents were killed during the hostage rescue, which resulted in both soldiers being freed without injuries. Darwish said two civilians were injured during the operation, but there were no reports of casualties among Afghan or coalition troops. "They were kidnapped and taken by force. Their only sin is their service for their country and the service to the people of this country, to bring peace and stability," said Afghan General Mohammad Sharif Yaftali, commander of the 203rd Thunder Corps. "Their only sin is to fighting against the enemies of this country and providing a better lifestyle for their countrymen." U.S. Air Force Captain Daniel Einert, an ISAF spokesman, would not confirm whether civilians were killed or injured during the operation but said it was aware of such allegations. "We are aware of the allegation of civilian casualties and along with Afghan authorities are currently looking into the incident to determine the facts," he said. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed 28 civilians were killed during the operation, but the claim could not be independently verified and the group frequently fabricates information for propaganda purposes. He claimed eleven children and women were injured and that others were missing. "The Islamic Emirate condemns this action of the defeated enemy with the strongest of words to date and considers it a war crime," Mujahid said, acknowledging that at least 12 of their fighters were killed. "It also calls on all neutral sides and media outlets to fulfill their duties by exposing and giving coverage to this inhumane barbarity." ISAF said the two-day operation, which was not disclosed until Wednesday, also resulted in the discovery of two caches containing three PKM machine guns, Dushka heavy machine gun parts, AK-47s, one anti-tank mine and numerous rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) rounds and tactical vests. Yaftali, at a ceremony Wednesday with the two rescued soldiers, presented four sheep to the Afghan commandos in appreciation for their work. "Our countrymen have hopeful eyes towards your green uniforms," he said. "You are a matter of pride, you are a symbol of unity, strength and power in this country." Also on Wednesday, ISAF said one of its service members was killed as a result of an insurgent attack at an undisclosed location in Afghanistan's eastern region. Einert said the death was not related to the operation in Logar province, but provided no other details about the attack.

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