

Mali Terror attack: Islamists kill at least 27 in Radisson Blu Hotel



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Dionne Searcey and Adam Nossiter

Islamist gunmen stormed the Radisson Blu Hotel on Friday in Bamako, the capital of the West African nation of Mali, seizing scores of hostages and leaving bodies strewn across parts of the building.

A senior UN official said that as many as 27 people had been killed, with bodies found in the basement and on the second floor, according to a preliminary assessment of the attack.

An unknown number of gunmen, perhaps four or five, took "about 100 hostages" at the beginning of the siege, said General Didier Dacko of the Malian army. He said soldiers had sealed the perimeter and were now "inside looking for the terrorists".

The gunmen shouted "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great") as they stormed the hotel, a security source told Reuters.

Several dozen hostages, many of them crying, streamed out of the hotel after hiding in their rooms, said Amadou Sidibé, a local reporter at the scene.

By afternoon, two assailants had been killed and the operation to retake the hotel was still underway, according to Colonel Salif Traoré, Mali's minister of interior security. The remaining assailants were holed up in a corner of the hotel, but he said there were no more hostages being held.

According to the operators of the hotel, at least 125 guests and 13 employees were inside the hotel on Friday after the siege began.

A US Defence official said 12 to 15 Americans were believed to be at the hotel when the gunmen first arrived. Six US citizens were recovered safely from the hotel, he said. The status of the others is not clear.

US Special Operations forces "are currently assisting hostage recovery efforts," said Colonel Mark Cheadle, a spokesman with US Africa Command. "US forces have helped move civilians to secure locations, as Malian forces work to clear the hotel of hostile gunmen."

The siege in Mali, a former French colony, came only a week after terrorists with assault rifles and suicide vests killed 129 people in attacks across Paris.

It is still unclear who is responsible for the attack in Mali, but the country has long struggled with insurrection and Islamist extremism.

Northern Mali fell under the control of rebels and Islamist militants in 2012. A French-led offensive ousted them in 2013, but remnants of the militant groups have staged a number of attacks on UN peacekeepers and Malian forces. Hundreds of French soldiers remain in the country.

The Radisson Blu Hotel is a popular place for foreigners to stay in Bamako, a city with a population approaching two million, and French citizens were among those taken hostage.

About 20 Indian citizens were in the hotel at the time of the attack but were evacuated safely, the Indian ambassador to Mali said.

Germany's Foreign Ministry said that two Germans were among the hostages who had been released from the hotel. Four Belgians were registered in the hotel, according to a Foreign Ministry spokesman in that country. At least one of them, a 39-year-old Belgian working for the Wallonia-Brussels regional parliament, died during the attack. He was in Mali for three days for a meeting.

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