

US general sees strike aftermath

The head of US and Nato forces in Afghanistan has visited the area where a Nato air strike destroyed two fuel tankers hijacked by Taliban militants.

Gen Stanley McChrystal's visit came amid reports that civilians were among scores of people killed in the attack.

Gen McChrystal has made avoiding civilian deaths a priority in the alliance's Afghan campaign.

A Nato investigative team also visited the site of the attack, on the Kunduz River in northern Afghanistan.

The 10-member team led by US Rear Admiral Gregory J Smith had earlier visited a hospital in Kunduz city where some of the injured are being treated.

Rear Adm Smith said there were few confirmed details so far.

"Two fuel trucks were stuck in the sandbar. There were two bombs dropped on that area," he said.

"The sense was that there were insurgents there, but we need to discover what really happened.

"We are really trying to learn and understand, and we are listening."

In a statement broadcast on Afghan television, Gen McChrystal promised a full investigation into the air strike.

"As commander of the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), nothing is more important than the safety and protection of the Afghan people," he said.

"I take this possible loss of life or injury to innocent Afghans very seriously."

Meanwhile, the German defence minister has defended his country's troops for ordering the air strike.

Franz Josef Jung said the two fuel tankers had posed a considerable danger to the German soldiers stationed close by.

The Nato attack occurred about 7km (four miles) south-west of Kunduz city before dawn on Friday.

German forces had reported the two tankers hijacked by the Taliban while they were being driven from Tajikistan to supply Nato forces in Kabul.

Witnesses said one of the tankers had become stuck in a river and militants asked villagers to extract fuel to make it lighter.

At that point, the air strike occurred.

The death toll is still not confirmed, with reports varying from 56 to 90.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said the attack had been a "big mistake".

The West should "work with the Afghan people, not bomb them", Mr Kouchner said in Stockholm, where European Union foreign ministers have concluded two days of talks focusing on their strategy in Afghanistan.

The ministers agreed there was "a need to reinforce our political, civilian and economic efforts in Afghanistan", Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said.

They also said there should be a greater focus fighting corruption and the production of opium.

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