Beat: Miscellaneous

Algeria hostage crisis ends with at least 23 hostages dead

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USPA News - The hostage crisis in Algeria came to a brutal end on Saturday, but confusion continued on Sunday as it remained unclear how many hostages died in the assault. The official death toll stands at 55, including 23 hostages and 32 militants.

The siege at the facility began last Wednesday when militant groups linked with al-Qaeda stormed the gas plant west of In Amenas, located in the Sahara and within the southeastern region of the country near the Libyan border, and took foreign and Algerian workers hostage. The crisis ended on Saturday after a military assault which lasted for hours, resulting in the deaths of many hostages and militants. Algeria`s Interior Ministry placed the confirmed death toll at 55, including 23 hostages and 32 militants, but news reports indicate the death toll could be as high as 80. A total of 107 foreign nationals who had been held at the plant were either released or managed to escape. At least 685 Algerian nationals were also safe after the hostage crisis, but many were released by the militants because they were only interested in foreigners working at the facility. Details of the crisis and security operations have remained unclear, but reports indicate that seven of the killed hostages lost their lives during the final raid. A number of international leaders has criticized Algeria`s aggressive actions during the hostage crisis, although the country`s officials said the operations were conducted in fear of the militants setting off the gas plant on fire. U.S. President Barack Obama on Saturday condemned the actions taken place, stating that "the blame for this tragedy rests with the terrorists who carried it out." Obama stated that the U.S. stands ready to provide assistance following the attack, adding that they will continue to work closely with its partners "to combat the scourge of terrorism in the region, which has claimed too many innocent lives." "This attack is another reminder of the threat posed by al Qaeda and other violent extremist groups in North Africa. In the coming days, we will remain in close touch with the Government of Algeria to gain a fuller understanding of what took place so that we can work together to prevent tragedies like this in the future," said Obama. The United Nations (UN) also strongly condemned the terrorist attack on Saturday, as members of the Security Council expressed deep sympathy and sincere condolences to the victims of the attack. Ambassador Masood Khan of Pakistan, which holds the rotating Council presidency for January, called for justice, urging all states to cooperate with Algerian authorities in this regard. Earlier on Saturday morning, British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said the "large majority of British nationals originally caught up in it are now safe and accounted for," adding that fewer than ten British nationals were at risk or unaccounted for. In a later statement, Hague said five Britons and another resident of the UK died or were missing after the last security operation. On Friday, the U.S. had confirmed the death of at least one American. The Ain Amenas gas plant is operated by BP, Statoil from Norway, and Algeria`s state energy company, Sonatrach. The attack was apparently triggered following France`s decision to deploy its military into Mali, also in northern Africa, but others have suggested that the siege had been previously planned.

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