

Car bomb to hit US Embassy in Yemen

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US officials reported that a car bomb targeting the US embassy in Yemen detonated outside the compound's security gate causing multiple casualties

A series of explosions followed but officials were unable to confirm whether they were separate attacks.

Hundreds of heavily-armed troops have now surrounded the embassy compound in the capital, Sanaa.

Eyewitnesses say an exchange of gunfire between embassy guards and unidentified attackers followed the first blast.

The attack occurred at about 0830 local time (0530 GMT).

A US spokesman inside the embassy, Ryan Gliha, was unable to confirm reports of a gun battle.

He said the explosions had caused "multiple casualties", although he was unable to give any information on the numbers or nationalities.

Mr Gliha said the embassy building itself had not been damaged as it was set far back from the security gate.

He described the atmosphere inside the embassy as calm, adding that arrangements were being made so that staff could "go about their business in a safe manner".

A group calling itself the Islamic Jihad in Yemen said it carried out a bomb and rocket attack on the embassy, and threatened to attack other foreign missions in Yemen, Arabic TV channel al-Arabiya reported.

The authenticity of the claim could not be immediately verified.

It is the second attack on the embassy this year.

The US ordered the evacuation of non-essential personnel from Yemen in April after mortar bombs were fired towards the embassy. They missed but hit a nearby school.

The government of Yemen, which backs America's "war on terror", has often blamed al-Qaeda for attacks on Western targets in the country.

US special forces have been helping the government fight the Islamist militants.

In October 2000, 17 US sailors were killed when suicide bombers blew themselves up on an inflatable raft next to the destroyer USS Cole in the southern Yemeni port of Aden.

The Yemeni government has also been fighting an insurgency in the north of the country by Shia rebels, whom it accuses of trying to seize power and impose religious law.

The rebels accuse the government of corruption and discrimination. But they are particularly angered by the government's current alliance with the United States.

Hundreds of people have been killed since the rebellion began in 2004.

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