

SERENA HOTEL

Situation: Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan attacked by terrorists.

On 14 January 2008, a group of four terrorists using suicide bombs, grenades, and automatic rifles attacked the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan. The assault left six individuals dead and six wounded.



The terrorists targeted Western interests. The Serena Hotel was popular with foreign travelers and foreign workers residing in Kabul. Additionally, it housed the Australian Embassy in Kabul and the Norwegian Embassy was conducting high-level meetings at the hotel at the time of the attack.

The attack on the Serena Hotel demonstrates the ability of terrorists to use relatively unsophisticated tactics with deadly results. The attack also demonstrates that terrorists may target foreigners in areas customarily regarded as secure.

Terrorist tactics do not need to be sophisticated or well planned to be deadly. You should be conscious of your vulnerability to low-tech tactics in the areas where you live and travel.



At 6:30 p.m. on 14 January 2008, a team of 4 terrorists began an assault on the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan. The attack began when the attackers dressed in local police uniforms detonated a car bomb outside the hotel. This may have been a premature detonation of a bomb intended to be closer to the hotel structure.

In response to the explosion, hotel security personnel exchanged gunfire with the terrorists, killing one, but the other three managed to enter the building. As they entered the building, one terrorist detonated his suicide vest.

Using AK-47s and hand grenades, the remaining two terrorists targeted guests and hotel employees as they worked their way through the hotel lobby towards the hotel's gym and spa facilities, the apparent target of the attack. One terrorist inadvertently locked himself in a stairwell leading to the roof. The other made it to the gym but fled the scene after firing only a few rounds, apparently deciding not to detonate his suicide vest.

While you should not be paranoid, you should always be vigilant. Terrorists may disguise themselves as local officials to gain access to facilities or approach intended targets. Be aware of suspicious behavior and report it to the proper authorities.

Six people were killed and six were injured in the attack on the Serena Hotel including one American citizen and a prominent Norwegian reporter. However, given the amount of ammunition and explosives carried in by the attackers the toll could have been much higher.

The Serena Hotel was most likely targeted because of its frequent use by Western businesses, diplomatic missions, and media reporters. The hotel housed the Australian Embassy in Afghanistan. The hotel exercise and spa facilities were used by many foreigners, even ones not actually registered there. In addition, the Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs was present at the hotel conference facility for a series of high-level meetings of the Norwegian Government. Norway played a key role in the NATO security mission in Afghanistan and it is possible that the Norwegian diplomatic mission was the specific target of the attack.



Whenever possible, avoid locations with highly symbolic or significant targets such as official government delegations. If this is not possible, you should try to choose hotels, recreation facilities and restaurants that have adequate security to counter the local threat.



Shortly after the bombing the Taliban made multiple press releases claiming responsibility for the attack, although they never definitively identified the specific targets. However, it is possible that the Norwegian delegation was targeted to discourage Norwegian military support to NATO in Afghanistan and to warn that no Westerner was safe in the nation's capital.

Afghan security elements quickly responded to the incident and arrested a terrorist attempting to flee the scene. In the subsequent investigation, Afghani forces arrested the driver of the vehicle that transported the attackers to the hotel, two individuals that assisted in attack preparations, and an individual that allegedly provided the weapons and explosives.

When traveling to high-threat areas, take the time to research local terrorist tactics. Knowing common attack methods may help you recognize a potential threat. Try to avoid places where Americans and Westerners congregate; these areas may be targeted by terrorists. Choose hotels, restaurants, and recreation areas that have security adequate for the local threat.