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## CNN NEWSROOM

### Terror Attacks in Mumbai

Aired November 27, 2008 - 09:00 ET

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FREDRICKA WHITFIELD, CNN ANCHOR: Terror

strikes in Mumbai, the Indian city formerly known as Bombay. The official numbers at this hour, 101 people are dead, at least 314 are wounded.

The U.S. State Department confirms at least three Americans are among the injured. Just minutes ago, authorities told CNN that the siege is over at the Taj Hotel, one of the targeted sites. We don't know, however, about the hostages who are believed to have been inside that location.

And less than an hour ago, we received these images right here. We believe these are hostages being freed from the nearby Oberoi Hotel. Again, two hotels where hostages and explosions all occurring.

It has been a morning here in the U.S. and a day in Indian of explosions and gunfire, and details are very sketchy. A previously unknown Islamic militant group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

India's prime minister calls the strikes well-planned and very orchestrated. At least 10 separate sites have been targeted including those two hotels that I mentioned.

So take a look right now at the map, as you see those images, the newer images that are streaming in. These are the locations that we believe to have been targeted attacks. As you can see, the target stretch across a large part of

Mumbai's southern peninsula. To the north a hospital, a train station. To south a cluster of restaurants, upscale hotels are on the coast. To the east and the west, there you see.

Witnesses say the attackers were armed with assault rifles, hand grenades and explosives.

A hostage standoff unfolding this morning in the nearby Oberoi Hotel. Here explosions and gunfire as well.

CNN's Phil O'Sullivan is on the site there at Oberoi and he joins us on the phone right now.

What can you tell us right now, Phil?

PHIL O'SULLIVAN, CNN PRODUCER: I'm standing outside the Oberoi Hotel about 35 meters from the main entrance. And the good news, you just mentioned before, Fredricka, that they'd actually allowed 10 hostages to come out of the hotel, out the front entrance, and they just recently pulled up a big white bus out the front gate. It's a shuttle for those of us who are inside. They feel comfortable now to put those buses right out in front of the main entrance.

I'll be honest, it's been a dramatic day. And in the last couple of hours, there's still explosion, we've seen explosions going throughout the afternoon. And at one point a very sustained and very, very, very loud and aggressive sounding firefight going on between what sounded like machine gunfire went on for quite some time, probably three minutes.

It was coming out of the front of the hotel initially. Everybody moved around the back when it got a bit dangerous and then the gunfire started coming out of the back of the hotel as well. We don't know who was firing, we don't know who they were firing at.

One of the main problems, nobody knows how many hostages are in the hotel or how many gunmen are in the hotel. It's very difficult for the military to go in there and sort of try and sweep floor by floor, get rid of these gunmen so they actually can bring these hostages out safely -- Fredricka?

WHITFIELD: So Phil, just to recap for me now, just to help me understand this, when we say that we believe the situation may be over at the Oberoi Hotel, yet we're still unclear how many hostages were being held against their will, how many suspected terrorists may be involved, can you help me understand how it is authorities are saying the situation is over? What is it that they have control of right now?

O'SULLIVAN: Well, in terms of (INAUDIBLE) the Taj Mahal Hotel, first thing (INAUDIBLE) when there was actually hostages coming out the front door. Minutes before one of the officials from the Maharashtra police, the Mumbai police, said the situation would be over within minutes.

As the hostages came out there was a gun fight in front of the hotel and you know media standing around within about 17 meters and we were a full-arm gunfight, shots being fired back and forth. And the hostages that were coming out and standing in the -- stepped down to the foyer of the hotel, (INAUDIBLE), watching this gunfight take place right in front of them.

And it's very difficult for the authorities to (INAUDIBLE) get control over. The Taj Hotel, gunfire and explosions and more fire in the building all day. You know (INAUDIBLE) a very similar situation. (INAUDIBLE) more explosions.

There's certainly no sense (INAUDIBLE) that this is totally under control (INAUDIBLE). And that's (INAUDIBLE) feeling, (INAUDIBLE), when they started at 10:00 last night they have continues on for the next 22 hours here.

Really, the situation here at this hotel doesn't feel like it's over. (INAUDIBLE) WHITFIELD: And Phil, just because, you know, we're talking about a huge distance, so we've got a lot going on in that area, but it is a little difficult to hear and understand everything that is being said so because of this delay and interference in our cell phone line, do you mind speaking a little slower?

O'SULLIVAN: Sure.

WHITFIELD: And giving us information again?

O'SULLIVAN: OK. So, basically, it doesn't seem to be any control over the situation by the authorities at the moment. Certainly when I was at the Taj earlier, there was hostages coming out and there was a gunfight taking place as they were moving hostages from the hotel.

Here at the Oberoi Hotel, there's still a standoff very much in place. The authorities don't have control.

WHITFIELD: OK. Phil, Phil O'Sullivan, let me just ask you to take a pause for a moment. We're going to join CNN international right now.

Sara Sidner there on the scene.

SARA SIDNER, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Let me ask you, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes, yes, yes.

SIDNER: Come talk to me. Come talk to me. Come talk to me.

(CROSSTALK)

SIDNER: Tell me. Tell me.

(CROSSTALK)

WHITFIELD: OK. We believe that is outside the Taj Hotel. That was the second hotel that we've been describing this morning where there have been reports of explosions, hostages being taken there, as well, and authorities trying their best to get a handle on the situation.

Where Sara has been, Sara Sidner, our correspondent there in Mumbai, has been for a good part of the morning outside the Taj Hotel. It has been a very tenuous situation, at best.

A number of reporters, live cameras, outside the scene where she has been standing, as well as a number of citizens who have just been streaming about, trying to get a handle on what's taking place there at the historic 105-year-old hotel, Taj Hotel, very opulent hotel, a surprise to many that this would be a target in this very important financial district of India.

Peter Bergen is on the phone with us, I understand. He's joining us now to give us an understanding. Peter, what we know -- you're joining us from which city?

PETER BERGEN, SENIOR FELLOW, NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION: Washington, D.C.

WHITFIELD: OK. Well, we have heard that there have been some e-mail correspondence from a group claiming responsibility. Let's try and delve into this group for one. And then number two, why it is that you believe Mumbai would be targeted, these opulent hotels as well as hospitals and a train station all targets today.

BERGEN: Well, yes, the group that claimed responsibility, the Deccan Mujahideen, is a group we've never heard of before. It might be an offshoot of a group called the India Mujahideen which is a group that has conducted attacks, bombing attacks in Bombay in the past.

Their motivations, I mean, we know they've asked for people with British and American passports when they attack these targets. Also, something that has seems to have not got a lot of attention yet. But they also seem to have targeted an orthodox Jewish center in Bombay.

So a group which defines by anti-American, anti-British, anti-Jewish and also attacking, you know, five-star hotels likely to house a lot of westerners, a lot of foreigners.

We've seen hotel attacks by al Qaeda and its affiliates, very many of them over the last several years and attack against the Hilton in Egypt, attacks against three American known hotels in Amman, Jordan, a recent attack, Fredricka, as you probably recall, in Islamabad against the Marriott Hotel the last several months.

So you know, hotels are soft targets, are likely to house westerners that, by definition, in the hospitality business, they can't be turned into fortresses. They're very easy targets.

Now these attackers were not suicide attackers in a conventional sense except all of them surely knew that they were going to go into an operation in which there was a very high likelihood that they would be killed.

Multiple targets. So we still don't exactly know who is behind this. The Indian prime minister has said that there appears to be external links, which is Indian code for Pakistan -- some Pakistan link.

Pakistani militants have attacked in a very similar operation back in 2001, sending in guys with weapons and grenades attacking the Indian parliament. That was in 2001. That was a Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Kashmiri militant group.

Could Lashkar-e-Taiba be involved in this as our Kelli Arena has been reporting? That's certainly one possibility. But at the end of the day, obviously, an Islamist terrorist group defined by its anti-westernism and also probably trying to create problems and tensions and probably succeeding in creating tensions between tack Pakistani and India, Fredricka. WHITFIELD: And because it is still an active situation, there are potentially still hostages being held, we understand now that the anti-terror task force leader as well as other top officers have been killed there.

It would seem as though what has been made extra vulnerable is law enforcement there, to get a handle of this but at the same time the government's trying to figure out who is response for this. The priority here would be which?

BERGEN: Well, you know, one interesting thing, as you say, the fact that the leading counterterrorism official was killed along with a lot of his staff, that reminds me a little bit of 9/11 where, you know, New York City's emergency response center was located in the World Trade Center.

So, of course, when you do this you make the response that much more complicated. We're not getting really good information, it seems, from the Indian authorities about very basic things such as a number of hostages in these buildings, the number of terrorists who still remain there.

So it's extremely uncoordinated. On the other hand, when you have so many terrorist attacks happening simultaneously it would overwhelm any organization trying to get a handle on what's go on.

WHITFIELD: And you mentioned, you underscored that India, this region, no stranger to terror attacks, very sophisticated ones, exemplified like what we're seeing today.

However, a lot is going on around the world in terms of terrorism. We've got on the Somali coast, you've got the pirating, you've now this situation in India and then in Thailand with the airport being seized.

Do you see any connection to all of these acts of terror taking place around the world right now?

BERGEN: Not really, Fredricka. I mean, you know, we also have this report in New York -- coming out of New York that al Qaeda was planning to attack the subways in New York City.

But you know, al Qaeda's always planning an attack on the United States. The question is capabilities and their ability to attack the United States right now is very, very low. Very hard to get terrorists into the country.

American Muslim communities rejects the al Qaeda ideological virus and it doesn't appear that there are al Qaeda sleeper cells here in the United States.

So I think, you know, the threat to the United States is quite low, as it happens, not for a want of desire by al Qaeda but because of a lack of capability. But as -- you know these kinds of attacks that we saw in the last 20 hours in Mumbai, these attacks are very easy for groups following an al Qaeda ideology to mount. I mean these are soft targets. We can't protect everything. And of course, these kinds of attacks, particularly on hotels, we're going to see more of in the future, unfortunately.

WHITFIELD: Sadly.

All right. Peter Bergen, national security analyst, thanks so much joining us from Washington.

Peter will continue to join us to help make sense of what's taking place there in India, in Mumbai, also known as Bombay. Many locations being targeted by these terrorists and many hostages being held and, of course, the law enforcement being made very vulnerable as well because many their top officers have also been killed in all of this.

We'll continue to watch the situation here on this Thanksgiving Day here in the States.

Meantime, we also have breaking news out of Iraq. Lawmaker there have approved a security pact that defines the future U.S. role in Iraq. Under the terms, American troops can remain in the country three more years. Iraq will have strict oversight over the U.S. forces.

Debate over the issue sparked massive street protests in Iraq's capital. The measure now goes to the presidential council for approval.

And now response coming in this country on what's taking place in India. President-elect Barack Obama being briefed on the situation in Mumbai. We're also getting reaction from the White House. We'll be going live to both Washington and Chicago for a full report on the reaction at the violence taking place out of Mumbai.

Much more straight ahead here in the NEWSROOM.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

WHITFIELD: Sadly, an update now on this breaking news taking place in India. A group believed to be freed hostages, walking out of the Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai today.

Earlier new gunfire and explosions erupted at the Oberoi and the Taj Mahal hotels just a short time ago. Authorities told CNN that the siege at the Taj Hotel may be over.

The two hotels are among at least 10 sites targeted by the terrorists in a wave of coordinated attacks. Authorities now saying 125 people have been killed and another 327 wounded.

Again, these new images of what we believe to be people who were held at these hotels, hostages now being released.

Sara Sidner is in Mumbai. She's been outside the Taj Hotel.

Sara, we saw you moments ago live, a number of people who seemed very upset around you. Can you describe the situation for us?

SIDNER: Basically we're standing just outside of the Taj. We've been (INAUDIBLE) 20 or so hours (INAUDIBLE). It just so happens that the situation at the time (INAUDIBLE) we've noticed that the army has come out of the Taj.

They have been sending in ambulances much close that appear to be picking people up and leaving the Taj. So the situation with the Taj and the possible terrorists inside and hostage seem to be over. That is what authorities were telling us.

As we were standing outside talking to (INAUDIBLE), a large group of people came around, they were chanting, many of them young, smell of alcohol on their breath, frankly, they were standing very, very close.

And suddenly there's chaos erupted and they started grabbing us and you know, pushing and suddenly they pushed our cameraman backwards and over and feeling very aggressive and they were kind of yelling at us, why are you reporting? Why are you reporting this? We're Mumbaiers (ph) is what they said.

So there was a certain sense of -- a bit of a (INAUDIBLE) mentality just for about 15 minutes. (INAUDIBLE) as people are getting pretty aggressive. And then they -- police finally moved in after about five, 10 minutes after we fought our way through the crowd and took this sort of crowd of a younger generation and a few people in their late 40s off.

And so the siege is -- it's back to what it was before this (INAUDIBLE) got out of (INAUDIBLE) and out of control. But they -- it has nothing to do with the scene that's been here and the hostage situation or at least the situation inside the Taj Hotel that's been going on for the past 22 hours -- Fredricka?

WHITFIELD: Yes. OK. OK. Thanks for that clarification. I know tempers are high, obviously. This has been a devastating hit for Mumbai, for India, as a whole. And people are very clearly upset over what's transpiring there.

Now when you describe that authorities say that the situation may be over at the Taj Hotel, will they give any more details about what constitutes being over? We still haven't seen the release of or the apprehension of these suspected terrorists.

We did see some images of people being released, presumably hostages. But can authorities give you any more detail or are they giving you any more details of what constitutes it being over?

SIDNER: I wish they (INAUDIBLE). But this has been (INAUDIBLE) a lot of the other media -- members of the media, (INAUDIBLE), they're really kind of separate from us. So we still don't know just yet whether or not they have taken the terrorists down? Have they arrested them? Has there been shootings inside where people have been injured or killed?

We do not know. And we also cannot see into these ambulances. (INAUDIBLE) They drove off with their sirens and their lights going.

WHITFIELD: I'm sorry, you, said you did -- I'm sorry, there was just a break in the cell phone line. You said you did see these ambulances depart...

SIDNER: Yes.

WHITFIELD: ... with sirens going. So presumably...

SIDNER: Yes.

WHITFIELD: ... injured inside. OK.

SIDNER: We saw at least two of them, went and go up to the front of the hotel, stop for a few minutes, and then put the lights on and then (INAUDIBLE) a couple of times and drive off.

But we couldn't see inside. And so, you have a sense of you're not sure what you're looking at, if you're looking at people who were inside the hotel are being taken to the hospital or, you know, what exactly you're looking at that point.

And authorities have been very, very hush-hush on exactly what is going on. I have to tell you that they have moved (INAUDIBLE) ambulances that were here earlier away and they are gone now. And there are just a few, two or three, left.

The scene has definitely died down quite a bit. But there is still a scene or still bright lights being shown on the right hand portion of the Taj, but right now we're all standing around wondering what's going to happen next, if police are going to finally come out and tell us something, or if the army is going to come out and tell us something -- Fredricka.

WHITFIELD: And Sara, you know, we're seeing images -- I know you're not in front of a monitor, and you can't, you know, show and tell a little bit about what we're seeing, but we just saw images of what appeared to be inside the Taj Hotel and there seem to be some law enforcement officers walking around it.

Now we're looking at exteriors of the Oberoi Hotel and these live images. It's nightfall now. This has been transpiring all day there. You're outside the Taj Hotel...

SIDNER: Yes.

WHITFIELD: ... a few blocks away. This 105-year-old building, hotel, is huge, is it not? Describe to me how many...

SIDNER: Yes.

WHITFIELD: ... blocks and why it's difficult from your vantage point to be able to see all activity that's taking place in this hotel? How many blocks does it seem to take up?

SIDNER: It look likes it takes -- would take up about two city blocks. Both length and width wise. It's a large, beautiful structure with many, many rooms inside, hundreds of rooms inside. And people come to just to be.

They don't even have to go in to get the beauty of this place. And so it is a large structure. It is kind of hard to see around corners when they've cordoned off. I mean we are literally stuck on one side, the very sort of front of it. We can't see to the right, left or behind of what's going on back there.

WHITFIELD: OK, and let me just interrupt you for a second, Sara, because now, now we're looking at the Oberoi Hotel.

SIDNER: OK.

WHITFIELD: ... a few blocks away from where you are, the Taj Hotel. These are live images now coming from our sister station there outside the Oberoi Hotel. And now you can see flames just beyond some trees there, fire burning at the Oberoi Hotel.

We know that this really began earlier in the day, both hotels with explosions being heard and felt. We saw fire coming out of the Taj Mahal Hotel and now we're seeing fire at nightfall there in Mumbai inside -- at the Oberoi Hotel.

And now we're looking, Sara, at some images of inside the Taj Hotel.

SIDNER: OK.

WHITFIELD: It looks like some law enforcement folks there. There occasionally appears to be civilians or tourists, people who presumably were staying at the hotel.

So Sara, take us back at those harrowing moments that a number of people experienced there at the Taj Hotel being told by the hotel if they're in their rooms to stay in their rooms, to turn off the lights, to close the shade and at the same time, the suspected terrorists were asking to see passport, singling out British and Americans.

Describe all that for me. Piece it together if you will.

SIDNER: So last night about 10:00, 10:30 all of this went down here at the Taj. The story is, is that these groups of men with grenades, holding, you know, AK-47s guns, were walking down the street from one place, this cafe where they had shot up the cafe, both inside and out.

They still literally walked down the street, according to witnesses, and they came into the Taj Hotel and started doing the same, randomly firing. They were firing at the poolside. We know there have been people killed, apparently, at poolside who were just sitting around, trying to enjoy Mumbai and trying to enjoy this fabulous hotel.

And then witnesses said, look, we were inside, they were specifically asking for people who had American or British passports specifically making an important part of their game plan, so to speak, and wanting to single them out according to witnesses.

So they're basically the hostages of people that were holding American or British passports.

So imagine you're in this hotel. Suddenly you hear, you know, loud noises, gunfire and you're told, get in your rooms, close the door, shut all of the lights off, no television, nothing. You are cut off from communication. And you're told not to come out unless you know there's a -- there is a safe voice on the other side of the door.

And so some of these people, if in fact they've been able to bring out people so far from the Taj, have been sitting in there for 20 hours wondering what to do and if they're going to be next, so to speak, because authorities --

there were terrorists still inside the Taj just three or four hours ago.

That is the report that came to us from authorities. So here they are waiting and wondering, and then fire breaks out for the second time on the 4th floor of the Taj. There was a large fire. We saw it ourselves coming out of the window. And so then you've got the problem of smoke and fire.

And then what do you do? Do you stay in your room or do you go out and risk being shot or hurt by the terrorist or by the army that doesn't realize you're in there?

It is a terrifying situation for those who may still be inside the Taj. We're just waiting to find out the very latest possibly, Fredricka.

WHITFIELD: And so now, Sara, all that complicated by the fact that you may have a crippled law enforcement, the army, police able to respond with the anti-terror task force leader and top officers being killed.

Were they singled out in this -- in these series of attacks? How is it that they were killed as well or taken out by the suspected terrorists?

SIDNER: You know, that is -- that's the question a lot of people are asking. Were they targeted or did they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, so to speak? And no one knows really the answer to that.

But certainly a big blow to lose the commander, the command that a lot of people were looking to, to deal with these terrorist situations and who was quite looked upon highly here in Mumbai and across India.

So that was a big blow. And obviously that's going to affect the troops, so to speak, when they're out dealing with all of this. But it appears (INAUDIBLE) at the Oberoi there were several hostages that were freed over the last company of hours and so it appears here at the Taj, there's definitely a sense that things are over and having authorities say, look, we're telling you, this is a done deal.

But that there are still vehicles here, police vehicles here that are just standing by.

WHITFIELD: And so, Sara, while you and I are speaking, and you're unable to see our monitor, but just to explain to people who are watching. On right hand side of your screen, you're seeing images from previously shot at the Oberoi Hotel where it appeared as though -- and now you're seeing part of the Taj Hotel -- where it appeared as though there may have been a suspected terrorist kind of in the window as you saw that red circle around him and you see outside, all the people outside.

And then on the left is the Oberoi Hole where it's an active fire right now at nightfall there after a day of chaos and to the right, again, now, Sara, we're seeing some -- perhaps a body being taken out into -- in one of those ambulances that you talked about being outside the Taj Hotel.

Some ambulances you've actually seen depart from that location. Now as you described earlier, Sara, that a number of, you know, hotel guests were being given those instructions to stay inside, et cetera.

Is there any account whatsoever by law enforcement or whomever about how many people, residents of that hotel, that may actually still be in there or how many actually got out safely before utter chaos really erupted here?

SIDNER: That is the most frustrating part of all of this. No one has been told any kind of definite number as to how many people are still inside and how many people were let out -- actually escaped.

We know that there were quite a few people that escaped because people were able to, you know, see them come out themselves and they came and talked to some of the media members. But the reality is that the authorities have been very tight-lipped on that situation.

I should mention to you, you mentions ambulances and we were talking about that. Well, we went by one of the hospitals today to see if we can find people who can tell us what was going on and maybe family members outside.

We noticed one gentleman, that was the Taj -- obviously worked for the Taj. He had a Taj chef's outfit on and has



still -- had, you know, the blood sort of splattered on his outfit, on his shirt, coming out, and (INAUDIBLE).

We did hear a few people talking about, you know, bodies inside the hospitals, because some of the hospitals were also attacked. This has just been a real nightmare that doesn't seem to want to end for the people of Mumbai and for foreigners who were targeted in all of this.

WHITFIELD: And Sara, while you and I are talking, while you're at the Taj Hotel, a few blocks away from the Oberoi Hotel, is the skyscraper or taller tower that we're looking at right now. Our latest information is that while there's a fire under way, even though the images that you're seeing right now appear to be daytime images, right now it is nightfall. There are some live images of a fire that we've been able to show you as we've been speaking here.

30, we believe, are trapped in the Oberoi Hotel, roughly on the fourth floor, where that fire is that you saw earlier. We'll be bringing you those live pictures again in a moment. Right now, we're looking at some images that were shot earlier at the Oberoi Hotel. Relatively tall looking building. Earlier you saw perhaps some language here on the screen from our affiliate there in Mumbai that there is a 19th floor so we know that this building is at least that tall, according to our affiliate there.

And then these images here, Sara, that we're able to see is a number of people, some what appear to be passers-by, some who appear to be army or even representative of law enforcement. And then, we're also seeing kind of a hodgepodge of images of the ambulances that you referred to earlier, Sara.

So, a moment ago, about roughly 30 minutes ago when we went to you live, it was a pretty chaotic scene. A number of people were taking out their frustration seemingly on you. It's very quiet where you are right now. Can you describe the scene where you are outside the Taj Hotel?

SIDNER: Yes. I had mentioned after having that happen, and there still quite a few people milling about and people start to run and they'll push, and it is not unusual here in India for stampedes to happen because there are millions. This city is like 19 million, 20 million people. So, you can imagine how big the crowds get at times.

So, I've gotten myself into a safe area, into a car, locked the doors and I'm looking at the Taj from our van that is directly parked right near the area where we're going live to keep myself away from that, because obviously it's very difficult to report when people are pounding on you and trying to grab you and that sort of thing.

So, I am looking right now at a picture, or kind of picture at -- at the Taj (INAUDIBLE), and it's still lit up. There are still, you know, some police vehicles outside. Like it's really quiet at the Taj. Around the Taj, there are some people that are still milling about and causing a bit of trouble and just overexcited.

(CROSSTALK)

WHITFIELD: And is there still fire at the Taj? We're looking at images shot earlier at the Taj. Still fire there?

SIDNER: Yes.

WHITFIELD: Yes. OK, because unable to put it out because you've got an active scene.

SIDNER: Yes. There is still smoke at the Taj. Even though you're not seeing flames, but you're definitely seeing some dark smoke coming out from that fourth floor. And that was -- we're live with that with you (INAUDIBLE). And the fourth floor windows blew out. The fourth floor blew out. But, yes, there's still an active scene here. It's certainly -- to me, it's certainly not completely over. When you have, you know, flames or at least smoke coming out of a building, it can't be done just yet.

WHITFIELD: All right. Devastating, heartbreaking images coming out of Mumbai, India. Sara Sidner, there, thanks so much. We'll be checking back with you. She's outside the Taj Hotel, which is an active scene right now even though some authorities have told Sara that it is over. Unclear what that means -- whether there have been terrorists that have been taken care of, whether they've been apprehended, whether a law enforcement authorities have been able to secure the 105-year-old hotel where earlier there were explosions. There were many people who are killed at that hotel.

In all now we understand 125 people have been killed at various site there throughout Mumbai. Oberoi Hotel,

also another location, where now active fire scene. And we understand 30 people are trapped in the Oberoi Hotel, which is a few blocks away from the Taj Hotel. Hospitals targeted, train station as well. We have reaction coming from the U.S. State Department, from the White House, as well as Chicago, from President-elect Obama's office. We'll be bringing all that to you, right here in the NEWSROOM, right after this.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

WHITFIELD: Deadly explosions and hostage taking in many locations there, Mumbai. We want to join our affiliate IBN News there in Mumbai to hear their reporting.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

VOICE OF YOGITA LIMAYE, CNN-IBN CORRESPONDENT: A big explosion. Not like a grenade blast or anything like that -- much, much bigger. We can't see anything from this phase of the hotel. That (INAUDIBLE). Perhaps something might be seen from the one that faces Colaba Causeway. The fires are being put out at this point, but obviously the operations on still inside. Police vehicles, ambulances parked at the entrance of the hotel. Extra forces had been put into the hotel as well. So operations still very much on here at the Taj Mahal Hotel as reports that we had been getting.

VOICE OF UNIDENTIFIED CNN-IBN CORRESPONDENT: Right. OK, let's stay with the pictures, both at the Taj and Oberoi. Use them in a double screen on both sides, the two images (INAUDIBLE) of Mumbai. Quick comments at the moment (INAUDIBLE), someone who perhaps has spent many nights at the Taj and the Oberoi. It must shock you. It must leave you as a Mumbai shock.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WHITFIELD: All right. You're listening to live reporting there from our affiliate IBN News there in Mumbai, and they're talking about another explosion that is taking place at the Taj Mahal Hotel there in Mumbai, and that's exactly where we find our Sara Sidner. You've been hearing from her all morning on her reporting.

Sara, from where you are, did you hear explosions?

SIDNER: Yes, I just barely jumped out of the car. It was so loud. (INAUDIBLE), and then we opened the doors and jumped out to see what happened. A very loud bang, similar to the six loud explosions that we heard about four hours ago.

And so, we're now -- we're all out of the car and we're all looking at the Taj. The scene is still the same, though, there are fire trucks that are now putting water into that window that is still smoking -- the one that was burning a few hours ago. So, they're now splashing it with water, but another bang. And after hearing from one of the members of the army that this was quote/unquote, "over," that wasn't sound over to me.

I don't know why there was that loud noise and what it means, but certainly there's been another, either it's the army making this loud bang for an effect or there's something else more dire going on inside the Taj. It's a wait and see situation. But yes, we just heard the seventh and the last blast.

WHITFIELD: So seven now explosions taking place at the Taj Hotel alone there. Many while you have been there reporting. Can you describe kind of the scene on the ground there, whereas earlier we saw an awful lot of people, whether they were just onlookers or people who worked at the hotel and wanted to continue to see what was going on, who might be out there now?

SIDNER: It's onlookers. And that is something that actually is -- happens all over India. There are, you know, millions of people and there are many people who are just really interested in kind of trying to stand around and watch and see what's go on.

So, there are probably 300 onlookers that are milling about, watching. And then the rest of the people here are media. And every now and then, the police are coming in and moving the onlookers out of the area and trying to get them away after what happened to us a few moments ago. So basically, at this point, you've got about 300 people (INAUDIBLE), and then several members of the media all with their cameras pointed at center at the Taj, wondering what that loud explosion was.

WHITFIELD: And in fact, Sara, I want to ask you about reinforcements if you -- you know, in the amount of time that you've been out there outside the Taj Hotel, while we look at some of the indoor imagery of what's taken place in the Taj Hotel with law enforcement coming in, sweeping the halls. And on the right of the screen, we're looking at live pictures of the Oberoi Hotel, a few blocks away where a fire is underway we believe on the fourth floor, and there may be 30 people trapped.

I wonder from your vantage point, have you been seeing a lot more reinforcements coming in? We know that the task force or anti-terror task force has been crippled, possibly, by these terrorists taking out some of the top leaders. But have you seen reinforcements of army or city police, law enforcement coming in to help get a handle of this situation at the Taj Hotel?

SIDNER: No, actually. We saw a lot of the members coming in droves, basically. A couple of hours ago, they were just milling out, you know, one after the other, with their guns first pointed down in a more relaxed position, leaving the area. So, they may have been sort of coordinating themselves around the outside, but they were, you know, much closer moments ago. And they left.

So now we're wondering what we're hearing -- I don't know if you can hear about a few sirens going off, that's an ambulance siren going off. And there are -- one, two, three, four, five, six ambulances that are still sitting here.

What is odd, Fredricka, is that, you know, Mumbai is a city that is (INAUDIBLE) it's bustling, millions of people here. And it's very much an incredible city to see and sort of feel and breathe. And yet, we've only seen two fire brigades, and this is an enormous hotel that obviously is still has many hot spots. So it seems that there isn't enough infrastructure, there isn't enough personnel apparently, to deal with some of this -- sort of this going on.

WHITFIELD: Yes. And clearly, because it's an active hostage taking, even though I know some of the sources earlier told you that it's over. It's clearly not over because we just heard another explosion. You just heard another explosion. You know, we're talking about, you know, historic landmark, an opulent hotel which kings, presidents, top business people, celebrities, have stayed in this hotel. It really is a prize jewel of Mumbai.

And even if you haven't been to India, you've heard of it, you know of it. So the psychology here of why this would be a target and the people that would stay at this hotel, do you believe or do you believe sources there seem to think that the target was not necessarily a hotel but the clientele at that location?

SIDNER: If you listen to some of the witnesses who have talked today, they have said things such as, look, they were looking for specific people, they were asking about people with American passports and people with British passports. That gives you some idea as to what was going on here.

And obviously, these five-star hotels are frequented by people from - foreigners, basically, who come from out of town and want to see the most beautiful place and they have the money to pay for it. These are not by any means cheap hotels. They are very expensive to stay in. And so, you do have to wonder whether it is in a situation of going in and knowing the clientele's going to be such, but it's also the massive and the beauty and the historic background on this hotel may also be of significance. And all of that will have to be flushed out by authorities at some point.

WHITFIELD: Sara Sidner outside the Taj Mahal Hotel where we understand now, a series of explosions taking place there at that the hotel and at many locations throughout Mumbai, also known as Bombay, at the Oberoi Hotel. Also seeing images to the right of your screen of active fire that was taking place at the Taj Hotel earlier and we understand from Sara, it is still burning as well. At least they're seeing smoke. 125 people have been killed. And more than 300 wounded. Law enforcement sending conflicting messages to our reporters there on the ground about whether this is over at the Taj Hotel. But clearly it must not be. Our Sara Sidner hearing the explosions, feeling an explosion just within the past 15 minutes.

Our Paula Newton is in London, also watching the situation from where you are. What are your sources telling you, Paula?

PAULA NEWTON, CNN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CORRESPONDENT: Substantially, I think just to try and help Sara out there on the ground. What seems to be happening here is that the local commanders on the ground are giving conflicting information, both to the Indian authorities and the British authorities.

Here, we are told that in fact, still at both hotels, there could be at least three or four terrorists still holding

hostages. They are unclear as to the number of hostages, possibly between 20 and 30 still. They are not clear how many of those hostages are foreigners.

As well, local commanders are telling authorities here that they believe that those terrorists still are in possession of lots of ammunition and lots of explosives. That could possibly explain what is going on outside the hotel right now and what Sara is hearing.

Further to this, we have unconfirmed reports, and again, the local commanders cannot get an accurate read on this on the ground for American and British authorities, which is why I'm just imparting what they are being told. And that, is that there possibly are American and British bank employees amongst the hostages.

Again, the local commander says he cannot confirm this to the British authority. This is what he's been told. This is what he's hearing. Again, you can appreciate we're not exactly sure the military or the police on the ground, what kind of communication they have with anyone in the hotel. This is what they're speculating on for the authorities here and this is what I'm imparting to you.

As well, the MV Alpha is what has been -- that's a ship, a Karachi-based ship apparently according to the Indian government has now been boarded by the Indians. The Indian government is following a plot line that goes like this. That the MF Alpha basically sailed off the Mumbai Coast and that from that ship dispatched three smaller speed boats laden with explosive, automatic weapons and a lot of other weaponry, and they came ashore and launched these attacks really from the water there.

It was these initial skiffs that they had along the water. They have unconfirmed reports that there is some CCTV footage of this happening. I have not seen it releases and no one can confirm that it exists. This is the kind of information right now that the Indian authorities are working on. Further to that, there are at least, they're saying, 12 foreigners dead. Indians right now are saying that there are six Austrians, five Italians and at least one Australian among the 101 dead.

WHITFIELD: Wow. That's an incredible amount of information there, Paula. So, possibly, you know, some analysts were trying to surmise who could be responsible, who could be behind this group, that it could more likely be foreigners, but now with this kind of possible scenario, you're setting up, they could possibly be folks in country, terrorists who may, may, underscore, according to Paula's reporting there, they may have been on board a ship and then released smaller boats or skiffs, speed boats heading towards there.

NEWTON: Speed boats going very, very quickly.

WHITFIELD: Yes, and loaded with ammunition and personnel.

(CROSSTALK)

NEWTON: And Fredricka, I just want to -- I just want to stress here. American and British authorities cannot confirm any of this. They are saying this is what Indian officials are telling them. Without actually having their own intelligence on the ground right now, they're listening to the Indian authority and this is what they're telling them.

They're not saying that any of this is true and this is how it went on. They're saying this is what the Indians are acting on right now. This is how they believe the plot unfolded.

Also, the Indians already -- Indian government already warning them, look, we believe there could be American and U.S. bank employees among the hostages. We don't know for sure. Again, because of the communication. Appreciate that the local commanders on the ground are telling the emergency services people there in the capital, and also in Delhi, trying to keep the government informed of what's going on, and those officials are then imparting this information, both to the White House, to the Pentagon and here to Britain today.

WHITFIELD: Do you know whether or not British authorities would be offering any kind of assistance? Are they in a position to offer --

(CROSSTALK)

NEWTON: They are most definitely -- they are most definitely, and right now, a team from Scotland Yard is on

their way there. And I'll tell you why. They have been following, certainly, the progression of Kashmir certainly from here. There's a very large Indian and Pakistani community here in Britain. So, it's not just the invaluable counterterrorism information that those officers in Scotland Yard have, but they are intimately knowledgeable about the conflict there in Kashmir because they deal with it in the communities here. And I think the Indians will find that that had been valuable help.

WHITFIELD: All right. Paula Newton, thanks so much from London. We're going to continue to keep you abreast of all that's taking place. A whole lot of moving parts here on what is still a very active hostage-taking, explosions taking place in Mumbai, also known as Bombay. At least 10 sites targeted throughout the day there. It is now nightfall. And you're looking at live images on the right-hand side of your screen at the Oberoi Hotel, where fire is believed to be under way on possibly the fourth floor. And as many as 30 people trapped. Much more information straight ahead here in the NEWSROOM.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

WHITFIELD: All right. We're continuing to watch the unfolding situation in Mumbai, India, where a series of terrorist attacks began about 22 hours ago and it's still an active scene right now. You're looking at images of fire taking place at the Oberoi Hotel. Fire is still underway. Unconfirmed reports at this moment that U.S. and British bank employees may be among the possibly up to 30 people being held hostage. U.S. authorities have not confirmed that.

Indian authorities are also saying the attackers may have come to the Mumbai Coast by boat, then boarded speed boats to get even closer, initially starting off from a very large ship and then to those speedboats. And police now saying 125 people are dead from a series of explosions at up to ten locations in Mumbai and another 327 people wounded.

We want to take you to this account from a reporter from our affiliate IBN there out of Mumbai, filed just a few moments ago.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: That's indeed looking very, very strong. In fact, what was happening right now is that they are trying to -- in fact, I'm not too sure if I'm able to hear gunshots perhaps right now. It's a little difficult to understand. There is a -- there is a bit of some sort of sound that just came from that direction. But, yes, you're right.

Unfortunately, we can't see the fire from this particular angle. But right at the end of that building, that short building, just behind that is where the fire is raging. And what we've been told is that -- whether it is -- it could really -- we don't know the real cause of that fire. But it could very well be diversionary tactic.

Yes, I think I am hearing some gunshots that are coming in from that particular direction. So, those are some of the gunshots that are coming in after a lull that was here for a while, really. So clearly, you never know there could really be perhaps -- this particular fire could be a diversionary tactic that has been used, but it's not clear by which side, really, but yes.

The fact is that there is a fire and there is firing that is going on simultaneously. So, things relatively tense, but also let me tell you that we are getting news that a majority of the hotel has been scanned, lots of people have been rescued. Lots of people have already trickled out of the Oberoi Hotel. There are still some hostages which are left.

And you know, sources have been telling us from inside that, they are nearing the end of that operation. However, there are some last-minute photos. And remember, (INAUDIBLE) pointed out, this last strike is perhaps the most difficult because everyone would be saving the best for the last -- best would be the wrong word to use in this situation. But what I meant by that was that, you know, all the ammunition that they have, they would have gathered that by now. We were told that they had -- they were in possession of grenades. They would be saving all that for the end, really, to try and counter that final assault that would be undertaken by the security forces.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes, the last few hours, the final assault often turns out to be the most crucial and of course the most tense. As a general officer commanding indicated to us, it looks like it's a long light. We are going to go past 24 hours.

But needless, we'll continue to keep track of this situation with all our reporters on the ground who are at all the three flash points, as well as our special investigations editor, VK Shashikumar, and our editor in chief, Rajdeep Sardesai. All of them will be joining (INAUDIBLE) in just a bit. The terror really in full fury. It continues to be a big focus, our only focus.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WHITFIELD: This latest update coming from our sister network, CNN-IBN. The reporters there saying that over 100 people, 125 people have been killed in these series of attacks taking place in Mumbai, and the fear right now that perhaps more explosions, more intense explosions could possibly be under way. We'll have much more reaction from around the world including the U.S. right after this.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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