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US scorns Taliban helicopter claim

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The Taliban have previously paraded wreckage from the 1980s as recently-hit US aircraft

The Pentagon has denied Taliban claims to have shot down a US helicopter and killed "40 to 50" American soldiers.

The US Defense Department has acknowledged that an American helicopter was forced to crash-land in Afghanistan.

But it insisted that no US soldiers had been killed.

The four crew members were injured, but have been flown out of Afghanistan aboard another American helicopter, the Pentagon said.

There has been no independent verification of the US or the Taliban's versions of events.

The Taliban claim came from their information ministry in the Afghan capital Kabul.

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Low Graphics They said one American helicopter had crashed and another had been hit by a rocket as it tried to carry out a rescue operation.

"Altogether between 40 to 50 Americans have died," a Taliban official was quoted as saying.

"You can see the bodies of the Americans on board ... with their uniforms."

First aircraft lost

Washington had denied earlier Taliban claims to have shot down American aircraft.

But the Pentagon confirmed that four members of its special forces were rescued after their helicopter crash-landed in Afghanistan on Friday night.

US officials said bad weather, not enemy fire, had brought down the crashed helicopter, which was one of two on a special mission inside Afghanistan.

An American official was quoted as saying that the helicopter which crashed had been sent under cover of darkness to pick up a sick soldier.

The Pentagon has previously admitted that US special forces are operating in Afghanistan.

It was the first time the US has admitted losing a plane since the military campaign began on 7 October against Osama Bin Laden - the Islamic militant suspected of masterminding the 11 September terror attacks on New York and Washington, and his Taliban protectors.



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The crashed helicopter was deliberately destroyed by F14 Tomcat fighters after the crew were flown to safety, officials said.

It is unclear exactly where in Afghanistan the helicopter came down.

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