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2 Albanian soldiers shot dead in Afghanistan

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TIRANA, Albania — Suspected Afghan police opened fire on Albanian and other foreign troops in the war-wracked country's south Monday, killing two Albanian soldiers and prompting the arrest of 11 Afghan policemen, authorities said.

The deaths were the first for Albanian troops in Afghanistan. Another international soldier was wounded.

The shootings appeared to be the latest in a growing number of attacks by Afghan police or army soldiers on foreign forces, a trend that has raised concerns about the vetting of Afghan recruits and threatened the international military commitment to the country. Last month, France suspended its training program and warned it may withdraw its forces a year ahead of schedule after an Afghan soldier shot and killed four French soldiers.

Monday's shooting occurred in the village of Robat, in the southern district of Spin Boldak near the Pakistani border, Kandahar police chief Abdul Raziq said. The troops were accompanying a USAID team for a meeting about opening two schools and a health center, Albania's defense ministry said.

The soldiers "found themselves attacked by a group of persons wearing uniforms of the Afghan police," Brig. Gen. Viktor Berdo, head of Albanian land forces, told reporters in Tirana.

The Albanian ministry said the remaining soldiers "arrested 11 Afghan policemen who opened fire."

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There have been more than 45 attacks on international troops by members of the Afghan army or police since 2007, more than 75 percent of those in the last two years, according to data from the Pentagon.

In Monday's incident, the attackers opened fire with five assault rifles and one light automatic machine gun, the Albanian Defense Ministry said.

The two Albanians, a captain and a corporal, died later of their wounds in a hospital in the southern city of Kandahar. Another international soldier was wounded in the incident, the ministry said. There was no immediate information on that soldier's nationality.

Albanian President Bamir Topi denounced the attack as a "grave terrorist act" and called for the punishment of those responsible.

Albania has 265 troops in Afghanistan. The two killed were part of a contingent that left Albania in mid-January for six-month tour of duty.