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## Spies assist Australian forces in Afghanistan: Aussie spymaster

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Head of Australia's super-secretive service Nick Warner has revealed that secret agents assist Australian troops in conducting tactical and strategic operations in war-battered Afghanistan.

Warner publicly announced in Sydney on Thursday that "Australia's Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) support Australian Defence Forces (ADF) operations in Afghanistan range from the tactical to the strategic."

"It is difficult to see a situation in future where the ADF (Australian Defence Forces) would deploy without ASIS alongside," AFP quoted Warner as saying.

Warner pointed out that "ASIS reporting has been instrumental in saving the lives of Australian soldiers and civilians - including kidnap victims".

He also added that more than half of the secret intelligence members are women and out of each five spies, one belongs to an ethnic group.

Describing the importance of cyber-operations for national security of Australia in the coming years, Warner stated that "ASIS's operational sphere will become more challenging, volatile and dangerous."

A total of 33 Australian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since October 2001, when the US-led invasion of the country took place, according to official figures released by the website [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org).

Some 1,500 Australian soldiers reportedly support the US-led operations in Afghanistan.

Insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan despite the presence of some 130,000 US-led forces in the war-torn country.

The United Nations announced on February 4 that 2011 was the deadliest on record for Afghan civilians. The death toll rose eight percent compared to the year before and was roughly double the figure for 2007.

Overall, 3,021 civilians died in violence related to the war and 4,507 were wounded in 2011.