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Four NATO troops killed by bomb in eastern Afghanistan

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KABUL: Four service members from the NATO-led [International Security Assistance Force](#) (ISAF) were killed by a roadside bomb in eastern [Afghanistan](#) on Saturday, the force said, continuing a trend of rising violence in recent weeks.

[ISAF](#) gave no other details about the latest incident. Most of the ISAF troops serving in the hotly contested east, where a fragmented insurgency is being fought near the border with [Pakistan](#), are Americans.

At least 220 foreign troops have been killed in Afghanistan in 2011, 57 in May when the [Taliban](#) began a spring offensive, making it the deadliest month of the year for foreign troops.

The Taliban vowed to attack foreign military targets, as well as the Afghan government and security forces, when they launched their offensive at the beginning of the traditional warm-weather fighting season in Afghanistan.

US commanders had warned of a spike in violence, saying that insurgents could be expected to hit back after significant gains were made by mainly US [NATO](#) troops in the southern Taliban heartland of Helmand and Kandahar over the past year.

Despite record violence, Washington has pledged to begin a gradual drawdown of its forces from

next month as part of a process that will see all foreign combat troops leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

Analysts and some US lawmakers have questioned the wisdom of starting to withdraw troops so soon after those gains were made and with violence rising steadily across Afghanistan.

Violence across Afghanistan hit its worst levels in 2010 since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-backed Afghan forces in late 2001, with record military and civilian casualties.

Also on Saturday, a government official in the normally peaceful Panjshir province in the northeast said a foreign civilian, said to be an Italian man, had been killed in a dispute with villagers.

Abdul Rahman Kabiri, the deputy governor of Panjshir, said the Italian man, his wife and a translator were walking along a goat track in a district known for its emerald mining when the dispute broke out on Friday.

"The foreigner's wife was about to fall down when a villager with a donkey grabbed her hand," Kabiri told Reuters by telephone from Panjshir.

"The man thought his wife was being attacked and shot and seriously wounded the villager," he said. "Other angry villagers came and killed the Italian," he said.

Kabiri said the man's wife and translator had been taken back to Kabul. While violence and anti-Western sentiment have been rising across Afghanistan, the incident did not appear to be directly related to the insurgency.

Panjshir is one of seven areas slated to be handed over to Afghan forces as part of the first phase of a gradual security transition to begin some time next month.

The Italian embassy in [Kabul](#) was not immediately available for comment.