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## Afghan foreign troops death toll hits 500 for 2010

- \* 2010 likely to become deadliest year of war
- \* Civilian casualties also at record levels
- \* More tough fighting ahead, U.S. commanders warn
- \* NATO acknowledges civilian deaths in Helmand strike (Adds byline, civilian casualties, paragraphs 5, 11-15)

By Paul Tait

9/6/2010

The number of foreign troops killed in Afghanistan this year has reached at least 500, compared with 521 in all of 2009, according to an independent monitoring site on Monday and a tally compiled by Reuters.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said an American service member was killed in an insurgent attack in the east on Sunday.

There has been a sharp increase in foreign military deaths, many of them American, as foreign troops launch more operations to counter a growing Taliban-led insurgency that has spread out of traditional strongholds in the south and east.

At least five ISAF troops have been killed since Friday, including the first Georgian.

Civilian casualties, a point of great tension between Afghan officials and Washington over the past year, have also reached record levels.

Violence across Afghanistan has hit its worst since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-backed Afghan forces in late 2001.

The spiraling death tolls come despite the presence of almost 150,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan and will be another worrying statistic when U.S. President Barack Obama conducts a strategy review of the war in December.

Public support for the war is flagging, with a recent opinion poll by NBC television and the Wall Street Journal showing as many as seven in 10 Americans saying they did not believe the war would end successfully.

The traditional summer fighting period has taken a heavy toll on foreign troops this year. A total of 102 were killed in June, the deadliest month of the war, followed by 88 in July and another 80 in August, according to independent monitor [www.iCasualties.org](http://www.iCasualties.org).

The latest casualties take to 2,068 the number killed since 2001, almost half of them in 2009 and 2010. Roughly 60 percent of those killed were Americans. U.S. and other NATO commanders have warned of more tough fighting ahead.

Also on Monday, ISAF said investigations into an attack in southern Helmand province last Wednesday showed that four civilians were inadvertently killed and two wounded by an ISAF strike after a patrol came under fire by insurgents.

"We regret the loss of life and injuries to our civilian partners," U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Timothy Zadalis said.

Last Thursday, Afghan President Hamid Karzai strongly condemned an ISAF air strike in northern Takhar province which he said killed 10 election campaign workers and wounded a candidate for the Sept. 18 parliamentary elections.

ISAF commanders, however, maintain the strike killed a senior member of the al Qaeda-linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

A United Nations report released last month showed that civilian casualties had risen by 31 percent in the first six months of 2010, compared with the same period last year. More than three-quarters of the casualties were caused by insurgents.