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Reuters

Four Georgian soldiers killed in Afghanistan

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Four Georgian servicemen have been killed in southern Afghanistan, where they were serving in the NATO-led peacekeeping operation, the Georgian Defence Ministry said on Friday.

"According to information available to us, the soldiers were blown up by a mine" late on Thursday, the ministry said in a statement.

The incident coincided with NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's first official visit to Georgia.

Georgian troops have participated in the Afghan operation since 2004, a commitment that underscores Tbilisi's ambitions to join NATO, despite fierce opposition from Russia and waning enthusiasm among the alliance's member states.

The former Soviet country has over 900 troops serving in Afghanistan. It increased its contingent there over the past year, after the withdrawal of 2,000 troops from Iraq in 2008 following a brief war between Georgia and Russia.

Since earlier this year, most of the Georgian troops in Afghanistan have been serving in Helmand, the country's most dangerous province, located in the south.