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Al Jazeera

'Afghan policeman' kills UK troops

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Five British soldiers have been shot dead at a checkpoint in an attack allegedly carried out by an Afghan policeman in the country's south, officials have said.

The men were killed in the Nad Ali district of the volatile Helmand province on Tuesday, the UK defence ministry said, adding the incident was under investigation.

"An Afghan national policeman from the checkpoint started firing without warning before anyone could really respond," a spokesman from the department said.

"Every effort is being put into hunting him down."

A British military spokesman in the Afghan capital, Kabul, told the Reuters news agency that the gunman may have been working with another man during the attack

Gordon Brown, Britain's prime minister, said the deaths were a "terrible loss".

"They fought to make Afghanistan more secure, but above all to make Britain safer from the terrorism and extremism which continues to threaten us from the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said.

The deaths bring the number of British troops killed in Afghanistan since operations began in 2001 to 229.