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## NATO Air Strike Kills Two Afghan Children, Nine Taliban Fighters

March 30, 2013

Officials say that a NATO helicopter strike has killed two Afghan children and nine suspected Taliban fighters in Afghanistan's southeastern Ghazni Province.

Mohammad Ali Ahmadi, the deputy governor of Ghazni, said that the casualties happened in a joint Afghan and coalition operation early on March 30.

NATO spokesman Major Adam Wojack said that the helicopter came in response to a Taliban attack on an Afghan police patrol.

He said that the coalition was investigating reports of civilian casualties.

Afghan civilian fatalities in NATO air strikes have been a major source of friction between President Hamid Karzai's government and the U.S.-led international military coalition.

Last month, Karzai ordered Afghan forces not to call in coalition air strikes in civilian-populated areas after 10 Afghan civilians were killed in an air strike called in by Afghan troops.

Meanwhile, U.S. special operations forces have handed over their base to Afghan forces in a strategic region of central Afghanistan.

The handover of the base in Nirkh district of the central Wardak Province on March 30 fulfills Karzai's demand that U.S. Special Forces leave the area following allegations that their Afghan allies committed grave human rights abuses on their orders.

In a statement, General Joseph Dunford, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, said that NATO troops will transition security responsibilities to their Afghan counterparts in other regions of Wardak as they "continue to grow in capability and capacity."

The development ends another key disagreement in the strained relations between Washington and Kabul.

Karzai had demanded the handover after allegations of killings, torture and kidnappings emerged. U.S. officials denied the charges.