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Afghan insurgent attacks soared in 2013

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The violence overwhelmingly targets Afghan troops and police as foreign combat forces step back from the frontline in preparation for withdrawal from the country next year, according to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO).

ANSO reported 2,331 insurgent attacks in January-March, a 47 percent rise on the first quarter of last year.

"We assess that the current re-escalation trend will be preserved throughout the entire season and that 2013 is set to become the second most violent year after 2011," said its report.

The year 2011 was the bloodiest in a conflict which began when a US-led invasion ousted the Taliban government in Kabul in 2001. But US-dominated foreign forces are pulling out, and the report found that 73 percent of all attacks in January-March were against Afghan soldiers or police.

A further 10 percent targeted civilians seen as associated with the Kabul government. Only four percent were against foreign forces.

ANSO director Tomas Muzik described his organisation's assessment as "grim", but said it "only represents a further escalation in the perpetual stalemate that has come to characterise the conflict".

ANSO (www.ngosafety.org) conducts safety assessments for non-governmental organisations operating in the country and is supported by the European Commission, the Swiss development agency and the Norwegian foreign ministry.

Afghanistan s defence ministry confirmed a "big increase" in Taliban attacks on the country s army but disputed the figures in the ANSO report.

Ministry spokesman Zaher Azimi said casualty figures for the army would be released soon.