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AP News

NATO: 6 US troops killed in Afghanistan

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Jul 10, 2010

Six American service members and at least a dozen civilians died in attacks Saturday in Afghanistan's volatile east and south, adding to a summer of escalating violence as Taliban militants push back against stepped-up operations by international and Afghan forces.

NATO said four U.S. service members died in the east: One as a result of small-arms fire, another by a roadside bomb, a third during an insurgent attack and the last in an accidental explosion. Two other U.S. troops died in separate roadside bombings in southern Afghanistan. Their deaths raised to 23 the number of American troops killed so far this month in the war.

Also, unknown gunmen killed 11 Pakistani Shia tribesmen in the east and at least one person died when a bomb planted on a motorbike exploded in Kandahar city in the south, officials said.

Explosions also hit two convoys of international troops in different parts of the country, with Germany saying two of its troops were wounded by a roadside bomb in the northern province of Kunduz. Another explosion targeted NATO troops in Khost in the east, but the alliance said there were no casualties.

Afghan and international forces also said a combined commando unit killed a Taliban operative and captured eight others in an overnight raid in Paktia province in the east,

though local villagers claimed the men were innocent civilians. In the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, thousands of Afghan's staged an anti-U.S. protest over another night raid that killed two security guards.

Insurgent attacks have intensified across the country and the international coalition has been stepping up raids to root out militant leaders as 30,000 more American troops arrive to try to turn around the war and build a stable Afghan government nine years after U.S.-backed forces toppled the Taliban's hard-line Islamist regime.

Last month was the deadliest of the war for the multinational force, with 103 international troops killed, 60 of them Americans.

A remotely detonated motorcycle bomb killed one person Saturday in Kandahar city, the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban, authorities said.

The blast set cars ablaze and shattered windows at a popular shopping center. One man was killed as he drove by in a car just as the bomb exploded, the provincial government said in a statement.

The province is the site of a U.S.-led military operation to strengthen government control.

In the eastern border province of Paktia, unidentified gunmen killed 11 Pakistanis who had crossed into Afghanistan to buy supplies, according to Rohullah Samon, spokesman for the provincial governor.

Samon said 11 Shia minority Muslim tribesmen died and three people, including a child, were wounded in the ambush of their minibus in Chamkani district.

Elsewhere in Paktia, a combined Afghan-coalition commando force raided a compound in Ahmad Abad district overnight, killing one person and arresting nine others, officials said.

The Ministry of Defense said the elite force killed an insurgent operative and captured eight others with weapons. The ninth person arrested was determined to be a civilian and turned over to local authorities, it said in a statement.

Paktia spokesman Samon complained that local authorities were not informed of the raid. He said villagers protested outside government offices Saturday, saying the dead man and those captured were innocent civilians. They promised a larger demonstration the next day if the eight prisoners were not released.

Combined coalition and Afghan forces have been stepping up night raids across the country trying to break up Taliban leadership and operations capability.

In the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, more than 1,000 people protested Saturday against the deaths of two security guards in another night raid near a market.

The crowd chanted "Death to America! Long live Islam!" Protesters said the security guards were unjustly killed when combined Afghan and international forces landed by helicopter at the bazaar before dawn Wednesday.

NATO spokesman Col. Wayne Shanks said the two guards were shot when they raised their weapons at the commandos and refused orders to put them down. He said the raid succeeded in capturing a Taliban operative who supplied bomb-making material.

The coalition says the new wave of raids has captured more than 100 senior- and midlevel Taliban figures since April and killed dozens more. But the success rate has not made much of a dent in insurgent attacks.

On Saturday, an explosion tore through a NATO convoy traveling in the eastern province of Khost, though no one was killed. The German army later said two of its soldiers were slightly wounded by a roadside bomb in the northern province of Kunduz — the second homemade explosive attack on German troops in the area that day.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force has been in Afghanistan since shortly after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, when U.S.-backed forces toppled the regime that sheltered the al-Qaida terrorist leadership following the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States.