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The Frontier Post

British, Estonian troops killed

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Two British and Estonian soldiers serving with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force were killed on Saturday as a result of two separate insurgent attacks in southern Afghanistan, officials said. One British soldier from 2nd Battalion, The Royal Gurkha Rifles was killed during an operation with Afghan police in the Nahr-e Saraj region of Helmand province. "Whilst protecting a checkpoint, his team came under insurgent small arms fire, during which he received a fatal gunshot wound," said Lt. Col. Gordon Mackenzie, a spokesman for the British Ministry of Defense. The identity of the victim was not immediately released, but British officials said his next of kin had been informed. "The thoughts and prayers of all those serving in Helmand are with his family at this very difficult time," Mackenzie added. Also on Saturday, in a separate incident, four Estonian soldiers were injured when their unit was attacked by insurgents during a foot patrol in Helmand province. One of the soldiers, identified as 25-year-old Corporal Agris Hutrof, later died at Camp Bastion. "I bow my head in mourning and express my deep condolences to the family of Corporal Hutrof who have suffered an irreparable loss," said Estonian Defense Minister Mart Laar. Other Defense officials described him as an 'exemplary soldier.' Coalition casualties in Afghanistan have been rising sharply in recent years with a total coalition death toll of 709 in 2010, making it the deadliest year for international troops since the war began in response to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. There are currently more than 130,000 ISAF troops in Afghanistan, including around 9,500 British soldiers and 159 Estonian soldiers. Nine Estonian troops have been killed since the country sent troops to Afghanistan in 2003. So far this year, at least 485 coalition service members have been killed in Afghanistan. Most troops are American and are killed in the country's south, which is plagued by IED attacks on troops and civilians. The deadliest incident happened in August when a U.S. helicopter crashed in eastern Afghanistan, killing 30 U.S. troops, seven Afghan troops and an Afghan interpreter.

