Beat: News

British NATO helicopter crashes in Afghanistan, killing 5

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USPA News - Five NATO service members were killed Saturday when a British helicopter crashed in southern Afghanistan, but the cause was not believed to be the result of enemy action, officials in London said. All casualties are thought to be British.

The accident happened at around 11 a.m. local time when a British helicopter, part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), went down near an airbase in Chaghri village in Takhta Pul district of Kandahar province, which is located in Afghanistan`s southern region that was the birthplace of the Taliban movement nearly two decades ago. "Five International Security Assistance Force service members died as a result of a helicopter crash in southern Afghanistan today," the coalition said in a brief statement. "ISAF is still in the process of reviewing the circumstances to determine more facts. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends affected by this tragic event." Britain`s Ministry of Defense confirmed one of its helicopters had crashed in Afghanistan, and a military source said all five casualties were British service members. "The incident is under investigation and it would be inappropriate to comment further until families have been notified," a defense ministry spokesman said. The cause of Saturday`s deadly crash was not immediately known, and both ISAF and Britain`s Ministry of Defense declined to comment on the circumstances. The Taliban claimed its fighters had shot down the aircraft, but insurgents regularly make false claims of responsibility and British officials - speaking on background - emphasized that the crash was not believed to have involved enemy action. Saturday`s crash, involving a Westland Lynx Mk.9 aircraft, represents the worst single loss of life for coalition troops in Afghanistan so far this year. The accident comes months after the crash of a Sikorsky UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter in Zabul province of southern Afghanistan, killing six American soldiers. The Pentagon confirmed in January that the crash on December 17 was caused by enemy action, even though ISAF had earlier claimed the opposite. There are currently more than 51,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, including some 33,500 U.S. troops and 5,200 British service members. Most foreign troops are scheduled to leave the war-torn country by the end of the year as Afghan President Hamid Karzai has refused to sign a security deal with the United States that would permit foreign troops to remain within the country beyond 2014.

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