

Airstrikes kill fewer Afghans, but more dying on ground

Wednesday, 03 March 2010 10:08 - Last Updated Wednesday, 03 March 2010 13:08



Even as U.S. forces take steps to reduce the number of Afghan civilians killed by aerial attacks, other civilian casualties remain stubbornly high — deaths in so-called escalation of force incidents in which edgy American troops fire on civilians who've come too close to their convoys or roadblocks.

The number of Afghans killed in such incidents rose 43 percent in 2009 to 113, from 79 in 2008, while the total number of NATO coalition-caused civilian deaths and injuries declined 15.5 percent, to 535 from 633.

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