SKOPJE, Macedonia - A soldier serving with NATO-led peacekeepers in Macedonia was killed and a colleague injured on Wednesday when their vehicle hit a mine near the northwestern town of Tetovo, a NATO spokesman told AFP.

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“One soldier was killed and another was injured in the incident (that) happened when the vehicle hit a landmine,” said Major Per Fpromstunen, from the NATO-led Kosovo peacekeeping force (KFOR). A police source in Tetovo told AFP the incident had occurred when a German KFOR vehicle carrying a mine-clearing team hit a landmine near the northwestern village of Lesnica close to the border with Kosovo.

The dead soldier was Italian and his injured colleague was German, the police source said, asking not to be named. “We are investigating the case. The incident happened at 1:55 pm (1155 GMT) north of Tetovo. The soldiers belong to the task force ‘Fox’,” Craig Cliff, NATO's spokesman in Macedonia told AFP. Task force "Fox" is part of KFOR's "Amber Fox" peace mission in Macedonia, which began after a peace deal last August ended seven months of fighting between Macedonian government forces and ethnic Albanian rebels. The conflict brought the former Yugoslav republic to the brink of civil war. The "Amber Fox" mission, which is currently headed by Germany and numbers around 700 soldiers, is due to come to an end on June 30.

But Macedonia last week officially asked NATO to extend its peacekeeping duties in the Balkan country by another three months to September 26. The European Union has said it is ready to take over leadership of the mission from NATO after parliamentary elections in Macedonia, which are scheduled to be held in September.

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