# Insurgent attacks on NATO trucks highlight US military crisis in Afghanistan

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A series of attacks on US and NATO military equipment depots in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar on Sunday and Monday have underscored the increasingly dire security situation facing American and allied forces conducting the counterinsurgency war in neighboring Afghanistan.

Anti-US insurgents attacked three depots in separate incidents, destroying some 200 trucks and containers loaded with military equipment and supplies bound for American and NATO forces across the mountainous border in Afghanistan. The trucks contained dozens of Humvees and military personnel carriers and other materiel.

The third major attack by insurgents on NATO supplies in Pakistan in less than a month, it was the biggest and most successful assault to date on the transit route for 80 percent of military supplies going to US and allied occupation forces in Afghanistan. Last month, some 60 insurgents, identified by NATO officials as Taliban, hijacked a convoy of trucks on the Khyber road between the two countries in broad daylight.

At 2:30 AM on Sunday, 200-300 insurgents overwhelmed the rudimentary security at two lots where the trucks were parked. They disarmed security guards, then threw grenades and fired rockets at the loaded trucks, destroying about 150 vehicles. Early Monday, an additional attack on Western supplies was reported in the same area. A security guard said 50 containers were burned and some vehicles destroyed by rocket fire.

The attacks were all the more remarkable since they occurred in the center of a city that houses the 11th Corps of the Pakistani Army.

The torching of the NATO supplies followed an evidently unrelated car bombing Friday in Peshawar city center that killed 29 people.

The US ships the bulk of its war supplies from the Pakistani port of Karachi, via forward staging grounds in Peshawar, over the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan, a landlocked country. Peshawar is the last staging point before the border, about an hour's journey, or 40 miles away. From Peshawar, Pakistani trucks loaded with the military supplies go through the Khyber section of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The Khyber area is almost totally controlled by factions of the Taliban and other insurgents, and many civilian government officials no longer dare to travel the same road the trucks use.

American officials said the destruction of the equipment at the Peshawar depots would have "minimal" impact on US and NATO military operations in Afghanistan. They declined to give a figure on the number of Humvees and other vehicles destroyed in the raids.

However, the threat to the supply lifeline into Afghanistan is of immense significance. *Asia Times Online* quoted Dr. Farrukh Saleem, the executive director of the Center for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan, as saying: "The Soviets' defeat in the Afghan war was primarily due to the cutting off of its supply lines. The Mujahideen focused on choking the supply routes from Central Asia into northern Afghanistan. At present, there is one US combat brigade in Afghanistan [about 5,000 men]. This December, another combat brigade will arrive, while two more combat brigades will arrive next year. Therefore, more supplies will be needed. If, at this juncture, the militants cut off the supply lines, it will be devastating for NATO forces in Afghanistan."

*Aisa Times Online* also noted that in July, when NATO-Taliban battles in Afghanistan were at their height, Taliban attacks on NATO's supply lines reduced NATO's storage capacity of food and other items from one month to just one week at important bases such as Ghazni and Helmand.

The latest attacks coincide with mounting evidence that

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the US-NATO military situation is deteriorating sharply within Afghanistan itself. The *New York Times* reported Sunday that a new US combat brigade being sent to Afghanistan next month will be deployed to two provinces bordering the capital city Kabul to the south, rather than to regions in the east and south of the country where most of the fighting has occurred.

This is an admission that the anti-US insurgency has gained strength in recent months and is now threatening Kabul itself. Security around Kabul has dramatically worsened in the past 12 months.

Almost all of the 4,000 combat troops of the Third Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division will be sent to Logan and Wardak provinces, adjacent to Kabul. According to the *Times*, "Wardak and Logan had been relatively secure until late last year. But by most accounts, Taliban activity has soared in the two provinces in the past year, as the insurgents have stepped up attacks against Afghan and foreign forces, sometimes even controlling parts of major roads connecting Kabul to the east and south."

In response to the worsening situation, the incoming administration of President-elect Barack Obama is planning a major escalation of US military violence in both Afghanistan and the tribal regions of Pakistan on its border. Obama and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, whom the president-elect is retaining from the outgoing Bush administration, plan to add more than 20,000 US combat troops to Afghanistan in the coming months. Combined with another 6,000 aviation and support troops, the planned military escalation will bring the total US troop contingent in the country from 32,000 to 58,000.

The toll of civilian deaths will rise accordingly. There will be an increase in incidents such as the US-NATO bombing on Saturday of the village of Shena Kali in the Nadali district of Helmand. Residents there said two houses were bombed, including the house of a farmer where nine people were killed. A second villager said ten people, including women and children, were found dead under the debris of one of the houses.

The military escalation within Afghanistan will be combined with stepped up attacks on adjacent tribal regions within Pakistan and demands that the Pakistani government escalate its military operations against anti-US insurgents. The US is seeking to exploit last month's terrorist attacks in Mumbai to increase pressure on Islamabad to intensify its military collaboration in support of the US war in Afghanistan.

David Sanger, the White House correspondent of the *New York Times*, published an article Monday revealing that the Bush administration is preparing to give Obama a lengthy and highly classified strategy review of the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A central component of the review, according to Sanger, is a recommendation that Obama tie future military aid to Pakistan to a demand that Islamabad reconfigure its military away from its long-standing tensions with India in order to concentrate on wiping out insurgents in the border regions with Afghanistan.

Implicit in this is a wider war that increasingly engulfs Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. The *Times* cited a "senior military official" as saying, "the message of the report is that you can't win in Afghanistan without first fixing Pakistan. But even if you fix Pakistan, that won't be enough."

Another press report cited Ashley Tellis, a former National Security Council specialist on South Asia, as saying, "This is a decades-long project," and adding, "The transition alone will take a decade until you can switch to the Afghan National Army."

Obama, for his part, routinely speaks of the "central front" in the "war against terrorism" as being "Afghanistan and its border regions with Pakistan." Interviewed Sunday on NBC News' "Meet the Press" program, Obama outlined a broad imperialist strategy in Central Asia that includes the implicit threat of a wider war. "We can't continue to look at Afghanistan in isolation," he said. "We have to see it as part of a regional problem that includes Pakistan, includes India, includes Kashmir, includes Iran." He added that he wants "a new national security strategy that uses all elements of American power."

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