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The New York Times

Gunmen in Pakistan Torch Nearly 30 NATO Fuel Tankers

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Gunmen in southwestern Pakistan set fire to nearly 30 tankers carrying fuel for NATO troops in Afghanistan on Saturday, an official said, two days after the United States apologised to Pakistan for a cross-border air raid that killed two Pakistani soldiers.

Suspected Islamist militants have stepped up attacks on convoys carrying supplies for NATO forces since the September 30 NATO air strike in northwestern Pakistan described by the U.S. ambassador as a terrible accident.

About 20 gunmen set fire to around 30 tankers parked outside at a roadside restaurant near the southwestern town of Sibi in a pre-dawn attack, the official said.

The tankers were on their way to the border town of Chaman.

"The attackers first fired shots and then fired small rockets at the tankers. Twenty-eight to 29 tankers caught fire," local government official Naeem Sherwani told Reuters. He said one of the paramilitary soldiers escorting the convoy was wounded.

The U.S.-backed Pakistani government is battling Taliban insurgents who remain effective despite military crackdowns on their strongholds in the northwest near the Afghan border.

Two suspected suicide bombers struck at a crowded Sufi Muslim shrine in the Pakistani city of Karachi on Thursday, killing at least seven people and wounding 65.

The U.S. apology for the September 30 cross-border raid had raised the hopes that Pakistan would reopen a vital supply route in the northwest for coalition forces which Islamabad shut after the NATO strike, citing security reasons.

A second supply route passing through southwestern Pakistan has remained open.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said after the U.S. apology that security was being evaluated and a decision on reopening the supply route through the famous Khyber Pass would be taken "in due course," but also emphasised Washington and Islamabad were "allies in the fight against militancy."

Trucking routes through Pakistan bring in around 40 percent of supplies for NATO forces in Afghanistan, according to the United States Transportation Command. Of the remainder, 40 percent come through Afghanistan's neighbours in the north and 20 percent by air.

The helicopter strike was the most serious of recent cross-border incidents involving NATO-led forces fighting in Afghanistan, which have stoked tensions with Pakistan.

The United States has been pressing Pakistan to take a harder line against militants launching cross-border attacks from their Pakistani safe havens on Western forces in Afghanistan.

An alleged al Qaeda plot to attack European targets has put Pakistan's performance against militants under further scrutiny.

The United States has also stepped up missile strikes against al Qaeda and Taliban militants by [pilotless drones](#) in Pakistan's lawless northwestern border regions in recent weeks.

On Friday night, at least five militants were killed in the latest such strike in the North Waziristan tribal region.