



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 1, 2010

## Pakistan-NATO Relations Strained

Officials report that the Pakistani government blocked oil tankers and trucks carrying NATO supplies into Afghanistan. The Pakistani government claims that the blockage is in response to an alleged NATO airstrike at a border post that resulted in the murder of three Pakistani troops.

A NATO official confirmed the border attack, which took place at the Upper Orakzai region, but did not indicate whether the incident was going to be investigated.

According to CBS News, "All NATO traffic was halted at the Torkham border checkpoint after threats by Pakistani officials to stop providing protection to NATO convoys if the military alliance's choppers hit Pakistani targets again."

Approximately 70 percent of American supplies and troops come through Pakistan, of which nearly half pass through the Torkham border.

Nearly 100 NATO vehicles were stopped at the Torkham crossing after orders to block passage reached security officials, allegedly in response to "rapidly growing insecurity, which makes it unsafe for us to let the trucks drive on."

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry official explained, "This is the second such incursion of this kind in less than a week. It marks a serious violation of a red line already put in place by Pakistan. We cannot tolerate this kind of behavior."

The border attack is likely to further strain the relationship between Pakistan and NATO. According to a NATO official in Islamabad, there are rising tensions between Pakistan, the United States, and other NATO nations: "For the Western world, Pakistan seems to have become a rapidly growing staging point for militants who attack our troops in Afghanistan. We say Pakistan could do more to restrain the militants, but hasn't taken adequate steps."

Tensions have been rising with the increased number of American drone attacks on Pakistani soil. In the month of September, 21 drone attacks targeted members of al-Qaeda, as well as suspected Taliban sites. Officials report that the recent attacks targeted militants plotting a siege on England, France, and Germany — plans that are unconfirmed but allegedly were orchestrated by Osama bin Laden.

Critics assert that law enforcement agents created the story of the plot on Europe in order to justify the increased attacks, citing Europe's failure to raise the terror threat level as proof that the story was unbelievable.

The relationship between the Pakistani government and NATO deteriorated after a helicopter attack targeted militants on the Pakistani side of the border, an incident protested by Pakistan.

The rising number of drone attacks has prompted a two-day visit by CIA Director Leon Panetta with Pakistani leaders. The meeting between Panetta and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani and the head of Pakistan's intelligence agency (ISI) was aired on Pakistan's state-owned television network. Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik addressed his country's relationship with NATO by saying,





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“We will have to see whether we are enemies or allies,” without having even mentioned the recent blockade.

The United States recognizes failure on the part of Pakistan as well. During Panetta’s visit, he seeks to outline a “clear timetable” for Pakistan to mount a military campaign in the North Waziristan region, an area where militants have taken refuge.

A struggling relationship between Pakistan and NATO is the last thing the United States needs, as the routes through Pakistan into Afghanistan are vital to the war. CBS News writes, “If Pakistan’s government decides to officially halt the flow of supplies into Afghanistan, it would represent a massive logistical challenge for U.S. and NATO commanders, and an equally large diplomatic challenge for Western leaders dealing with an increasingly frustrated Pakistani government.”

It seems Pakistan must continue to reconcile its alleged desire to support the United States with the fierce anti-American sentiment pervading the Pakistani population.

Photo: AP Images



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