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Pakistan attacks suggest Taliban undeterred by leader's death

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September 26, 2009

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Two powerful car bombs in Pakistan's troubled northwest Saturday announced the return of the country's Taliban, following a lull that accompanied the death of the terrorist movement's leader last month.

The latest bombings in Pakistan suggests that targeting terrorist leaders, as Vice President Joe Biden and other advocates of shifting to a counterterrorism strategy in Afghanistan are urging, may have limited results.

At least 16 were killed and more than 150 wounded as explosions ripped through a police station in the town of Bannu, on the edge of the lawless tribal area, and the city center of provincial capital Peshawar. The Taliban, claiming responsibility, warned of more attacks to come.

"We have broken the silence, as the government did not understand the pause in attacks, and from now there will be an increase in the number of suicide bombings," warned new Taliban spokesman Qari Hussain, who's known for running a "school" for suicide bombers, after the Bannu explosion.

U.S. commanders in Afghanistan will be closely watching Pakistan closely as President Barack Obama considers whether to shift from the present counterinsurgency tactics in

Afghanistan to a counterterrorism strategy that would rely heavily on more attacks such as the one early last month that killed Baitullah Mehsud.

Pakistan, a key U.S. ally, had been relatively calm since the assassination of Mehsud by a U.S. missile strike. However, the Pakistani Taliban replaced Mehsud with a younger, even more vicious extremist, Hakimullah, who's from the same Mehsud tribe. Under new leadership, the militants have demonstrated that their capability is intact and that a two-year campaign of violence is likely to continue.

Early Saturday, an explosive-laden truck was driven into a police station in Bannu. At around noon, a car exploded in the main commercial area of Peshawar. A third explosive device went off in northern town of Gilgit, wounding four people.

The Bannu blast flattened the police station and surrounding buildings, and left a big crater, some 15 feet across and 13 feet deep, according to local television reports. Six people died and 70 were injured, with many police officers among the victims. On Thursday near Bannu, gunmen had ambushed an anti-Taliban militia, killing nine of its members.

In Peshawar, the car, which officials said may have been triggered remotely, detonated next to a bank in a busy shopping district, shredding dozens of vehicles and destroying storefronts. Ten were killed and some 80 injured. Police estimated that more than 200 pounds of explosives were used.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad said the bombings "highlight the vicious and inhuman nature of this enemy whose true target is the democratically elected government of Pakistan and the security of all Pakistanis."

Attacking civilian areas is relatively uncommon for the Pakistani Taliban, which favors police and military targets. The Pakistani army launched an operation against the Taliban in the Swat valley, in the country's North West Frontier province in late April, and there's also a smaller offensive under way in parts of the tribal area.

"We won't be scared or cowered by these incidents. We won't quit this fight," provincial information minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain told reporters in Peshawar. "This is responsibility of the whole world. Today we are on the front line . . . the world must help us."