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## Pakistan summons US envoy over troop deaths

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Pakistan has summoned the US ambassador and lodged a protest "in the strongest terms" with NATO after 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed in what it said was a cross-border attack by NATO helicopters.

The attack on a military checkpoint in northwest Pakistan, which also wounded 12 soldiers, prompted Pakistan on Saturday to halt a vital supply route for NATO troops fighting in Afghanistan, Pakistani officials said.

"Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has strongly condemned the NATO/ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] attack on the Pakistani post," the foreign ministry announced.

"On his directions, the matter in being taken up by the foreign ministry, in the strongest terms, with NATO and the US," it added.

Gilani called an emergency meeting of his military chiefs to discuss a response. And the foreign ministry summoned Cameron Munter, the US ambassador in Islamabad, to "lodge a strong protest" against the attack.

"The foreign secretary conveyed to the US ambassador that the unprovoked attack by NATO/ISAF aircrafts on border posts in which 24 Pakistani troops lost their lives and another 13 were injured had deeply incensed the government and the people of Pakistan," the ministry said in a statement.

A Pakistani government official said the dead from Friday night's attack in the Mohmand tribal

area included two officers.

The checkpoint that was attacked had been recently set up in the Mohmand tribal area by the Pakistan army to stop Taliban fighters holed up in Afghanistan from crossing the border and staging attacks, said two government administrators in Mohmand, Maqsood Hasan and Hamid Khan.

NATO supply trucks and fuel tankers bound for Afghanistan were stopped at Jamrud town in the Khyber tribal region near the city of Peshawar hours after the raid, officials said.

"We have stopped NATO supplies after receiving orders from the federal government," said Mutahir Hussain, a senior administration official in Khyber. "Supply trucks are being sent back to Peshawar."

Pakistan is **a vital land route** for 49 per cent of NATO's supplies to its troops in Afghanistan, a NATO spokesman said.

A spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Kabul said the coalition there was aware of "an incident" and was conducting an investigation.

The incident occurred a day after US General John Allen met Pakistani Army Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani to discuss border control and enhanced co-operation.

### **Worsening relations**

Friday's attack is expected to further worsen US-Pakistan relations, already at one of their lowest points in history, following a tumultuous year that saw the bin Laden raid, the jailing of a CIA contractor and US accusations that Pakistan backed an attack on the US Embassy in Kabul.

An increase in US drone strikes on armed groups in the last few years has also irritated Islamabad, which says the campaign kills more Pakistani civilians in the border area than fighters.

Washington disputes that, but declines to discuss the drone campaign in detail.

"This is an attack on Pakistan's territorial sovereignty," said Masoud Kasur, the governor of Pakistan's northwestern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.

"Such cross-border attacks cannot be tolerated any more. The government will take up this matter at the highest level and it will be investigated."