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Suicide attack strikes Pakistani soldiers

Car filled with explosives blows up at paramilitary camp in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killing at least seven people.

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Supporters of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam take part in an anti-American and anti-NATO rally in Sindh province [Reuters]

A suicide bomber has rammed a car filled with explosives into a paramilitary camp in northwestern Pakistan, killing seven soldiers in the second attack in as many days.

The blast caused a part of a building to collapse inside the Frontier Corps camp, located in Bannu town in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, said local police officer Tahir Khan.

At least 19 soldiers were wounded in the attack, and rescue workers were searching for additional casualties, he said.

A **Pakistani Taliban** spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, claimed responsibility for the attack in a phone call to the Associated Press news agency. He said it was meant to avenge the death of commander Taj Gul in a US drone strike in October in the South Waziristan tribal area, a key sanctuary for the militants.

Gul was the Pakistani Taliban's operational commander in South Waziristan and was responsible for many attacks against security forces.

Around three dozen Pakistani Taliban fighters armed with assault rifles attacked a paramilitary camp in Tank district near South Waziristan before dawn on Friday, killing one soldier and kidnapping 15 others.

Ehsan, the Taliban spokesman, had also said Friday's attack was meant to avenge Gul's death.

The fighters targeted the soldiers because of Pakistan's alliance with the US, he said.

Ehsan pledged they would kill the kidnapped troops, saying "we are going to cut these soldiers into pieces one by one, and we will send these pieces to their commanders".

Campaign of violence

The Pakistani Taliban has waged a fierce campaign of violence in Pakistan over the past four years, killing tens of thousands of security personnel and civilians.

Their aim is to topple the civilian government, partly because of its alliance with the US, and impose Islamic law throughout the country.

Pakistan has launched a series of military offensives against the Pakistani Taliban in the northwest along the Afghan border, including in South Waziristan.

Analysts say the operations, combined with hundreds of US drone attacks, have contributed to a significant decline in violence in Pakistan this year.

The number of people killed in suicide attacks in Pakistan in the first 11 months of 2011 dropped almost 40 per cent compared to the same period last year, according to data compiled by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

Deaths from all attacks by anti-government fighters fell nearly 20 per cent. But violence still takes a large human toll in the country in near daily attacks.

More than 2,300 people were killed in attacks by Taliban fighters in Pakistan through November, according to the institute.