ATTACKS AND COUNTERATTACKS: TTP AND PAKISTANI MILITARY ESCALATE ACTIONS

The past three days have seen a number of major attacks between Pakistan's Taliban, known as the TTP, and Pakistan's military. On Sunday, a bomb exploded in a van transporting Pakistani troops, killing 20. This attack took place in Bannu (Bannu will return to this story in a moment). On Monday, a suicide bomber killed 13 just a few meters from the outside wall of the General Headquarters of the Pakistani Army in Rawilpindi. Today, Pakistani jets killed at least 24 with bombs dropped in North Waziristan.

It appears that in the Sunday attack, the bomb was in a vehicle rented for transporting troops:

> "The explosion took place in a civil Hiace van inside Bannu Parade Ground at 8:45 am," a senior military official told *The Express Tribune*. The blast occurred just as Frontier Corps (FC) troops had stepped into the van ahead of their departure.
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> "The K-P paramilitary unit had rented a vehicle from the market for movement of its troops," he added. The vehicle was supposed to carry the soldiers to Razmak, a town in North Waziristan Agency.
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> "It wasn't immediately known whether it was a suicide bombing or the device was detonated through a remote control," he added. "The van driver was also killed in the blast."

The suicide bomber in Monday's attack was first seen on a bicycle:

> District Coordination Officer Sajid Zafar Dall said that at the time of the attack a gaggle of children were heading to school. "Our initial assessment is that the bomber was possibly on a bicycle and he then approached the target on foot," he added. Since it was morning time, RA Bazaar was bustling with office-goers and schoolchildren.
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> Quoting eyewitnesses, Sardar Zulfikar, the SHO of RA Bazaar police station, said the bomber was walking towards the GHQ but detonated the explosive vest the moment he saw army troops at RA Bazaar's main roundabout, T-Chowk. The building of National Logistics Cell is located nearby.
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> The RA Bazaar is considered a high security zone due to its proximity with the GHQ. Police investigators believe the bomber intended to target the military headquarters. However, he couldn't get to his target due to the tight security.

Today's bombing by the Pakistani Air Force appears to be in response to these attacks:

> Several suspected militant hideouts were trampled by Pakistan's military's fighter jets in Mir Ali area of the North Waziristan, killing at least 24 persons and wounding 15 more, various local news channels reported on Tuesday.
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> The air strike followed a series of terrorist attacks across Pakistan in the past week, including Monday's blast on a check post in Rawalpindi that martyred 6 army personnel and 7 civilians. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan had claimed the

> responsibility for the attack. The events had led to a mounting pressure on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to take tougher decisions in response to the recent attacks by TTP.
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> “This hadn’t been planned before, and Pakistan Air Force jets were called to hit hideouts of the militants involved in attacks on security forces,” said one military official speaking on condition of anonymity.

It appears that the operations by Pakistani forces are continuing in several locations in North Waziristan.

At least one key TTP figure killed in today’s bombing has been identified. He has a very interesting history:

> Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) key commander Adnan Rasheed has been killed in an air strike by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in North Waziristan on Tuesday.
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> Sources said Rasheed along with his family was killed in an action by security forces in Mir Ali.
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> Adnan Rasheed was freed in an unprecedented jailbreak operation on April 15, 2012 when around 200 Taliban militants armed with guns, grenades and rockets attacked the high-security Bannu Central Jail and released 384 prisoners. TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan subsequently declared on April 20, 2012 that the jail break operation was chiefly meant to free Adnan Rasheed.
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> He was the same TTP commander who wrote a sympathising letter to Malala Yousafzai and explained her why she was

> attacked by the TTP. He wrote, ‘When you were attacked it was shocking for me. I wished it would never happen and I had advised you before.’ He explained she was shot not because she went to school, but because she had spoken out against the Taliban in Pakistan.

These most recent militant attacks are not aimed only at the Pakistani military. Three workers administering polio vaccines were killed today in Karachi. That attack has not yet been tied to a specific group, but the TTP has carried out a number of attacks on polio workers, in part because of the CIA’s use of a vaccination ruse in its search for Osama bin Laden.

It is tragic to see the violence level escalating in this way. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was elected in part because of his stated intention to begin peace talks with the TTP. Major steps toward those talks were proceeding until the US killed TTP head Hakimullah Mehsud in a drone strike just hours before talks were to begin. The likelihood of the peace talks taking place now seems to be greatly diminished with the frequency and size of attacks and counterattacks between the two sides increasing rapidly.

Update: There are now reports that Adnan Rasheed survived without injury.