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**NATO vehicles hit in Pakistan**

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Oil tankers and vehicles carrying supplies over land through Pakistan for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation-led International Security Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan came under attack in Karachi and near Chaman in Balochistan over the past 24 hours.

These attacks come at a time when Pakistan's relations with NATO are particularly strained over repeated violation of the airspace by ISAF aircraft. On Thursday night, the Foreign Office asked its Ambassador in Brussels to lodge a strong protest at the NATO Headquarters over the missile strike at a Frontier Corps outpost in Kurram Agency by two ISAF helicopters.

Condemning the airstrike — in which three Frontier Corps soldiers were killed and three injured — Pakistan has demanded an immediate and full explanation for this serious incident. With the government coming in for criticism for what is being perceived as a weak response to ISAF intrusions into Pakistani territory since last weekend, the Foreign Office reiterated its veiled threat that Islamabad would be forced to consider response options if such airspace violations continued.

“Such incidents create serious misgivings and thus defeat the very basis of cooperation in pursuit of the common objective of combating terrorism. The United Nations mandate for ISAF is confined to Afghanistan and NATO/ISAF forces are again advised to refrain from any actions that constitute a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty,'' a late Thursday night statement from the Foreign Office said.

The Foreign Office has refused to spell out what the options could be. However, sources indicate that non-guarantee of secure transit of NATO supplies could be an option and this week has seen an increase in disruptions. Since NATO supplies have come under attack in Pakistan in the past — mostly in Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa and once on the outskirts of the federal capital — the attacks in Karachi and Chaman could be coincidental.

But, coupled with the blockade at the Torkham border post, these attacks have disrupted NATO supply routes. From Thursday, NATO vehicles have not been allowed to cross over into Afghanistan at the Torkham border post in Khyber Agency. Since a bulk of NATO supplies — excepting weapons — are shipped to Karachi and then ferried over land through Pakistan to Afghanistan, disruption of the facilitating environment is seen as a non-offensive but sure way of conveying Islamabad's displeasure at violation of its territorial integrity.