

Pakistan protests soldier's killing in NATO firing

Pakistan Tuesday protested and a key minister spoke of 'retaliation' after a soldier was killed and two were wounded when NATO-led coalition forces in Afghanistan fired at a checkpoint, the first such incident at the tense Pakistan-Afghan border.

'Such attacks should be treated just like enemy attacks,' Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sher Afgan Khan Niazi said after Monday's killing, adding that violation of Pakistani territory from across the troubled western border 'must be retaliated'.

Pakistan's Senate witnessed angry scenes and Hamidullah Jan Afridi, a tribal leader from Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), said: 'They will not stop unless one or two of their planes were shot down.'

Dawn newspaper said Afridi threatened that tribal people would retaliate if the government did not take serious notice of the matter.

They had the necessary capability and weapons, he said.

While Pakistan has lodged a protest and termed the soldier's killing as a 'mistaken' one, coalition forces said they were responding to 'similar fire from the direction' of the Pakistani checkpoint near Shawal in North Waziristan.

Scores of people have died, both on the Taliban side and the NATO alliance that includes forces loyal to the Hamid Karzai regime in Kabul. But Monday's incident is the first case of casualties caused by cross-border firing.

Pakistan's military spokesperson Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan said Islamabad had lodged a 'strong protest' with the coalition authorities for 'mistakenly' firing on the Pakistani checkpoint.

However, coalition forces told the Pakistani military establishment that the incident was the result of 'similar fire from the direction' of the checkpoint.

NATO claimed it attacked Taliban firing rockets from within the border in Pakistan, The News said in a report from Kabul.

The newspaper noted that the coalition forces had violated the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the past, but this was the first time a soldier was killed.

The border along North and South Waziristan has witnessed considerable tension in the past several weeks with the Taliban challenging alliance forces after crossing over from Pakistan, allegedly with Pakistani logistical support.

Pakistan denies giving any such support and cites its own military campaign against the Taliban to support its claim. Over 600 Pakistani soldiers have died last year in fighting the Taliban.

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