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CUE: At least six school children have been killed, and seven others wounded in an ambush in South Africa's troubled province of Natal. The Killings took place outside Pietermaritzburg earlier this morning. The area has been the scene of bitter clashes between supporters of the African National Congress and Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party. Here's our Southern Africa correspondent, Pergal Keane.

According to police, the children were among a group of twenty two travelling to school on a pick-up truck in the Table Mountain district outside Pietermaritzburg. The truck was stopped and approached by a number of gunmen who opened fire at pointblank range into the group. Six of the children were killed, and seven wounded. Some of those injured are thought to be in a seriously ill. The police say the gunmen used AK-47 automatic rifles — which are widely available to both sides in the Natal conflict. A largescale search operation is underway, and police and troop reinforcements have been brought into the area. Table Mountain has been the scene of repeated clashes between the AMC and Inkatha. The suspicion is that the killers will have come from either of these two groups. Whichever side carried out the attack, the fear now is of retaliation. Coming only three days before the next session of multi-party talks in South Africa — the killings are certain to heighten political tensions in Natal.

FERGAL KEANE, BBC, JOHANESBURG END BUSH/SMB/NTU Robert Sobukwe Papers

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