

Terrorism: How the Suicide Attackers Operate in Pakistan

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The wave of the suicide attacks has posed a new security threat to Pakistan. With the recent suicide attack in Charsada, the number of such attacks in the country has risen to over 20 in a year.

Suicide attacks are not new phenomena in Pakistan as country has suffered from 37 suicide attacks during last six years. But the investigation revealed that not a single but multiple militant and terrorist outfits like tribal Taliban, jihadist organizations and Al-Qaeda were involved in these incidents. This is the real problem for the law enforcement agencies to sort out the different groups, motives and tactics behind the attacks.

The suicide attacks in Pakistan can be traced back in Afghan Jihad. The Arabs were the founders of the lethal attacks. The first suicide attack occurred in Bajaur Agency of Federally Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA) in 1987, when an Afghan jihad leader, Sheikh Jameelur Rehman was assassinated in his camp in Chamarkand by an Arab Mujahid. The Arab assassinator, Abdullah Roomi, belonged to Gulbadin Hikmatyar's party Hizb-e-Islami. He did also shoot himself at the spot.

Sheikh Jameel was the head of Wahabi jihad group, Jamaat Dawatul Toheed-wal-Sunnah, who had captured the Kunar province of Afghanistan in 1984 and formed the first government of the Mujahideen in the province. Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, who also had the influence in the area, was not happy with Sheikh because he was not willing to give him the share in the government. Hikmatyar fought against Sheikh Army for three years and it was ended with the death of Sheikh Jameel.

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was the first Pakistani jihad group, which introduced the suicide attacks in Indian Held Kashmir. Hafiz Abdul Rehman Makki, the foreign affairs head of Jamaat ud Daawa (JD) in his booklet "Tareekh-e-Islam Kay Fadayee Dastay" (Published in 2004-Darul Undlas, Lahore) claimed that LeT Mujahid, Hafiz Muhammad Akmal was the first suicide attacker. He belonged to Jilala Pur Pir Wala, Multan. He had blown up the Bandi Pura Brigade headquarters in Indian Kashmir in 1999. Describing the background of the attack, JD leader Saifullah Khalid wrote in the preface of the same booklet:

"It was 1999, when Mujahideen were taking out the enemies from Kargil and Daras' mountains. 40,000 of Hindu Army were under their siege. It was crystal clear that Mujahideen will take the revenge of 1971 Army defeat. But Prime Minister surrendered in America. He ordered to pull back the troops. Jihad lovers were demoralized. Kashmiris, who found the hope for freedom, lost their hopes. Once again the history of traitor was repeated. Every one was talking that it would be a great set back for Kashmir issue and might would not be compensated. At that time with the grace of God a young man, Hafiz Muhammad Akmal from Jilala Pur Pir Wala, Multan changed all the perceptions. He entered into the Bandi Pura Brigade headquarter and killed Brigadier Chakatwati and dozen other soldiers. He blew up himself and was torn into pieces but opened the way of Fidayat (phenomenon of suicide attacks) for the Ummah. After a week another Fadayee attack was done at Badami Bagh Headquarters. Time comes when the Lal Qilla Delhi will start crumbling by the suicide attacks".

According to a JD insider, LeT faced the hard criticism when it had decided to go with suicide attacks in Kashmir. Not only the other jihad groups but Salafi religious scholars as well condemned the suicide attacks.

Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) was the second group that took this initiative in 2000. JeM had also faced the criticism by Deobandi religious scholars especially from Banori Madrissa, Karachi but the organization carried out without paying any attention on the decrees against suicide attacks.

After 9/11, JeM's militants turned against Pakistan as well and started terrorist activities inside Pakistan. JeM supreme commander, Abdul Jabbar ordered to attack on Churches and Western interests in Pakistan in 2002 and terrorists hit the churches in Bahawalpur, Islamabad and Texilla. Later these terrorists also started the suicide attacks. Inside Pakistan the first suicide attack was made on May 8, 2002 in a bus opposite Sheraton Hotel Karachi in which 9 French nationals, five Pakistanis including one suspected suicide attacker were killed. The attack was made by the Harkatul Mujahideen Alalmi. It was the group formed by the Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) and other Deobandi jihad organizations' splintered activists. The mastermind of the attack, Muhammad Imran was the former member of JeM. Later in the suicide attack attempts on President Musharraf, Corp Commander Karachi, American consulate bombing, attacks on Ashora processions in Quetta and sectarian suicide attacks in Punjab, JeM and LJ were the major suspect groups. The statistics about suicide attacks inside Pakistan show that JeM and LJ terrorists were involved in 27 attacks out of 37. They had the links with Al-Qaeda and Taliban in tribal areas as well. Hafiz Yunis from Dera Ghazi Khan, the sole suicide attacker who is identified yet, had affiliation with JeM and LJ. He had blown himself after unsuccessful attempt to hit Islamabad Airport on February 6, 2007.

In the remaining 10 suicide attacks, local Taliban from Bajaur, South and North Waziristan were identified as guilty. The August 4, 2006 attack on the command base of security forces in South Waziristan was the first suicide attack in the tribal area. Investigation revealed that Uzbek commanders were behind the attack, which were not happy with the peace deal between government and Baitullah Mehsud. Later Baitullah Mehsud group was also identified involved in the suicide attacks inside the Pakistan.

The captured suspects from tribal areas during investigation revealed that Baitullah was unhappy with the army's killing of tribesmen in the name of action against the Taliban and Al Qaeda and he planned revenge attacks in other Pakistani cities.

Mindset of the bombers .

Why the suicide attackers choose to blow themselves? The investigations by the law enforcement agencies indicate that suicide attackers generally make choices and are not impulsive or "crazy." They are usually carefully recruited, indoctrinated and then targeted by organizations. The motivations for suicide attacks are not so different in many ways from the motivations for other types of terrorism, including attention to a cause, personal notoriety, anger, revenge and retribution against a perceived injustice.

The videos and the 'will letters' of the suicide attackers, which are very common and easily available in South and North Waziristan, show that the suicide attackers are very much clear in their decisions, politically and religiously indoctrinated, and motivated.

A will letter by a suicide attacker, Aminullah, who had blown himself in June 2006 in Afghanistan, describes his mission in these words: "Don't shed your tears for me. It was my life-long dream to fight jihad and embrace Shahadat (martyrdom). I am going to a suicide bombing (mission) and I am doing so on my own free will. You may not see my body but don't be sad." A pamphlet eulogizing the sacrifice of the Waziristan bomber, Younis, was also distributed in the area. It reads, "Younis embraced martyrdom for the glory of Islam."

A suicide bomber, arrested from Dera Ismail Khan in March 2007 along with the armed jackets, has pleaded guilty during interrogation that his target was the foreign European embassy in Karachi. He confessed it in front of the Peshawar police. Report of this dreadful incident and the confession of the alleged suicide attacker have unfolded many facts. According to these revealed facts, Muhammad

Sohail Zeb, whose organizational name is Waheedullah, was the student of 2nd year at Government college of Tank. He belongs to a good family and his father acts as a bargain agent in Islamabad. Sohail told the interrogation team that he was inclined towards preaching while he was studying and during that he met Abid who took him from Tank to AzamWarsek in Wana Region. He was taken to Kenza Pengaa training camp. Initially he was given three books to go through. These books were 'Rehbar Ki Talash', 'Fidayee Hamle' (suicide attacks), and a book referring to a specific sect. The aforesaid training camp was not only feeding their bodies but also washing their brains. The trainees were told that suicide attack will lift them to the rank of martyr and their soul will rest in peace in heaven. The trainees are allowed to return home once their training is complete. The alleged suicide attacker told that he spent two months and twenty days at the camp and afterwards he was permitted to go home. After few days, Abid called him up and asked him to collect two bags from a car with tinted glasses, parked in the Tank station. He was told to keep one of those bags with him and to hand over the other bag to a local man whom he was to meet in the mosque. Dera police captured Sohail while he was taking the bag to the man. According to high police officials, the suicide attacker also revealed the facts about the preparation of the armed jackets. According to the culprit, nut bolt, electric wire, buttons and other explosives are used in the making of these armed jackets. He also disclosed this sad reality that under-training boys in the camp are of 18 to 25 years of age. The Peshawar Police has sent its investigation and facts report to NWFP Inspector General of Police.

The sources from tribal areas told that initially when the Taliban had decided to use suicide attacks as tactic, they had the very strict criteria to be a suicide attacker.

To fulfill the moral and Shariah demands it was compulsory for suicide attackers that they should be unmarried, will have brothers or patronage who will look after their families after their death. If they will not have the brother or patronage then it was their responsibility to arrange guarantee of some one who took responsibility for taking care of his family. Taliban provided the compensation to suicide attacker family as well. The permission form the family was not necessary. "If he had made sure that he is unmarried and has some one who can take care his family then the permission from family was not necessary", the source told.

The case of Dera Ghazi Khan Suicide attacker, Hafiz Yunis shows that before going for suicide attack he had divorced his wife. Investigators believed that perhaps he had done so to fulfill the condition of being unmarried. But the source from tribal areas says that now Taliban didn't care for any condition. Their emphasis is on to recruit more and more suicide attackers. "To hit the target, they need more suicide attackers because the arrest rate before the attacks and unsuccessful attempts are quit high", the sources told.

However to minimize the unsuccessful rate of attacks, terrorist organizations have issued strict instruction to the attackers. A two page manual "A Guide to Mujahideen", of an organization was recovered during a law enforcement agencies' raid in Karachi in 2005. The manual is in two languages Urdu and Arabic and deals with the relation between the terrorists and their operational coordination.

The hints of the manual, which were provided by a law enforcement agency official on condition of anonymity, point out:

- 1: Lock up mouth, if you are arrested, avoid to meet family members, don't keep organizational material and Mujahideen's address during travel, don't rely on "Punjabis" and always use code names"; all this and much more has been stated in the booklet "Guide to Mujahideen",

2: It starts with the Islamic concept of martyrdom and urges that every Muslim's biggest desire should be the martyrdom.

3: "Don't discuss your personal matters with your companions and try not to get in touch with your family. You are chosen in the way of Allah and family relationships and friendships should not remain important in the way of God", the booklet directs. While about every day life it guides: Don't stay more on a place, always use the code names, don't discuss organizational matters to your companions at public places and don't tell the family about your activities especially about your party friend.

One important direction for the militants especially for the Arab and Afghan militants quoted in the booklet is about the "Punjabis", which stated as, "Don't rely on Punjabis if you are on mission or moving from one place to another, because the most of the intelligence officials are from Punjab". However, the booklet said that be law obedient in daily life and always complete the vehicle papers, don't quarrel with traffic sergeants and the police men at check posts.

The booklet guides the militants as what they should do if they are arrested: "Investigators usually give the gesture that they know every thing about you and your organization but in fact they do not know anything, be careful and don't fall in their trap". The booklet further stated: "Law enforcement agencies could insult your father, mother and women, don't come in pressure and always remember you're in the way of God and He would save your family".

Although depression, dreams of paradise, money and internal ambition for jihad among individuals remain the factors for such terrorist activities but the real cause lies with the Jihadi organizations whose charismatic Jihadi teachers have effective pedagogic skills to mesmerize the youth and make them ready to give their lives for the cause of Allah. The blind commitment and conviction, found in suicide attackers, is injected by these chief mentors of Jihad.