

# Suicidal Attacks in Pakistan: Only one of its kinds.

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A well known and well informed journalist around Afghan issues made a prediction of more suicidal attacks in Pakistan in upcoming days. (Already ten attacks have been carried out in this year so far) He was being interviewed on television after the suicidal mission carried out in Marhaba Hotel, Peshawar. If he is proved right in his judgment, it may not be surprising because of some simple and understandable reasons. Though, prediction was made in the context of murder of Mullah Dad Ullah, a Taliban Commander, but other than that, suicidal attacks are increased in frequency in other parts of the world as well. Robert Pape, a leading authority on suicidal attacks believes that these attackers learn from each other's experiences and success stories. The partial success of insurgency in Iraq could be a leading cause for the increase. At this juncture there are at least three characteristics worth noting about these missions in Pakistan.

First and obvious one is the increase in numbers. Pakistani society remained the target of terrorist activities since early eighties. Bomb explosions and shooting at various public places, Mosques and Imambargahs started in General Zia's era. But they were not suicidal missions. The first ever, reported, suicidal mission carried out on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002 outside of Sheraton Hotel Karachi where the French nationals were targeted. Since then these attacks kept on rising every year. Here are the figures of suicidal attack carried out in each year. Except a decline in 2005 the rise in these attacks is evident.

**Suicidal Attacks in Pakistan (2002-May 2007)**

Year	Number of Attacks	Sectarian Attacks
2002	2	0
2003	2	1
2004	8	6
2005	3	3
2006	10	3
until May 2007	10	1
Total	35	14 (40%)

At the moment these attacks are being carried out by some splinter groups. They are not as identifiable as Hamas, LTTE or Al-Qaeda. The rise is more foreseeable as some other groups (clerics from Lal Masjid) started threatening the Government of carrying out suicidal attacks if their demands are not met.

If we look at the flash points of the suicidal attacks around the world, Pakistan comes out among those countries where the frequency of such attacks is on rise.

**Flash Points of Suicidal Attacks (2002-March 2007)**

Country	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Israel	40	22	9	7	2	1
Iraq	0	20	68	144	103	61
Afghanistan	0	2	4	8	50	14
Chechnya	2	12	2	1	0	1
Pakistan	2	2	8	3	10	7
Sri Lanka	0	0	1	2	8	2
S. Arabia	3	1	1	0	0	0

Among these flash points, Iraq is taking the lead with the highest figures at the moment. Afghanistan is emerging second to Iraq with six times more attacks in 2006. Pakistan is next country after Iraq and Afghanistan where these attacks are on rise. Israel, which did have the highest number at one point, (40 in 2002, and 27 in 2001) had only one attack in the first quarter of 2007. This is because of it's successfully preventing the Palestinians to enter into Israeli territories. Despite Pakistan's being the American ally in "war on terror", attacks in Pakistan are increasing. Sri Lankan Prime Minister and President of Pakistan were the only two heads of State who have been targeted and narrowly escaped suicidal attacks. Dick Cheney was far out of range of an attack in Afghanistan in February 2007.

Second thing which makes Pakistan really an exception is the occurrence of suicidal attacks without having any ongoing occupation by foreign forces or any separatist movement going on. Wherever in the world suicidal attacks are being carried out consistently, either they are occupied territories or people there, are fighting for independent state for themselves. Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and Sri Lanka are the examples. Pakistan is the only place to have suicidal attacks without any of these reasons. Saudi Arabia could be considered as similar, but number of such attacks is very less. In Sri Lanka Tamil Tigers (LTTE) are fighting with a clear goal of a separate Tamil State and the movement is not confined to Sri Lanka, they attempted similar attacks in India as well. (Rajeev Gandhi was killed in a suicidal attack in India) Their targets are well defined, usually political leaders and army personnel and very rarely they target masses. Attacks carried out in Pakistan are, partly, because of Pakistan's foreign policy and its alliance with the US. It is an erudition drawn by analysts because no organization active in Pakistan ever made its motives and objectives known and explicit for public as in case of LTTE or HAMAS.

Third distinction of Pakistan is the element of sectarianism involved in suicidal attacks. Nowhere in the world are sectarian killings being carried out through suicidal missions. Iraq could be presented as an example. Journalists and other well informed people are reluctant to accept any sectarian

crack in Iraq. Suicidal missions in Iraq are believed to be manufactured. Even if one accepts it's happening in Iraq that would not be due the sectarian reasons but because some groups would perceive others as collaborators with the occupiers. There are no incidents of sectarian killing in Iraq's recent history before occupation. Whilst in Pakistan sectarian killings are carried out purely for sectarian reasons because it was there even before Pakistan's becoming an US ally in "war on terror". Suicidal missions have further darkened the sectarian scene in the country. Fourteen of thirty five attacks were carried out against other sects (40%). In 2007 more attacks were planned to target the security forces. Only one in 2007 has targeted Shias in the Muharram procession in Peshawar. But if we exclude the figures of 2007 for a moment, the ratio of sectarian attacks was as high as 52% until 2006 (13 out of 25 attacks)

Since the start of sectarian rift in Pakistan, scores of Shias, Barelvi Sunnis and Deobandi Sunnis have lost their lives. But no Deobandi Sunni has ever been the target of suicidal attack. Mostly Shias were the target but on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2006 Barelvi Sunnis became the target in Nishter Park Karachi. Though the leading clerics across the sectarian divide condemned and gave verdict against such attacks but even then their frequency did not cease to progress. At the moment Shias, Barelvi Sunnis and Deobandis are part of the same political coalition party MMA (Mutihdda Majlis-e-Amal, a coalition of religious parties) but it could not put these attacks in a lull. It would be an indication of the cleric's low level of influence over the attackers who are running their political and sectarian agendas simultaneously. The combination of sectarian and political agendas in suicidal killing exist no where else other than in Pakistan.

## **Comment by Naveeda Khan Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University.**

Akhtar Ali Syed's piece above provides a useful overview of the numbers of suicide attacks in different parts of the world. I would like to comment on his finding that suicide attacks in Pakistan seem to be more likely to be based on sectarian divisions alone whereas in the other countries examined suicide attacks may be as much parts of efforts at separatism or protests at occupation as sectarianism (although we have to keep in mind that his analysis is only valid up till March of 2007 and Pakistan has witnessed few suicide attacks on sectarian grounds alone since then. A case in point is the suicide bombers in the crowd gathered to greet Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan in October 2007). However, his finding that suicide bombings are entering the sectarian fray is of interest as it suggests that sectarianism has entered a new phase in Pakistan that demands concerted attention. While sectarianism in the form of Shia-Sunni violence burgeoned and acquired almost calendrical regularity in colonial times, under President Zia-ul Haq, sectarian violence took different forms as organized militias of each sect assassinated each other (with the deaths of Shias far outstripping that of Sunnis) most notoriously through gunshots and bombs lobbed at gatherings by men on motorbikes. Suicide bombings, which I consider to be by and large a tactic of insurgency, suggest that sectarianism in Pakistan has acquired new congeries of desires, however thwarted, techniques and resources that need to be carefully parsed out.