

Terrorist incident assessment in Pakistan

It is generally accepted that Pakistan is one of the world conflict, which the international community need to monitor closely, not only the nuclear proliferation but also extremist terrorist groups around this country. Since 1980s, Pakistan is well known to have a history of sectarian violence, and mostly blamed on majority Sunni and minority Shia extremist groups. Also Pakistan is labeled as the home of extremist terrorist groups, which most groups have participated in the street violence and in conducting terrorism operations inside and outside Pakistan. During 2001 to 2004, there were a great deal of violent incidents occurring around Pakistan between the Sunni and the Shia groups and from the beginning of 2005, the violence has continued. Recently, there were two suicide bombs in the Shia mosque on May 27 and May 30 in Islamabad and Karachi respectively. This essay will assess the three linked incidents of sectarian violence in May 2005 by groups that were declared as terrorist groups by President Mucharraff since 2001. Firstly, this essay will present the incidents and their background. Also, it will briefly discuss Pakistan background in terms of conflict between religious groups history, and then it will describe the strategic objective and goals. This essay will also explain the sectarian groups' organization. It will clarify their tactical objectives, and will give information about their support bases. Finally, this essay will present the likelihood of victory and defeat of the terrorist groups, which conduct these incidents.

Incident

There were three incidents that may be linked to each other. The first incident took place in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital. A suspected suicide bomb exploded inside a crowded Shia Muslim shrine near the Pakistani capital, killing at least 20 people and wounding more than 150 people. It is important to note that this incident happened when US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca was visiting Pakistan. At the same time, the Pakistanis were protesting the US that the US military admitted some of its guards had mishandled the Muslim holy book.

Three days later, a suicide bomb killed six people and 19 persons were injured in an explosion in the courtyard of a Shia mosque at Gulshan-e-Iqbal in Karachi, the city in the south of Pakistan. The second incident led to the third incident, when groups of angry people set fire to cars and shops particularly the most popular American restaurant, KFC; six people were killed inside KFC restaurant.

No groups claim responsibility for the violence bombs. The motive of the bomb incidents was not clear, but it can be seen that the Sunni sectarians are most likely conducting such attacks against the Shia group. It was also unclear whether these incidents were an attempt to represent religious parties of Pakistan as extremists.

Background of Pakistan sectarian violence

According to Pakistan official report, the population of Pakistan is 150 million people, mainly consisting of Sunnis at 80% and Shia at 17 %. The 2 % of non-Muslim population the majority are Christian, with nearly all Hindus and Sikhs. It is well known that Pakistan has had a history of sectarian violence since 1980s. It mostly has been blamed on majority Sunni and minority Shia extremist groups. (Jane's defence, 2005)

In fact, most of Sunni and Shia live together peacefully, but small groups of militants on both sides stage attacks.

Assessment

It has been claimed that a Sunni terrorist group conducted violence against Shia. Two groups are suspected: the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. There is a great deal of evidence showing that both groups have been involved in violent incidents.

Firstly, the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) is a Sunni sectarian outfit that has been alleged to be involved in terrorist violence; the SSP is also one of the five outfits that have been proscribed by President Musharraf on January 12, 2002. The outfit is reported to rename as Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan after the outlawing. The SSP also actively opposes the US-Pakistan alliance formed after September 11, 2001. The former Taliban regime in Afghanistan was a major supporter of Sunni extremists and terrorist outfits in Pakistan.

Another group is Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which is a Sunni terrorist group formed in 1996 by a group of radical sectarian extremists of the SSP. The LeJ is one of the two sectarian terrorist outfits proscribed on August 14, 2001, by President Musharraf.

1. What is the over-arching political objective?

- The most important political objective of the SSP and the LeJ is to declare Pakistan a Sunni state. The SSP also aims to protect the Sunnis and their Shariat (law). The SSP has declared that Shia is non-Muslim. Likewise, The LeJ aims to transform Pakistan into a Sunni state, primarily through violent means.

Maulana Zia-ul-Qasmi, a leading SSP leader, said in an interview in January 1998 “the government gives too much importance to the Shias. They are everywhere, on television, radio, in newspapers and in senior positions. This causes heartburn.”

- It is also important to note that the SSP and The LeJ may need to overthrow President Musharraf in order to establish a Sunni state. This is because his denouncing many sectarian terrorists group may harm their activities and support by the Sunni people. Also President Musharraf’s policy is to work closely with the US especially in the case of invasion Afghanistan. To achieve the overthrow president, the terrorist groups may conduct violence against the security measures.

2. What are considered to be the major impediments to achieving the political goal?

Any violence on the innocent people never retained support from Pakistani people. In the both incident, there were numerous criticisms and condemnations from many group leaders both political and religious.

One of the most important concerns of Pakistani people in term of improving their economy is international investments. Tarar (2001:8) states that “rising sectarian violence in Pakistan has disrupted peace in urban centers and has negatively affected international investor confidence in the region.”

3. Why use violence to achieve the goal?

The reason why they use violence is to point the political ambitions of the sectarian groups. They need to emphasize on conflicts between the two groups. The violence is one of the most powerful means to bring message of situations in Pakistan.

Also, it is likely that all subsequent Sunni violent movements showed that while violence first took place in the Jhang, where the SSP began from 1993, the violence tended to move away from the district to other parts of the province. It also can be seen in the history Pakistan, a violent ethnic movement for an Independent Baluchistan was followed by strong repressive measures from State in 1973; this movement has ceased to exist. (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2005)

It can be argued that the SSP and the LeJ may conduct the operation following the extremist terrorism doctrine developed from Al-Qaeda, and members of both groups were trained from Al- Qaeda. The violence is mostly perpetrated by Sunni extremists, some thought to have links with al-Qaeda and other adherents of the austere, Saudi-inspired, Wahhabi school of Islam. (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2005)

4. What are the group's organization strengths and weaknesses?

Both the SSP and the LeJ's organization strengths are well- trained members, several types of operations and small cells operation.

The LeJ's strength is approximately 300 active cadres. Most of these cadres are based in the various training camps in Afghanistan, where they often-small cells came to Pakistan to conduct terrorist activities. The LeJ is formed into small cells of approximately five to eight cadres for each cell. They operate separately of the others. After carrying out an attack, the LeJ cadres often break out and then assemble at the various training camps to plan future operations. Therefore, it is very difficult for the counter terrorism security force to investigate their traces. The success of most of its terrorist operations is attributed to its multi-cellular structure, whereby the outfit is divided into small groups that are not in constant contact with each other. (Chaudhry, 2004)

The weakness of the SSP and the LeJ's organization is command and control measures. It seems that each cell needs more financial support from the leaders. Media reports indicate that the occasional successes against the LeJ by the security agencies have forced the top leadership to remain underground. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal report (2005), "they have begun training new recruits and directing operations rather than risk arrest by engaging in attacks themselves." That means these groups need more time to train new members.

5. What is the support base?

It seems that most of Sunni people do not support the extremist groups. They want to live peacefully with each other. However, there are some Sunni people supporting these groups because they may want the violence to become the political issues and may lead to undermine President Musharaaf's power.

The SSP reportedly receives significant funding from Saudi Arabia through wealthy private sources in Pakistan. Funds are also acquired from various sources, including Zakat and donations from various Sunni extremist groups. Other sources include donations through local Sunni organizations and trusts. Reports hold that the LeJ has been securing financial assistance from Saudi Arabia as well. Evidence of Private Arab funding was disclosed with the arrest of several LeJ cadres. A substantial portion of LeJ's funding is reportedly derived from wealthy benefactors in Karachi, Pakistan. (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2005)

According to senior investigators, the Al Qaeda network is suspected to have worked with LeJ cadres to plan both the car bomb attacks. Intelligence sources have indicated that

certain LeJ terrorists arrested in Karachi in June 2002 have been allegedly working with the Al Qaeda to strike at targets in Pakistan.

6. What tactical means are available to conduct operations?

For these incidents, there are two tactical means of terrorists groups. The first involves targeted killings of prominent opponent organization activists. Secondly, bombs have targeted on worshippers in mosques operated by opposing sects. Sectarian massacres have taken place across Pakistan over the past year, usually inside mosques or during religious festivals, and obviously, Sunni groups have admitted responsibility for numerous massacres of Shias and targeted killings of Shia religious and community leaders. (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2005)

Suicide bombs have increased as the major tactical means over last two years. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal research (2005), more than 70 doctors and 34 lawyers, Ulema (religious scholars), teachers and students of seminaries, politico-religious parties leaders and activists, officials of various government and private institutions were assassinated between June 2000 and June 2002 in Pakistan by the SSP and the LeJ. All of them were Shias.

7. What factors guide the selection of tactical objectives?

It is clear that the extremists focused on the Shia mosque for numerous massacres of Shias and in order to increase the break down in the relation between two religions.

In the first incident, they were preparing for the arrival of Shia leader, Hamid Moasvi, a vehement critic of the U.S.-led war on terrorism, who was about to deliver a sermon. It seems that the bomber wanted to assassinate the Shia leader.

8. How do the tactical objectives advance the strategic goal?

The bomb blasts showed the weak security measures to protect against violence. The terrorists have complete freedom to strike even in the locality of the highest security zone. As a result, the people may feel that the government cannot protect them. Then, people may undermine President Musharraf's power by direct and indirect ways. Many Pakistanis also ask the government to concentrate on the real matters and stop trying to make false public statements that everything is under control.

9. What means are available to the groups to exploit tactical outcomes?

It can be said that the media is a most important part of the terrorist means to exploit tactical outcomes. In the riot case at KFC, although it was unclear why KFC was targeted in rioting, along with arson attacks on vehicles, shops, three bank branches and three gas stations, it may be that this third incident of violence was carried out by terrorist to protest against the US through the attack on KFC, which is the popular US's symbol. There are many reports showing that many rioters in Pakistan typically attack symbols of the US during the riots. Therefore, it may lead to encourage Pakistani to make reactions against President Musharraf in relation to his pro US policy.

10. What features underpin the group's longer-term sustainability?

The first feature is the support from the Pakistanis who need to have more security from the government. They may help the extremists take longer term in the cases of social instability. It may lead to requesting more responsibility by President Musharraf. There is also a great deal of evidence showing that many Pakistani nowadays protest against President Musharraf in many ways. Some of them believe that President Musharraf could not provide their security since they could even stop the recent incident close to the President's resident. Also, the Anti-U.S. feeling has grown in Pakistan after President Musharraf allied the country with the US in the war on Iraq by 2003. It is likely this insecurity of people will be an important feature to continue longer term of sectarians.

Secondly, both the SSP and LeJ maintain that they are not organizationally linked. In fact, the two organizations share the same sectarian belief system and worldview. They also have a similar charter of demands, which includes turning Pakistan into a Sunni state. (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2005) The mutual support will help them to become stronger.

11. What would amount to 'victory' for the group, and what would amount to defeat?

- Victory

The leaders of the political and religious parties said that the government failed to provide protection to the people. The first incident of such intensity took place under the nose of security forces near Prime Minister Residence. Sectarian violence show the weakness of the security measures.

In case of KFC, it seems that some Shia people blamed The US because one of the Sunni sectarian's objectives is to conduct violence against the US. More importantly, the Medias are important part of the terrorist means to exploit tactical outcomes.

- Defeat

Interestingly, many experts say that political and sectarian violence between radical groups within the majority Sunni and minority Shia Muslims is common in Karachi. That means the violence was not able to get attention from the national and international community.

While a sizeable proportion of traders and shopkeepers continue to fund the SSP in Jhang, most do not believe in the violence associated with the party, rather it is now a matter of buying security. It is clear that there is a decline in the support for the SSP over recent years as a result of the economic consequences of sectarian strife. That means the people's support sectarian groups may gradually decrease.

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