

Terror attack on Pakistani police academy kills more than 60

By Keith Jones
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At least 61 people were killed and 117 wounded Monday evening in an attack allegedly mounted by a Pakistan Taliban faction on a police-training academy in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's southwestern province, Balochistan.

Initial press reports spoke of four or even five attackers. But subsequently Pakistani officials said that just three attackers, armed with guns and bombs, had stormed a dormitory inside the police cadet training facility. Most of the casualties were caused when two of the attackers blew themselves up.

The attack on the Balochistan Police College is said to be the deadliest terrorist attack ever mounted on Pakistan security forces.

It came amidst the on-going military operation in North Waziristan tribal agency against Pakistan Taliban Islamist militants. The operation was launched in mid-2014 in close collaboration with the Pentagon.

On Tuesday, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the head of Pakistan's military, General Raheel Sharif, and Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar, flew to Quetta, where they met with top officials, including the governor and chief minister of Baluchistan to discuss enhanced security measures.

There are conflicting claims as to who was responsible for the attack. A website linked to the Islamic State or ISIS reportedly said that it was behind the storming of the Quetta police academy. Pakistani authorities have blamed it on the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a faction of the Pakistan Taliban.

The Pakistan Taliban or Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) arose in the early 2000s after the US, with Islamabad's support, occupied Afghanistan. Taliban fighters fled across the unmarked and popularly unrecognized border into Pakistan, and Islamabad, under pressure from Washington to close down Taliban

“safe havens,” ordered the army to invade the country's traditionally autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Pakistani authorities said that the police academy attack was directed from Afghanistan and even claim to have intercepted communications between the attackers and their Afghan “handlers.” They have further suggested that the terrorist assault could have been assisted by Indian or Afghan intelligence.

“All such attacks have been managed from across the border in Afghanistan,” said a Balochistan government spokesman, Anwar ul-Haq Kakar. “Hostile intelligence agencies of neighbouring countries are directly responsible for terrorism in Pakistan.”

In recent years, Pakistan's government and military have repeatedly charged that India and Afghanistan are providing support to anti-Pakistan government insurgents, including Balochi separatists and the Pakistan Taliban.

Although this has been buried by the US press, the *New York Times* did report several years ago that the Afghan government, angered by the Pakistan intelligence agency's continuing ties to elements within the Afghan Taliban, had decided that it would hit back at Islamabad by providing aid to the Pakistan Taliban. The *Times* report further revealed that this stratagem was initially supported by at least some elements within the US military-intelligence apparatus.

Tensions between India and Pakistan and between Afghanistan and Pakistan have escalated in recent weeks.

India, which has vehemently denounced Pakistan for the on-going popular unrest in Indian-held Kashmir, declared Islamabad responsible for the September 18 attack on an Indian military base at Uri that left 19 Indian soldiers dead. Eleven days later, New Delhi

boasted that it had conducted commando raids inside Pakistan-held Kashmir and had inflicted “heavy casualties” on Islamist terrorists and their “protectors.”

These “surgical strikes” have been celebrated by India’s ruling elite as marking the end of New Delhi’s policy of “strategic restraint,” under which India did not publicly admit to conducting military operations inside Pakistan for fear of triggering a dynamic of strike and counterstrike that could rapidly escalate into all-out war.

Relations with Afghanistan are little better. Kabul continues to charge that Pakistan is conniving with sections of the Taliban. It has also taken exception to Islamabad’s attempts to strengthen the British-designated border between the two countries, including through fencing. Since May there have been several bloody border clashes between Afghan and Pakistani security forces.

Throwing further fuel on its conflicts with Islamabad, Kabul applauded the recent Indian military strikes on Pakistan, terming them a legitimate act of self-defence.

Pakistan was schooled in the use of Islamist militia to serve reactionary geopolitical ends by the US Central Intelligence Agency. Beginning in the late 1970s, Pakistan helped organize, arm and train the Afghan mujahedeen to serve as shock troops in a US-masterminded drive to weaken the USSR by overthrowing the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.

Subsequently, and initially with Washington’s encouragement, Pakistan backed the Taliban’s rise to power as a means of consolidating its influence in Kabul and using Afghanistan to give it “strategic depth” in its reactionary military-strategic conflict with India.

For the past 15 years, Pakistan has been the pivot of the US war in Afghanistan—a war aimed at establishing a US strategic beachhead in energy-rich Central Asia. But even as Pakistan has provided the supply line for the US-NATO forces and turned much of FATA into a killing field to support the US occupation, elements within Pakistan’s military-security apparatus have maintained links with elements in the Taliban so as to ensure that Islamabad has a significant say in any political settlement to end the Afghan war.

A major factor driving this stratagem is Islamabad’s growing anxiety over the burgeoning Indo-US alliance.

With the aim of transforming India into a frontline state into its military-strategic offensive against China, Washington has showered New Delhi with strategic favours, including access to the Pentagon’s most advanced weaponry, and in the process has overturned the precarious balance of power between South Asia’s rival nuclear-armed states.

Over the past decade, and in particular since 2014, Pakistan, in the name of the “war on terror,” has become increasingly militarized.

The military has repeatedly intervened in FATA, mounting dragnet security sweeps, carpet-bombing alleged terrorist positions, and imposing colonial-style collective punishments on entire villages.

In Balochistan, it is waging a dirty counterinsurgency war that has resulted in thousands of disappearances.

In 2014, the military occupied the North Waziristan tribal agency, ordering the entire population of more than one million to evacuate and declaring that anyone who did not would be considered a terrorist. Six months later, following a brutal Dec. 2014 TPP terrorist attack on a school, the military prevailed on the government to give it sweeping new powers of arrest and detention and the power to try civilians accused of terrorism in military courts. The government also lifted a ban on executions.

Paramilitary forces under military command are virtually occupying Karachi, the country’s largest city under the guise of maintaining “law and order” and cracking down on “terrorism” and “criminal gangs.” A similar operation was launched in Punjab province following the Easter holiday terrorist attack on a children’s park in Lahore that killed more than 70 people. Following a now well-established pattern, each major terrorist attack is followed by further measures that concentrate draconian powers in the hands of the military and shred basic democratic rights.

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