

Reasons for the Target Killing of Hazaras in Balochistan, Pakistan

By Ishaq Mohammadi - Aug 22, 2010

April 1978's Afghan-Saur-Inqilab (Afghan Red Revolution) and February 1979's Islamic revolution in Iran left a deep geo-political impact in the region. During the reign of army dictator, General Zia-Ul-Haq, Pakistan became an important player in the Cold War between USA and Russia and a main player in the various conflicts between Shia Iran and ultra-conservative Wahabi Saudi Arabia. General Zia established a network of over 20,000 madrassas (religious schools) with the financial help of Saudi Arabia. These were established all over Pakistan, but the majority of them were located in NWFP and Balochistan. These madrassas attracted fundamentalists from all over the world. Some of these madrassas also provided, and continue to provide, army training to fundamentalist fighters. Thousands of fighters from these madrassas fought shoulder to shoulder with the Afghan Taliban against their enemies: the Northern Alliance (NA).

The Hazaras played an important role in the Northern Alliance, and was one of the main adversaries in stopping the total Taliban takeover of Afghanistan by opening over a dozen fronts on a long border stretching from Bamyán to Ghazni. Over the course of the fighting, a number of Pakistani Taliban were killed, injured or taken prisoner, especially in the fierce fighting that occurred in Mazar Sharif and Kunduz.

After losing the war, these battle-hardened fundamentalists returned to Pakistan in large numbers. According to B. Raman (analyst from Asia Analysis Group), Al-Qaeda capitalized on this by starting to use these fundamentalists in a well-planned policy of targeting Shias. This included attacks from Parachinar in NWFP to Karachi in Sindh, and from Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab to Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir. B. Raman goes a step further suggesting that the Hazaras in Quetta were specifically targeted by Al-Qaeda and Taliban, who they accuse of colluding with the Americans and becoming the cause of their ultimate downfall in Afghanistan. [1] Since Quetta has become a major hub for the defeated elements of Taliban, it has become a major site of the expression of their deep seated hatred of the Hazaras. Militant extremists are exacting their revenge on the Hazaras in Quetta. An analysis on the ground seems to confirm his analysis.

The new wave of target killings in Quetta, which began in 2009, suggests that Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and their allied terrorist groups have now adopted a policy of ethnic cleansing by pushing for the total uprooting of over half a million Hazaras from Quetta region. The clear pattern emerging from the targeted killing of Hazara leads us to conclude that while these Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist groups in Balochistan want not only to target Hazara intellectuals, but also to make life impossibly difficult for the poor Hazara masses by targeting people from all walks of life.

Some example of Hazara intellectuals killed includes [2]:

- Jan 14, 2009 – Police officer (DSP) Hassan Ali
- Jan 26, 2009 – Writer, Producer, and Chairman Hazara Democratic Party, Hussain Ali Yousafi
- June 22, 2009 – Syed Talib Agha Member District Government of Pakistan
- Sept 7, 2009 – Prominent businessman Engineer Ahmed Ali Najafi
- Oct 1, 2009 – Senior Lawyer of Balochistan High Court Walayat Hussain
- Oct 12, 2009 - Chief Mining Engineer Balochistan Govt Ashraf Ali Changezi

- Oct 15, 2009 – Businessman Asif Ali
- April 16, 2010 – Police Officer (DSP) Ghulam Muhammad
- April 16, 2010 – Police Officer (DSP) Zahid Shah Kazmi

Some example of common Hazara civilians killed includes [2]:

- Dec 2, 2009 – Muhammad Latif and Syed Mostafa were killed at the Pir-Ghaib picnic area outside Quetta
- Feb 13, 2010 – Mehmood Ali was killed while driving on the Quetta-Karachi main highway
- March 17, 2010 – Day laborers, Ghulam Rasool and Muhammad Ali, were killed in Akhtar-Abad area of Quetta
- March 18, 2010 – Shop owner, Shabbir Hussain was killed in Hazar-Ganji area of Quetta
- March 20, 2010 – Vegetable sellers, Muhammad Ali, Ghulam Raza, Ramzan Ali, were killed in Hazar-Ganji area of Quetta

Among the Hazara intellectuals killed, Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) Chairman, Hussain Ali Yousafi; Senior lawyer of Balochistan High Court, Advocate Walayat Hussain; member of district government Syed Talib Agha; and Deputy Superintendent of Police Ghulam Mohammad (who was severely injured in an earlier assassination attempt in which four other policeman including DSP Hassan Ali were killed), all were targeted for intimidation and received death threats prior to their assassinations.

Hazara Target Killing and Government Response:

On the 6th October, 1999, the Education Minister of Balochistan, Sardar Nisar Ali Hazara was severely injured in an attack that killed his driver and his bodyguard. This was the first of the targeted anti-Hazara attacks in Quetta. Most recently, on April 16th 2010, a suicide bombing attack killed eleven (including eight Hazaras). Included in the victims were two high-ranking Hazara policemen. Between these two events, over 150 Hazaras have been killed and over 500 injured – most of them permanently disabled – by anti-Hazara violence. [2]

The response of the Pakistani Government has been mere lip service at best. It is no secret that not a single person has been brought to justice in response to these attacks. The Pakistan police never seem to complete its investigations. Corruption, sympathy with the perpetrators and fear of retaliation contribute to police impotence. The master minds belonging to the Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist outfit “Laskhar Jhangvi,” Usman Saifullah Kurd and others, which were apprehended by the Karachi police and handed over to Balochistan Police, successfully slipped from the maximum security ATF Prison along with other terrorists. The police claimed ignorance of the event until 12 hours later – giving these terrorists a convenient window to escape. The full details of the escape still have not been made public. In another investigation after the suicide attack on local administration offices (Kachehri), it was learned that the suicide bomber was apprehended a few days earlier but was let go of by the Police after allegedly receiving a handsome bribe. The investigation led to termination of two senior Deputy Superintendent Police (DSP) officers charged with corruption and receiving bribes, but later reinstatement with full honor after being “cleared” from all charges.

The Provincial Interior Minister, Mir Zafrullah Zehri, stated in Balochistan Assembly that “he had clues about those involved in the target killings but he was helpless.” [3] The Governor of Balochistan, Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Magsi, quoted his Inspector General of Police (IGP) saying, “whenever Police catches a high-valued suspect, he receives a phone call from above” is enough to prove the bitter reality about the reach of the terrorist organizations into the highest ranks of Pakistani Government. [4] This raises an important question: what is the role of ISI (Pakistan’s notorious and secretive army Inter-Services Intelligence) in the wake of complete failures of police and various other security agencies in Pakistan and especially in Balochistan? South Asia expert, Ahmed Rashid, in his book Descent into Chaos answers this question: Even as the ISI helped the CIA run down Al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan’s cities, Pakistani Islamist militants, with quiet ISI approval, were attacking Indian troops in Kashmir or helping the Taliban regroup in Pakistan. [5]

The lack of funding for governmental institutions in charge of security of Pakistan, corruption at the highest levels of government, favoritism, discrimination towards minorities belonging to certain ethnicities and religions, political affiliations, and double-standards, have taken a high toll on the ability of these organizations to protect the lives of its citizens. The increasing influence of Al-Qaeda, with access to billions of dollars from countries such as Saudi Arabia and individuals sympathetic to their cause all over the world, has found a heaven in poverty-stricken Pakistan. [6] Pakistan’s huge uneducated masses are fodder for the 20,000+ madrassas and their nefarious causes. The never ending sequence of attacks on World Trade Center in New York, Metro bombings in London, attacks in Spain and Tanzania, and daily killings of innocent civilians all over Pakistan, are all painful reminders of a stark reality facing Pakistan and the World.

In summary, it is important to understand that these terrorist outfits can only be defeated with the full cooperation from the security establishment of Pakistani Government whose first and foremost responsibility is to protect the lives of their citizens. In this regards, the fatwas (religious decrees) from Saudi religious institutions following the suicide attack on Saudi Interior Minister in Aug, 2009, calling Al-Qaeda as “Outsiders” seems an important first step [by Saudi Arabia] in cutting off the support to these terrorist outfits. Pakistan needs to follow with similar steps. The United States, NATO, and the UN also have to do more to help Pakistan. Simply calling on the Pakistani government to “Do More” will do little to prevent Pakistan from falling ever more hostage to these terrorist elements.

SOURCES:

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