

Legal Community Attacked in Quetta

Factual Updates

On Monday, August 8, 2016, at least 70 people, including fifty five lawyers and two media men, were killed while 112 others wounded when a suicide bomber detonated the explosives at the emergency ward of Civil Hospital in Quetta. Earlier, a senior lawyer and President of Balochistan Bar Association (BBA) was shot dead by armed motorcyclists who opened fire on the victim at Mano Jan Road area of the provincial capital.¹ The blast took place when a large number of people were gathered in the hospital to mourn over the death of BBA president. Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the targeted killing and the subsequent blast.² On the other hand, the Islamic State (IS) also claimed responsibility for the explosion. The Chief Minister of Balochistan, without providing the adequate cogent evidence, has also claimed that the involvement of India's intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), couldn't be ruled out as it had been involved in similar subversive activities in the western Balochistan province in the past.³

Situational Background

According to reports by security agencies, the suicide bomber carried about eight kilograms of explosive material, packed with ball bearings and shrapnel, and targeted the crowded place in order to inflict the maximum fatalities.⁴ Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, that had its safe havens in the north western Pakistan in the past, had established its bases in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province following the security operations. The militants associated with the group often infiltrate into Pakistan through Durand Line, the boundary line between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to stage terror attacks across the country. Earlier, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide attack in March 2016 in Lahore. The attack which targeted the Christians claimed the lives of over 70 people, including the children.⁵

¹ Dawn, "Quetta in a Daze after Massacre," *Dawn*, August 9, 2016.

² Wajahat S. Khan and Mushtaq Yousafzai, "Quetta Bombing: Dozens Killed in Attack Targeting Pakistan Hospital," *NBC News*, August 8, 2016.

³ Mohammad Zafar, "Quetta Weeps Again," *The Express Tribune*, August 8, 2016.

⁴ The Guardian, "Pakistan: Dozens Dead as Bomb Hits Mourners at Quetta Hospital," *The Guardian*, August 8, 2016.

⁵ BBC News, "Pakistan Taliban Faction Claims Park Attack on Lahore Christians," *BBC News*, March 28, 2016.

Analysis

The recent attack is considered one of the most deadly attacks in the history of Quetta. The terrorist attack has also been condemned by the international community. The White House and United States (US) State Department condemned the incident and expressed the commitment to help Pakistan in confronting terrorism.⁶ Although the Balochistan province has been marred with multifaceted violence spearheaded by both Baloch nationalist elements, the Islamist radicals and sectarian outfits; however, the modus operandi of the recent attacks indicate the involvement of religious radicals as they often plot twin attacks in order to cause maximum casualties. Regardless of the claims of curbing the violence by law enforcement agencies, the successive incidents of terror in Quetta highlight that the country in general while Balochistan province in particular remain vulnerable to the planned urban terrorism. Following a few months of lull in the wake of countrywide security operations, the recent surge in militant activities indicate that the extremist elements have not only intensified their terror maneuverings but also have regained the grounds in the conflict stricken province.

The professionals belonging to different walks of life, particularly the lawyers, along with Hazara community, have recurrently been targeted by the militant outfits during the recent wave of violence in Balochistan. Earlier in this month, a lawyer was gunned down by unidentified assailants in a broad daylight in the city.⁷ Although the motives of targeting the legal community are unclear so far, the legal proceedings against the terrorists might have sparked the violence. Further, lawyers are the only segment of the society who are raising voices against the abuses of human rights in the run up to the enduring insurgency and subsequent security operations in the province. Moreover, the militant attacks can be attributed to the blowback incurred by the militant groups during the enduring security operations across the country as part of National Action Plan (NAP).

Implications

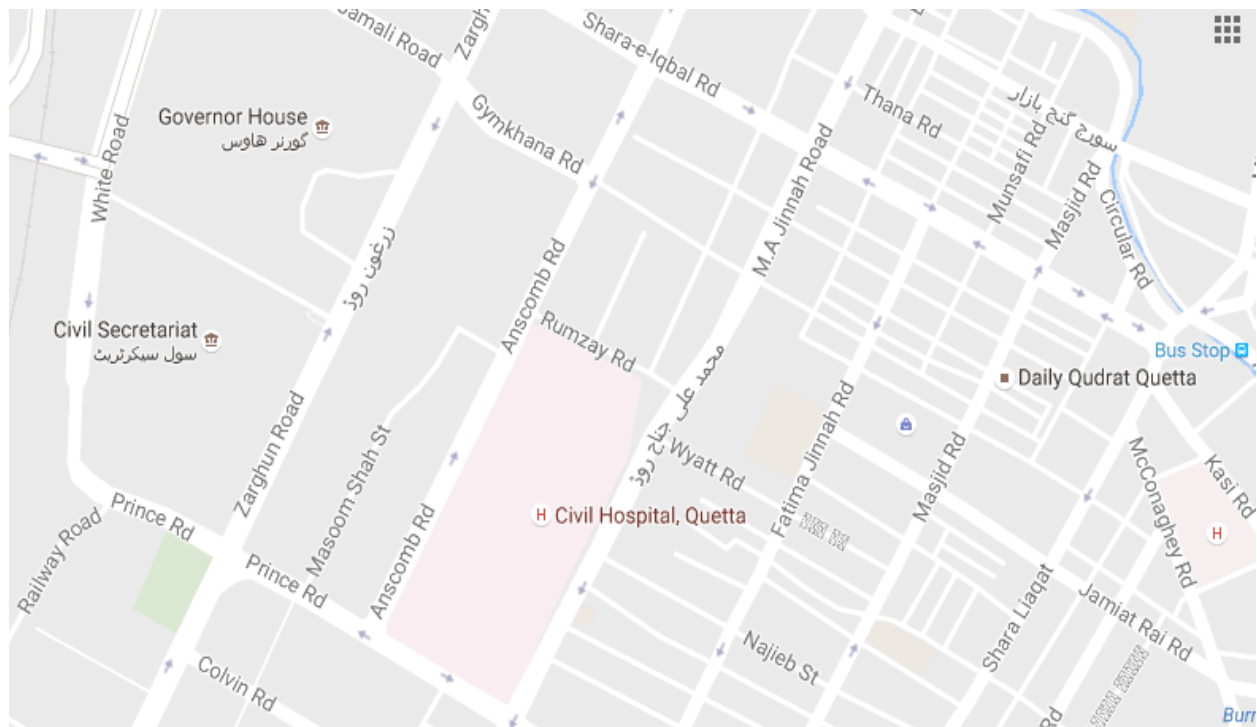
The Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) and Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) enunciated a week of mourning and a three-day strike from the courts to express their solidarity with the victims of

⁶ Wajahat S. Khan and Mushtaq Yousafzai, 2016.

⁷ Dawn, "Carnage in Quetta," *Dawn*, August 9, 2016.

Quetta attack.⁸ On the other hand, the civil and military leadership of the country has declared that the terrorist attack was staged to sabotage the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.⁹ The Islamist militants, who had their strongholds in north western areas of Pakistan in the past, have shifted their terror maneuverings to the Balochistan province following the comprehensive security operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Considering the recent surge in militant activities and a resolve of civil and military leadership against the militancy, an intensification in security operations is highly likely.

Location Map



⁸ Malik Asad, "Lawyers Announce Week of Mourning," *Dawn*, August 9, 2016.

⁹ Dawn, "Consensus that Quetta Attack Targeted CPEC," *Dawn*, August 9, 2016.

Photo Gallery



Volunteers helping the Victims, Dawn August 09, 2016.



Relief activities following the blast, Dawn, August 9, 2016.



Lawyers mourning following the blast, Dawn, August 9, 2016.



Relatives of victims mourning after the blast, Dawn, August 9, 2016.