

Incident Update

Militant Attacks Cause Casualties in Mardan and Peshawar

September 3, 2016

Factual Updates

On Friday, September 2, 2016, at least 14 people, including lawyers and policemen, were killed while more than 50 wounded when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives near the entrance of District and Session Courts in Mardan. The suicide bomber also hurled a hand grenade before exploding his suicide vest.¹ Earlier on Friday, at least four terrorists were killed during an encounter with security forces in Christian Colony area of Peshawar. Additionally, a civilian was killed and five others, including three security personnel, were wounded in the exchange of fire.² According to security officials, the perpetrators might have been attempting to infiltrate into an adjoining security installation – Military Cantonment – by exploiting the fragile security arrangements in the residential area.³ Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JA), a splinter group of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the attacks in Mardan and Peshawar.⁴ Prime Minister lauded the security forces over the successful operation against the militants who attacked the Christian Colony near Peshawar.

Situational Background

Apparently, the Mardan attack was aimed at targeting a gathering of lawyers at Bar Room located within the ambit of District and Session Courts. However, the policemen thwarted the attack by hindering the assailants outside the perimeter of courts. On the other hand, the militants, equipped with suicide vests and firearms, attacked the Christian Colony in the wee hours of Friday at about 05:50 hrs. The Christian Colony contains about 25-30 residential houses of Christian community. However, the vicinity is included among the high-security zones due to the presence of military and paramilitary installations, and a cadet college in the locality.⁵ The security forces including Army, Frontier Corps and police, backed by army helicopters, promptly retaliated and killed all of

¹ AFP, "Bomb Attack at Pakistan Court Kills 14, Injures Dozens," *Mail Online*, September 2, 2016.

² Ali Akbar, "Attack on Peshawar's Christian Colony: Civilian Killed, All terrorists Dead," *Dawn*, September 2, 2016.

³ Iftikhar Firdous, "Five Killed in Peshawar Christian Colony Attack," *The Express Tribune*, September 2, 2016.

⁴ Ali Akbar, "Suicide Bomber Kills 13 in Attack on Mardan Courthouse," *Dawn*, September 2, 2016.

⁵ Geo News, "Attack on Christian Colony in Peshawar Foiled, 4 Terrorists Killed," *Geo News*, September 2, 2016.

four assailants during their counteraction. The quick response by security forces along with civilian security guards minimized the casualties during the attacks. According to biometric evidence, as proclaimed by the Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, the assailants involved in Mardan and Peshawar attacks were foreigners. However, their country of origin has so far not been ascertained.⁶

Analysis

The terrorism ravaged KP province has witnessed numerous militant and terrorist activities in the past. The Islamist militant outfits often target soft sections of the society, including minorities, professionals and the children, in order to challenge the state authority. The Christians comprise a tiny and impoverished minority – only 2% of the populace⁷ – in Muslim-majority Pakistan and are frequently targeted by the radical elements across the country. Earlier in March 2016, a suicide bomber attacked the Christians while they were celebrating Easter killing 69 people while wounding 341 others at Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore. On the other hand, the JA, a breakaway faction of TTP who pledged allegiance to Islamic State, has intensified its terror maneuverings across the country in recent past. Earlier in August, the militant outfit carried out an attack at a hospital in Quetta claiming the lives of above 70 people, including the scores of lawyers.⁸

The attacks in Maradan and Peshawar came barely a day after an extensive summation by Director-General (DG) Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Asim Bajwa over progress in operation Zarb-i-Azab launched against the militant elements in June 2014 across the country. The spokesperson for JA, while claiming the responsibility for assaults, enunciated that the attacks were launched in response to the press conference which claimed elimination of militant groups.⁹ The militant outfit has established its safe havens in the Nangarhar province in Afghanistan after the security operation launched in Pakistan. However, its associates often infiltrate into the country through Durand Line, the boundary line between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to stage terror attacks across the country. The group also claimed the responsibility for attack in Lahore. Despite the claims of security agencies regarding the elimination of militant outfits, the recent attacks highlight the

⁶ Dawn, "Militants who Stormed Peshawar's Christian Colony were Foreigners: Nisar," *Dawn*, September 3, 2016.

⁷ Sophia Saifi, "In Pakistan, Taliban's Easter Bombing Targets, Kills Scores of Christians," *CNN*, March 28, 2016.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Iftikhar Firdous, "Five Killed in Peshawar Christian Colony Attack," *The Express Tribune*, September 2, 2016.

vulnerability of soft sections and legal community which was also attacked in Quetta in August 2016.

Implications

Following the attacks, the security arrangements of Christian establishments including schools, hospitals, colonies and churches have been intensified across the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Moreover, the recent attacks also highlight that JA has enhanced its maneuvering capacities in the recent past. Considering the increasing capabilities of the militant outfit and the government’s resolve to eradicate the terrorism, further militant attacks and subsequent security operations are highly likely.

Location Maps

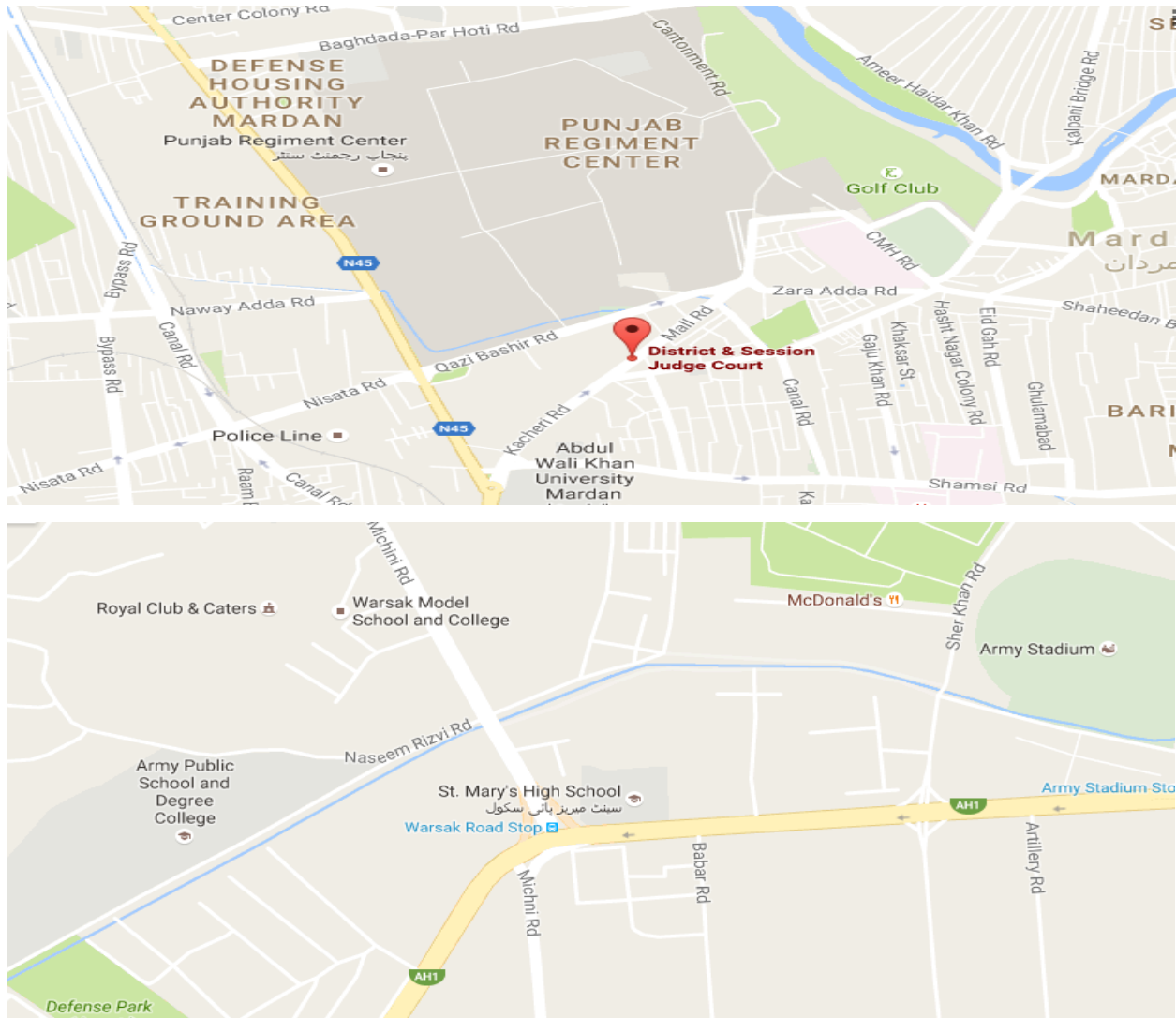


Photo Gallery



Blast Site in Mardan, BBC News, September 2, 2016.



Security Personnel Investigate the Site in Mardan, Dawn, September 2, 2016.



Army Men at Site of Peshawar Attack, Dawn, September 2, 2016.



Security Personnel Cordon off the Christian Colony, CNN, September 2, 2016.