

# Twenty-First Century Terrorism in Pakistan

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Pakistan has been using terrorism as a low cost weapon in its proxy war against India and, in the process, has encouraged the growth of Islamic radical groups in its territory. It has now fallen victim to its creations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Pakistan has witnessed increasing terrorist violence, especially after it joined the US “global war on terror.” Many of the terror acts were in the form of suicide terrorism. The causes of the violence are attributable both to the Pakistani security forces’ operations against radical groups in the Pak-Afghan border as part of the US war on terror and sectarian clashes between the Sunni and Shia communities. Increasing radicalisation of Pakistani society due to Saudi aided Wahabisation and increasing disparity in distribution of social wealth were catalysts in this regard.

## Introduction

While terrorism has become a global phenomenon thanks to modern-day communication facilities and availability of electronic funds transfer, India and Pakistan are two of the worst affected countries. It is well known that India’s terror woes are due to availability of sanctuaries in, as well as financial and training support from, the Pakistani soil, from both state and non-state actors. Unfortunately, Pakistan fell victim to the old adage,

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“*Those who live by the sword, die by the sword*”. The continuous policy of encouraging and supporting Islamic extremist violence against India and later against the US led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces in Afghanistan has led to an enormous strengthening of violent Islamic extremism in Pakistan itself, not only in the Pak-Afghan border areas but also in other parts of the country. Talibanisation of the Pakistani society now poses a grave danger to the very existence of Pakistan as a moderate Islamic and democratically governed state.

This paper examines suicide terrorism inside Pakistan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The increasing frequency of suicide terrorist attacks inside Pakistan is attributable not only to Pakistan’s participation in the war against terrorism post 9/11, as an ally of the much hated US in the latter’s war on terror but also as part of internecine sectarian clashes. A few months before his death in November 1984, Pakistan’s leading poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz had said that the tragedy of Pakistan is that it will continue to exist as it is. Another writer, Ibne Insha, known for his satirical writings, had said that earlier, people were included in the “circle of Islam,” but nowadays they are forced out. Though a 97 per cent Muslim country, it has become a country of *kafirs*, with every sect believing that the others have become non-Muslims because of their religious beliefs. According to the early propagandists for Pakistan, right after the independence in 1947, Pakistan was to become a “fort of Islam”. Today, there are fights and killings over everything inside that fort.

## **Suicide Terrorism in Pakistan**

In addition to the traditional methods of terror such as hijacking, bombing, diplomatic kidnapping and assassination, the terrorists have, in the last few decades, perfected the art of suicide attacks against the state. Investigations by the law enforcement agencies in Pakistan indicate that suicide attackers are carefully selected, indoctrinated and then sent to their targets. The great advantage of a suicide attack is

its cost-effectiveness, as expending one individual gets a return of a large number of victims, thus, increasing the coercive power against the state. Apart from choosing those whose motivation comes from either a sense of revenge (having lost a relative in an anti-terror attack by the state), there are also those with a guilt complex for having broken the Islamic law (committing adultery, etc) and wanting to expiate their sin. Also, there are those who are totally indoctrinated into believing that by becoming suicide attackers, they are fighting the battle for Allah and would be rewarded suitably in heaven.

The new generation of terrorists is more willing to engage in suicide attacks. The Taliban terrorist groups are increasingly recruiting younger people, including children, to carry out such attacks. Al Qaeda, has been training most of the suicide terrorist groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. Many of these suicide attackers were trained in the *madrassas*, which impart religious education, almost exclusively, to millions of students in the Muslim world. The government started investing rural *madrassas* with more authority and power, both political and social, at the expense of the traditional tribal leaders. Over the years, more than 50,000 *madrassas* have come into existence in Pakistan. Non-availability of modern education from state-funded secular schools, especially for those from poor backgrounds, led to these *madrassas* filling the need for education and becoming a source of sustenance for such people. Most of these *madrassas* follow strict religious education; and some even stopped participating in the electoral process and confined themselves to propagating *jehad*. Much of the teaching comprises hate-filled sermons about “them” i.e. infidels who are a danger to Islam, and emphasising the duty of a Muslim to fight and kill such enemies. Eventually, many of these *madrassas* became factories for producing hate-filled terrorists. Most graduates of these schools eventually go on to become part of organisations involved in drug trafficking, illegal trading and eventually terrorism, including suicide terrorism.

Pakistan’s operations against the Taliban and Al Qaeda have not had the desired impact in stopping the Islamist terror groups since Pakistan’s tribes in the Af-Pak border area show considerable sympathy for the defeated Taliban regime. Many in the officers and ranks of the Pakistan Army are also reluctant to fight against, and kill, fellow Muslims. The intelligence agencies of Pakistan that have sponsored Islamic extremism as an intrinsic part of Pakistan’s foreign policy for nearly four decades, have found it extremely difficult to give up their self-destructive and double-dealing policies. Under these conditions, the suicide attackers are most valuable for the Islamic terrorists in creating mayhem in the society and demoralising it.

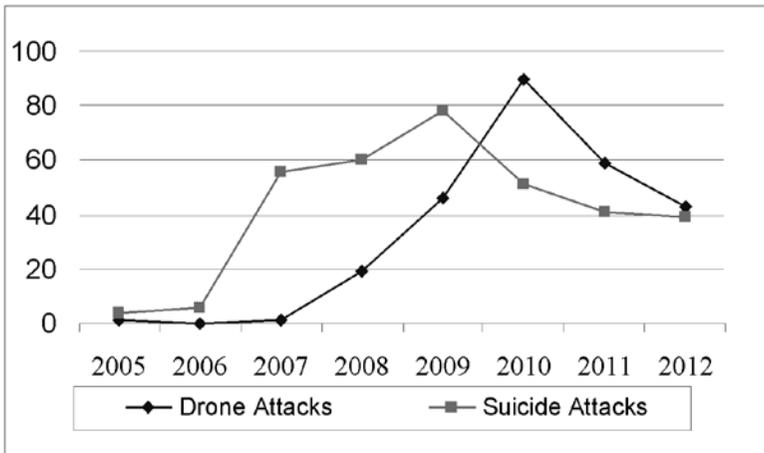
**Table 1: Data on Suicide Attacks in Pakistan 2001-11**

Year of attack	Number of suicide attacks	Number of victims killed	Number of killed per incident	Number of victims injured	Number of injured per incident
2001	0	0	0	0	0
2002	2	20	10	74	37
2003	2	69	35	103	51
2004	7	76	11	222	31
2005	4	82	21	219	55
2006	6	154	26	345	57
2007	56	731	13	1,672	29
2008	60	996	16	1,838	30
2009	78	998	12	2,339	30
2010	51	1,191	23	1,187	23
2011	41	639	15	1,208	29
2012	39	365	10	607	16

From the above table, it is clear that after the war on terror started after 9/11, the number of suicide attacks increased from the year 2001 till 2010. With not even a single suicide attack in the year 2001, it went

up to 78 in 2009 and slowly decreased to 41 in 2011. The first attempt at a suicide attack was on May 8, 2002, in a bus opposite the Sheraton Hotel in Karachi, in which nine French nationals and five Pakistanis, including one suspected suicide attacker, were killed. The highest number of attacks and victims injured was in the year 2009 and the highest number of people killed was in the year 2010. The latter is indicative of the increasing lethality of these attacks over the years.

**Fig.1: Correlation of Drone Attacks and Suicide Bombings in Pakistan**



Source: [http:// www.satp.org/](http://www.satp.org/)

It can be observed from Fig.1 above, that there is a decrease in the number of suicide attacks in 2011 compared to the year 2010. (When the suicide attacks started decreasing in 2011, simultaneously, the drone attacks also reduced; this can be observed by comparing the figures on suicide attacks and drone attacks from 2011-12 ). One reason for this decrease in the suicide attacks could be that the US drone attacks on the dwellings and camps of militants in the Af-Pak border, had resulted in the killing of a significant number of militants, including some prominent

leaders. For example, when the number of drone attacks went up from 46 to 90, the number of suicide attacks went down from 79 to 50 in 2009 to 2010. Obviously, the Islamic radical group leaders realised that increasing suicide attacks against the international force in Afghanistan was leading to a greater number of drone attacks against their sanctuaries in Pakistan. This could possibly have led to a reduction in the suicide attacks. In 2011, the drone attacks decreased partly due to public opposition and outrage in Pakistan, after the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers in a cross-border attack in November 2011. The US ramped up the number of strikes in July 2008 and has continued to hit at the Taliban and Al Qaeda targets within Pakistan regularly. While there have been 135 strikes since the programme started in 2005, 125 of them have been carried out since January 2008.

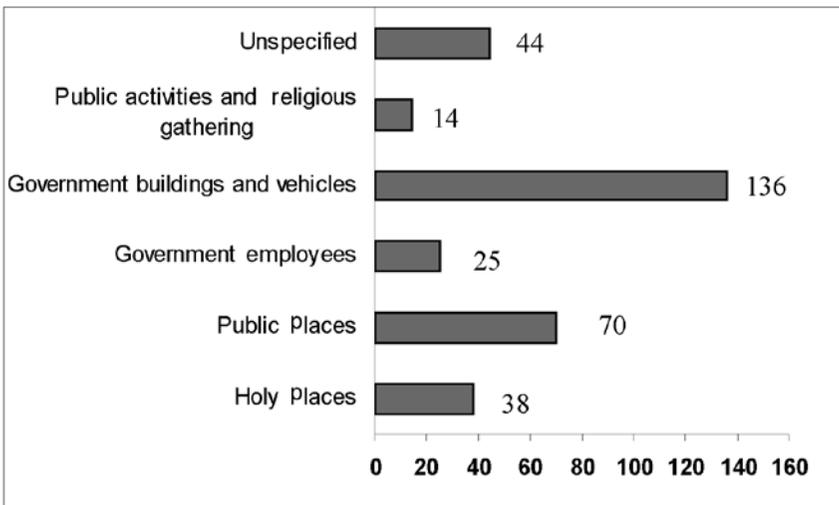
Among the suicide terror attacks, 10 are attributed to Pakistan's alliance with the US in the "war on terror" and 43 suicide attacks have been linked to sectarian conflicts. Four suicide attacks were aimed at bringing in the *Sharia* law for governance in Pakistan, and three were by militants in Punjab. Among 307 suicide attacks in Pakistan, responsibility for only 77 attacks has been claimed by extremist groups. In many cases, no responsibility was claimed as the motive could have been either individual revenge or a political one like the demand for the postponement of an election.

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the largest and most powerful faction of the Pakistan neo-Taliban which claimed responsibility for 48 suicide attacks which is the highest. The attacks targeted the Pakistani military and government officials, including high ranking military and security officials, ministers, and NATO forces. The triggering factors for the attacks were the Pakistani military operations against the TTP, the government's agreements with other countries to combat terrorism in Pakistan, the US-led war on terror, and operations of the Security Forces (SFs) to combat terrorism in the areas of where the TTP has its

stronghold, mainly in Pakistan’s border areas near Afghanistan. Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for six suicide attacks. Their provocation seems to be the American war on terror in Afghanistan with a spillover in Pakistan and the Pakistani government’s cooperation with the US in this regard. Another terrorist group, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the Sunni group linked to Al Qaeda, attacked Shias in six suicide attacks. The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi had also attacked Ahmedias, Sufis and Christians in Pakistan. Prior to 9/11, the group was known for its targeted attacks on Shias. Sunni and Shia extremist groups have often attacked each other in sectarian clashes, with most of the suicide attacks carried out by Sunni extremists on the Shia community.

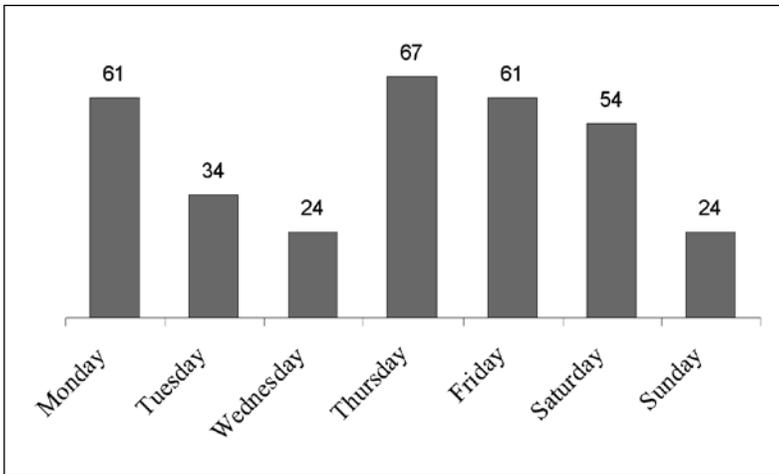
The suicide bombers have targeted crowded areas, causing maximum casualties. Their targets have been mosques, imambargahs, Shia processions, Sufi shrines, *madrassas* and churches. The public places attacked were markets, hotels, public parks, colleges, bus stops and parking areas.

**Fig.2 Targets of Suicide Bombers in Pakistan**



Government targets for assassination include police gunmen, military officers, lawyers, politicians, ministers, and foreign officials. Suicide attacks at the time of public activities and religious gatherings include food camps, during police raids, public rallies on anti-terrorism, community clashes, public meetings, funeral prayers, religious meetings and government buildings, including military centres, check posts, courts, election offices, police stations, world food centres for refugees, security forces buildings and government vehicles like trucks, vans of the military and security forces. Among 307 suicide attacks in Pakistan, 20 attacks targeted the Shia Muslim community, whereas the Sunni community was attacked only once in 2001. Violence became routine and ritualised, following the religious calendar, with special focus on sacred spaces like mosques and imambargahs, religious processions, sacred occasions like the times of prayers or pilgrims at their meal time and Independence Day.

**Fig.3: The Number of Suicide Attacks on Weekdays**



It is interesting to note from Fig.3 above that the attacks peaked on Thursdays. Mondays and Fridays saw the second highest number of attacks. The high number on Fridays may be explained by the fact that

the mosques are attacked when they are usually crowded for the Friday prayers. The reason for the highest number of attacks on Mondays and Thursdays is not clear though it could be an odd statistical coincidence. It could perhaps even be a mathematical oddity for this period. Data for future years could perhaps throw some light.

**Fig.4: Ten Locations Highly Attacked by Suicide Bombers**

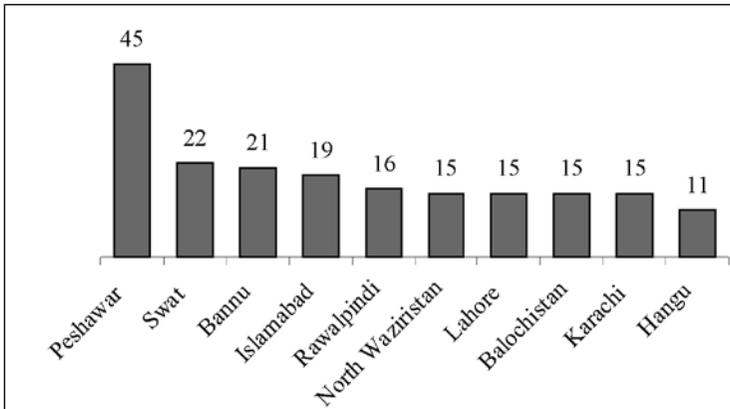


Fig.4 indicates the *most* highly attacked 10 locations by suicide bombers in Pakistan. Peshawar is at the top, with 35 attacks. The terrorist organisations like the Tehrik-e-Islami, Islam Taliban and Al Hezb are active in Peshawar. The *second* highest number of suicide attacks were in Swat, presumably due to Army action. There was confusion about the laws—religious or the state’s—that would prevail and this was made use of by the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi in 1994 to foment an uprising, thus, increasing the violence in Swat. *The location of the third* highest number of suicide attacks is Islamabad; the rapid transformation of its demography has brought with it a large number of mosques and illegally constructed *madrassas*, where the students are trained for terrorist activities.