

Terrorist Attacks and Suicide Bombers

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Attack with Little Chances of Escape

The Lashkar-e-Taiba introduced the concept of 'attack with little chances of escape' as part of the strategy of Pakistan to keep the jihad alive in Jammu and Kashmir (J and K). It started off with a probing attack on the campus of the Border Security Force (BSF) at Bandipur on the night of 13 July 1999. In this attack one militant who penetrated into the campus was able to kill two officers, a sub inspector, the wife of a constable and injure five others. After this, there were a series of attacks. The Rashtriya Rifles (RR) posts at Nutnus, Keegam and Beerwah in Budgam were attacked. In these incidents, the militants surprised the posts killing 11 personnel. 10 militants were killed in retaliation. The fifth attack was on an Intelligence Bureau (IB) post guarded by a section of the BSF at Handwara. Three militants entered the post and killed one and injured another. The Army surrounded the post and all the militants were killed.

Between 12 July 1999 and 3 September 1999, five attacks had taken place where a new strategy of entering security force posts by surprise and firing on the personnel was being tried. These were clearly 'attacks with little chances of escape'. Hamas in Palestine had tried such attacks and they had failed after initial successes. I was the Director General of the BSF at that time and I was naturally concerned. I had spent more than two years as Inspector General of the Force in J and K and knew the insurgency scenario fairly well. After carefully studying the incidents I wrote to all the Commandants and supervisory officers that there was nothing to be worried about but we should take it as a heaven sent opportunity to oblige the militants in their newly expressed desire to become martyrs by headlong confrontation with the security

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forces. They should reorganise the security of all camps, erect double barricades at the gate, set up double sentry posts, ensure total access control, set up perimeter lights with stand-by generators and have only two hour shifts for the sentries. The aim should be to deny the enemy ingress to the camps. Once the enemy entered the camp the battle was lost. In each encounter if a couple of members of the terrorist team were killed and we were safe behind our prepared defences the enemy was bound to give up such attacks. However, each time they succeeded in entering the camp and killing our personnel, it would mean a victory for them, even if all of them were killed subsequently. The worst-case scenario would be if they succeeded in entering the campus and killing some of our personnel and some or all of the militants succeeded in escaping.

There followed more number of 'attacks with little chances of escape' on the RR camp at Batpura and the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) camp at Ajas, Bandipur. On 7 November 1999 the militants targeted the Corps Headquarters at Badami Bagh. They succeeded in entering the main gate and went into the office of the Public Relations Officer (PRO), killing him and six other personnel. Two militants were killed and one escaped. This was followed by an attack on the camp of the Divisional Headquarters at Baramulla. On 27 November 1999 there was an attack on the Special Operation Group (SOG) of the Police at Shergarhi in which five SOG personnel were killed.

There were 13 attacks in the year 2000 on different targets ranging from "hard" military to "soft" civilians. All these attacks were by the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET). There was no intelligence for any of these attacks. Except for the attack on the BSF at Kokernag, and the attack on the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) at the Srinagar airport, the LET could not penetrate the defences. In all other cases they were able to enter the posts and inflict casualties.

Who were the LET and what motivated them to undertake such attacks? The LET is the armed wing of the Jamaat-e-Ahle-Hadith a Pakistani religious group that draws its inspiration from the Wahabi school of Saudi Arabia. Its parent body the Markaz-e-Dawa-wal-Irshad at Muridke in Lahore in Pakistan runs a huge

network of schools and social service centres that attract thousands of young men, trains them and instills in them a love for jihad. The Markaz considers the Jews and Hindus as the main enemies of Islam and India and Israel as the main enemies of Pakistan. They are against democracy as a concept, believe that the Sharia is supreme and all laws are laid down there and their religious leaders interpret these laws. The Markaz was founded in 1987 under the inspiration of Osama bin Laden, Zafar Iqbal, Hafiz Mohammed Syeed and Abdulla Azam of the International Islamic University, a mentor of Osama bin Laden. More than 80 per cent of its cadres are from Pakistan. It is a very secretive organisation. All their cadres have pseudo names from the *kuniats* of the Companion of the Prophet. Hafiz Mohammed Syeed says that, "God has ordained every Muslim to fight until his rule is established. We have no option but to follow the God's order."¹ LET infiltrated into the J and K foothills of the Shamsabari range in Kupwara, in the Rajwar forests and in the Lolab valley. Their encounters with the security forces were fierce and they never asked nor gave any quarter. There was one instance when they trapped a small security force patrol, who fought till their ammunition was finished. The LET group then descended on them and decapitated them. This was in their best tradition of beheading and disembowelling their victims. In this background it is not difficult to visualise the LET cadres volunteering for attack with little chances of escape.

Emboldened by their success in operations, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) chose a prominent location, the J and K Legislative building for their next attack. Four militants hijacked a Sumo vehicle and drove it towards the main gate of the Assembly building. A little short of the gate three militants jumped out and the driver then drove straight to the gate and detonated explosives kept in the Sumo vehicle. In the resultant confusion, the three militants ran into the Assembly building and managed to enter the west wing. The BSF and the SOG carried out a difficult clearing operation before they could kill the three militants. 24 civilians and nine uniformed personnel died. The attack was a success. The ISI tasked the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) to carry out this attack. Masood Azhar formed the JEM in early 2000 to celebrate his release by India after seven years of incarceration. The Army had

captured him in 1993 in south J and K. He formed this new tanzeem from elements of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul Ansar, both tanzeems of the Jamaat-e-Ulema-Islam (JUI). The use of an explosive filled vehicle being detonated was on the pattern of the Hizbollah in Lebanon and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka.

The 'attacks with little chances of escape' continued. The Awantipur airfield and the Army camp at Zakurah were hit by the LET. At the Awantipur airfield the attack was repulsed and the group could not enter and all were killed. The JEM now hit the police station at Chadoorah. Emboldened by their successes the LET hit the Parliament in Delhi on 13 December 2001. The assault caught the security force completely by surprise. The LET exploited the weakest link in the Parliament security set up—access control. Entry is vigorously checked for all at the gates except for the members of the Parliament. It was a well known fact that a member of Parliament could enter with his or her vehicle pass pasted on the windscreen. Individuals sitting inside the car were never checked for their passes. In this case the LET gang managed to drive through the main gate with pass pasted on the windscreen. The car was not stopped and squad of the LET armed with AK rifles and grenades just drove into the high security area with impunity.

In the year 2002 the Army camp at Trehgam and the Police post at Kokernag, were hit. Then there were a series of attacks in Rajouri and Poonch. The Police post at Chaktroo, the Army camp at Sunderbani, the BSF camp near Rajouri and the Army camp at Surankote were targeted. The next attack was on a civilian target—the Raghunath temple in Jammu. 14 May 2002 was a day of the worst attack when the families of the Army personnel were targeted at Kaluchak. Wives and children of the Army personnel were killed in this attack. The Army camp at Chassana was the next target, followed by the Akshardham temple in Ahmedabad. The two militants who entered the temple killed 21 civilians, four policemen and two National Security Guard (NSG) personnel. The militants were each carrying an AK rifle and 30 magazines and grenades.

The attacks continued in the year 2003. But now the security forces were able to repulse more attacks. Also, in a few cases intelligence was obtained and targeted units informed. In such cases the militants got a warm reception and were wiped out. The worst case was the Special Task Force (STF) post at Gul, where the post was overrun and the militants took away arms. The squad killed 11 STF personnel. In the next four attacks the militants failed to penetrate the posts. They attacked the BSF camp at Bandipur, the All India Radio Station at Srinagar, the RR camp at Drugmulla, and the BSF post at Tral. They were, however, successful in the next four attacks on the Police post at Bidiyar, the Army camp at Sajuan and the Army camp at Tanda.

Suicide Bombers

There are several insurgent groups who have resorted to suicide bombing. The LTTE heads the list as the most motivated, successful and deadly insurgent group. Their suicide bombers, the Black Tigers are given the foremost place on all ceremonial occasions. In death, they are venerated. They are given pride of place with granite tombstones. Their families are well looked after in case of their demise. Lasantha Dahanaikie describes them as the most effective weapon against an army that has modern weapons. Brigadier Karunaratne of the Sri Lankan Army describes the suicide cadre as a one-way soldier and there is very little stopping him. The last word on the Black Tigers is by Velupillai Prabhakaran—"The LTTE knows that the Black Tigers give them an unmatched edge. They are the strongest force of a much-weakened people. No weapon and no technology on earth can stop the determination of the LTTE's suicide bombers." The motivation of the Black Tigers is easily understood. It is the raw deal that the Tamils got from the Sinhalese, of being relegated to second class citizens from being the foremost in all spheres of activity in Sri Lanka, followed by the atrocities committed on the Tamil people by the Sinhalese Army and Police.²

The Hizbollah, a Shiite group in Lebanon trained and sponsored by Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran first used suicide bombers in Lebanon in November 1982. A suicide bomber destroyed a building in Tyre killing 76 Israeli Special Force personnel. In October 1983, it took

only two suicide bomb attacks, one killing 241 US Marines, the other killing 58 French paratroopers to force the US and France out of Lebanon. The driver who drove the truck into the compound of the building housing the US Marines was reported to be smiling as he detonated the explosives in the truck just before blowing himself and the truck to smithereens.

The suicide bombers of the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad is a study by itself. Palestinians overwhelmingly support suicide bombings, claiming that this is the only way they can make an impact upon a powerful adversary. Unlike the LET and the JEM who are motivated by religious fervour, in the case of the Palestinians it is a tactic of war, in defence of their land and homes. Living under siege and without good weapons as with the opponent, they see it as a heroic act of martyrdom. The suicide bomber of Palestine commits a final act of resistance stemming from desperation.³

Russia has been fighting a brutal no holds barred insurgency in Chechnya for the last decade. In the last eight months there have been 10 suicide attacks on targets in Russia and Chechnya, several carried out by women. In one incident, two Chechen women, one only 20 years old with explosives strapped round their waists went to a rock concert and detonated their deadly package killing 15 and wounding several persons. The interesting fact was that the 20 year old Zulikhan Yelitadzhiyeva had no dead father or brother or son to motivate her. She also had no interest in Islamic ideology. Imran Yezhiev head of the Russian Chechen Friendship society said that the suicide attacks are an inevitable response to the most crude and terrible treatment of the Chechens by the Russian troops.⁴

No paper on this subject can be complete without a mention of the suicide attacks by juveniles in the Iranian Armed Forces during the Iran-Iraq war. Their story is extraordinary and almost unbelievable. Facing the technical superiority of the Iraqi military, the Iranians responded with the *Basaji* squadrons of young generally unarmed boys who participated in human wave attacks. They were often sent ahead of the regular troops to clear minefields. Participation in *Basaji* raids was so popular, that on one occasion, when a commander asked for 1000 volunteers, 3000 volunteered.

Conclusion

More than religion it is the nationalist factor that motivates 'attacks with little chances of escape' and suicide bombings. This can be seen in the case of the LTTE, the Palestinians and the Chechens. Until the minority feels that they are not second-class citizens, as long as the Israelis occupy the land of the Palestinians and confine them to ghettos and refugee camps and as long as the Russians continue the scorched earth policy in Chechnya the suicide bombings will continue in Sri Lanka, Israel and Russia.

This is not the case of the LET and the JEM. The fundamentalist Islamic schools like the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam and the Jamaat-e-Ahle-Hadith follow the strict Wahabi school. They believe that Islam has no borders, that all countries once ruled by Muslims should be brought back to Islamic rule. In their interpretation of Islam, it is not difficult to motivate their followers to commit martyrdom in the cause of jihad. Both Sunni and Shia value and esteem martyrdom. Sunni Islam has historically valourised martyrdom through veneration of jihads of the early community with the Meccan Arabs, while Shia Islam celebrates annually the martyrdom of its early leaders. Hadith literature and Muslim tradition teach that martyrs are distinguished from others after death in several ways. Their self sacrifice and meritorious acts render them free of sin and they by-pass purgatory and proceed to one of the highest locations in heaven near the throne of God.⁵

We can, therefore, continue to expect 'attacks with little chances of escape' on military and civilian targets. We have to learn to be continually alert in guarding all military and security force campuses. Perimeter security should be made foolproof by using electronic sensors, barbed wire concertina coils, high power lighting and line of sight sentry posts. There should be roadblocks for vehicles set up far enough to prevent explosive laden vehicles from detonating near the posts or campuses. Regular drills should be conducted of mock 'attacks with little chances of escape' tactics. These precautions should be adopted in high-risk civilian establishments too.

The danger lies in a different direction. We have a population of Muslims that is larger than the population of Pakistan. We must look with serious introspection to the post Godhra riots. What happened in Gujarat was a blot on India's police and civil administration, with the police looking the other way while the rabid mobs attacked, raped and killed at will for two days. The police are to be scrupulously neutral. Their loyalty is to the Constitution and the laws of the land. After the riots, the police did their best to scuttle the investigation. The victims were denied justice. Worse still, their Hindu neighbours have economically and socially boycotted them. They have nowhere to turn now. It is when a community is economically, socially and legally denied justice that hopelessness sets in. We should not allow a situation to develop that Pakistan finds out that it is not necessary to send the LET or JEM cadres on suicide missions to India. There will be volunteers in plenty from the survivors of the Gujarat pogrom.

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