



Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

A project of the Blue Mountains Family Support Service Inc.

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Supplementary update on the Plight of the Shia population of Pakistan – December 2013¹

Graeme Swincer² for Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group, December 2013

Introduction and Summary

Over the 8 months since I wrote a basic paper on the “safety” of the Shias of Pakistan there have been many reports of escalation of the targeted violence. Anti-Shia attacks have been especially prevalent in the past 2 months as Shias have gathered to celebrate the holy month of Muharram and especially Ashura Day which this year fell on 15th November. Without attempting to give a comprehensive summary of the events of the past 8 months I will simply quote in chronological order from a selection of recent reports (from the last month) which emphasise the widespread nature of the attacks. Locations mentioned include Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Kohat and Hangu.

My April 2013 paper emphasised that it is no longer safe for Shias to live a normal life in any part of Pakistan. When they gather for significant celebrations they are an easy target for the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) aka Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and related extremist organisations. And they cannot hide from attention indefinitely. The national identity card system betrays their ethnicity and religious affiliation whenever they need to negotiate a commercial transaction – from purchasing a train ticket to buying a house. Particular groups, professions and families are especially vulnerable. The Hazaras, historic refugees from such persecution in Afghanistan, are especially defenceless because of their easily recognised appearance. But members of other groups such as the Turis, long-standing enemies of the Taliban, while not as immediately recognisable on sight, can soon be identified and pursued wherever they go.

¹ <http://www.bmrsg.org.au/compassion/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/SupplementaryUpdatePlightShiaPakistan1312.pdf>

² Retired agricultural scientist, international development programs coordinator, and cross cultural consultant, trainer and researcher.

Quotation #1

Deter attacks on Shias, Pakistan told

IANS, New York, 12th November 2013

<http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/deter-attacks-on-shias-pakistan-told-1226141.html>

The Pakistani government should urgently act to prevent deadly sectarian attacks on Shia Muslims that escalate during the Muslim holy month of Moharram, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday. In recent years, Sunni extremist groups affiliated with the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Pakistan have claimed responsibility for attacks that have killed dozens of Shias during Moharram, particularly on Shia processions marking Ashura, the 10th day of Moharram, which in 2013 falls on Nov 15. "Pakistan's besieged Shia citizens should be able to participate in Ashura processions without fear of predictable attack while the government just looks on," said Ali Dayan Hasan, Pakistan director at Human Rights Watch. "The Pakistani authorities need to put all necessary security measures in place to protect the Shia population. Arresting extremist group members responsible for past attacks would be an important first step." Sunni extremist groups have attacked Ashura processions in Pakistan for the last several years, Human Rights Watch said.

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*The Pakistani Taliban and its affiliates such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi have conducted unprecedented attacks in 2013 on the country's Muslim and non-Muslim religious minorities, claiming responsibility for most major bombings and vowing further violence. More than 800 Shias have been killed in targeted attacks in Pakistan since 2012, including about 400 so far this year. In the first days of November alone, at least 15 Shia have been killed in several targeted attacks across Pakistan. Sunni militant groups such as the banned Lashkar-e Jhangvi have historically had links to the Pakistani military and its intelligence agencies. While the military denies any ongoing links to such groups, **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi continues to operate with impunity even in areas where state authority is well established such as Punjab province and Karachi.** [emphasis added]*

Quotation #2

Violence in Pakistan Ahead of Shia Processions

By Annabel Symington

14th November 2013

<http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/11/14/violence-in-pakistan-ahead-of-shia-processions/>

Eighteen people were injured in two separate blasts near Shia mosques in Karachi late Wednesday, according to local media reports, as Pakistan was on high alert ahead of street processions for Muharram, the mostly Shia Muslim gathering that begins Thursday.

In a separate attack also in Karachi on Wednesday evening, a grenade was thrown at a police check point near another Shia mosque injuring two policemen, according to Amir Farooqi, a senior superintendent of Karachi police.

The police in the restive southern megacity launched an operation against a group of six men believed to be from Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni sectarian group, suspected of planning a suicide attack on the main Shia procession that will take place in Karachi on Friday. All six men were killed in a shootout with police late Wednesday, Mr. Farooqi, told India Real Time on Thursday. The group included two suspected suicide bombers, he added, and had arrived in Karachi earlier in the week from the tribal areas, which remain largely in militant control.

Quotation #3

Takfiris continue to attack Shias in Pakistan

Tehran Times 18th November 2013

<http://tehrantimes.com/world/112179-takfiris-continue-to-attack-shias-in-pakistan->

Sectarian violence spread in Pakistan on Monday after clashes between minority Shia and majority Sunni Muslims near the capital Islamabad prompted the government to impose a curfew and block mobile phone services over the weekend.

According to Reuters, clashes confined to areas in and around the capital at the weekend spilled over on Monday into two towns in the volatile northwest.

Tensions are high this month as Shias mark Muharram, an annual period of mourning which has often sparked bouts of violence.

Rawalpindi, a garrison city near Islamabad, remained under curfew and tight security for three days after an attack on a Shia procession on Friday in which at least eight people were killed.

On Monday, a mob set shops on fire in a predominantly Shia district in the northwestern town of Kohat in clashes that killed two policemen and a civilian, police said.

According to Shia news, Takfiri terrorists of the outlawed Sipah-e-Sahaba attacked a Shia mosque, an Imam Bargah (Husseinia), and a commercial market in the city of Kohat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday.

Takfiri is an expression used to describe individuals or groups who believe they are the only true Muslims.

Two policemen were killed and several others were injured in the terrorist attacks.

The armed terrorists attacked Imam Bargah Syed Habib, where two policemen were killed and three were injured. In the Teera Bazaar, the terrorists set a market owned by Shias on fire.

The terrorists also attacked a Shia mosque in Kohat and it was reported that they were harassing people by sporadically firing gunshots, despite the imposition of a curfew.

Tension also prevailed in Hangu, where terrorists fired rockets on Thursday, November 14, which was the day of Ashura, with the intention of disturbing the peaceful observance of Ashura. A curfew was also imposed in Hangu.

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The authorities imposed a mobile phone blackout on Rawalpindi, the seat of the Pakistani army, and parts of Islamabad over the weekend. The curfew was only lifted on Monday, but the city remained tense.

Attacks on Pakistan's Shias, who make up about a fifth of the population of 180 million, have worsened in recent years. [emphasis added]

Most of the attacks are the work of extremists affiliated with banned groups, such as the Taliban or Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which wants to drive all the Shias out of Pakistan.

Hundreds of Shias were killed in bombings and other attacks last year, including incidents in which children on their way to school were gunned down and doctors heading for work were shot.

Quotation # 4

Shia university director killed in Punjab, Pakistan

PressTV, 19th November 2013

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/11/19/335481/university-director-killed-in-pakistan/>

Gunmen have killed a senior Shia director at Pakistan's Gujrat University and his driver in the central province of Punjab.

Local security officials said Syed Shabbir Hussain Shah, director of student affairs at Gujrat University, and his driver were hit by several bullets and died on the spot on Tuesday.

“Gunmen riding a motorbike sprayed bullets on his vehicle when he was about to reach the university campus in (the) morning. His driver was also killed in the attack,” media outlets quoted Ali Nasir Rizvi, Gujrat district police chief as saying.

The attackers managed to flee the scene before policemen cordoned off the area, the police chief added.

“At the moment, we don't know about the numbers of the attackers, but the incident looks like a targeted killing,” Rizvi noted.

A colleague of Shah said he had previously received threats from pro-Taliban extremist groups.

This is the latest deadly incident in a wave of violence against the Shia Muslim community in Pakistan. [emphasis added]

Quotation # 5

Taliban claim deadly attacks on Shias in Pakistani city of Karachi

PressTV, 4th December 2014

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/11/23/336243/taliban-claim-attacks-on-shias-in-karachi/>

Pro-Taliban militants have claimed responsibility for recent twin bombings that targeted a predominantly Shia neighborhood in the southern Pakistani port city of Karachi. [emphasis added]

On Saturday, spokesperson for the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Shahidullah Shahid, vowed to carry out more such attacks against Shia Muslims across the militancy-riddled country. [emphasis added]

The remarks come after twin bomb explosions killed at least seven people and injured 50 others in Shia-dominated area of Ancholi on Friday night.

Reports say women and children were among those injured in the twin bombings, which damaged shops, cars as well as power transmitters, causing a blackout in the area.

Police authorities said the explosives were planted on two motorcycles parked close to cafes and tea stalls in the area.

The developments also come after pro-Taliban extremist groups killed at least eight Shia Muslims and severely injured several others in Rawalpindi during Ashura processions last Friday.

These are the latest deadly incidents in a wave of violence against the Shia Muslim community in Pakistan. [emphasis added]

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This comes while Shia Muslims in Pakistan say the government must take decisive action against the forces involved in the targeted killings. They also accuse Islamabad of failing to provide security for the Muslim community.

The country's Shia leaders have called on the government to form a judicial commission to investigate the bloodshed.

The killing of Shias has caused an international outrage, with rights groups and regional countries expressing concern over the ongoing deadly violence. [emphasis added]

Conclusion

As emphasised in my April 2013 paper on the “safety” of Shia Muslims in Pakistan, “No city in Pakistan is safe anymore for Shias”. If anything, eight months on, the situation is now worse than ever before. Furthermore the plight of such identifiable historic enemies of the Sunni extremists as the Hazaras and the Turis is even more dire than that of the “average” Pakistani Shia.

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