Attack on Danish Embassy in Islamabad (Pakistan)
2 June 2008

The Incident
An explosion took place outside the Embassy of Denmark in Islamabad on Monday, 2 June 2008, at around 1:05 pm. Eight people were killed, including a Danish national of Pakistani origin, and 30 were injured. Most of the victims were Pakistani citizens. Similarly, 21 cars parked in front of the embassy were destroyed in the blast. It is pertinent to mention that the Danish embassy is not located in the high-security Diplomatic Enclave, and was instead housed in a private home in a residential quarter, F-6/1, in Islamabad.

According to various reports citing Pakistani law enforcement officials, a white colour Toyota 1800 cc car bearing a fake red number-plate with registration number CD-18 (diplomatic number used by Danish embassy vehicles) was used in the blast. Some other reports stated that the car used in the terrorist attack was a stolen vehicle from the Jhang city of Punjab Province. According to eyewitnesses, the car was allowed to swiftly pass through the security barrier erected outside the embassy premises since it was bearing a diplomatic number plate. As soon as the car reached in front of the embassy, it exploded with a big bang.

Location

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1 “Suicide Blast at Danish Embassy Kills Eight”, Daily Times, 3 June 2008, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\06\03\story_3-6-2008_pg1_1
3 ‘Clues Found’, Dawn, 3 June 2008
Modus Operandi

According to the Pakistani law enforcement agencies, the terrorists employed a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). The preliminary reports of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) – comprising of police, Federal Investigation Agency and Inter-Service Intelligence – showed that approximately 30 kgs of explosive material was used in the blast, and it was 'ACLOC' kind of explosive material with potassium carbonate. Furthermore, the explosive material was fixed in the rear side of the vehicle causing downward impact of the blast. It is still not clear if there were one or more suicide bombers in the car. The suicide attack took place in the middle of the road which signifies that the car was in motion when the explosion took place. This is evident from the 13x10 feet wide and 3.3 feet deep crater in the middle of the road. The severity of the blast was such that a plume of smoke rose about 40 feet above the scene while pieces of the blown-up vehicle and the limbs of the suspected suicide bomber were scattered over an area of 500 yards. The engine of the vehicle was collected from Street 18, which is 300 yards away from the site of the blast in Street 21.

According to a government official, the suicide bomber used Street-19 from the Brazilian embassy to approach his target and made left turn into Street-21, passing the Indian High Commissioner’s House (17, Street-21) and reached in front of his destination. However, surprisingly, he blew up the vehicle after leaving behind both the gates - embassy and visa section gates - of the Danish embassy. The explosion destroyed the boundary wall of the embassy and its metal gate was blown inward, but the embassy building itself remained intact.

At present, the government is investigating the terrorist incident from three perspectives:

1. Whether, the bomb installed in the car was a remote controlled device which was blown up by someone from a safe distance while an occupant was driving the car towards the embassy;

2. Secondly, whether it was a suicide attack with one or two suicide bombers driving a car and exploding it when they reached in front of the mission;

3. And thirdly, whether it was a time bomb that was installed in a car. The car was parked in front of the embassy and its occupant walked out of it and detonated the bomb after reaching a safe distance.

The police has also collected alleged body parts of the suicide bombers that comprises of forehead, some fingers of the left hand, right foot and some parts of his abdomen from the site of the blast and sent it to laboratory for clinical examination to determine the identity of the bomber(s).

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6 “Joint Investigation Team to Probe Danish Embassy Blast”, *The News*, 4 June 2008
7 Explosion Outside the Danish Embassy: 8 Killed”, Urdu Daily *Waqt*, 3 June 2008
8 Ibid.
9 “Eight Killed in Bomb blast Outside Danish Embassy”, *The News*, 3 June 2008
10 Ibid.
11 “Eight Killed in Bomb blast Outside Danish Embassy”, *The News*, 3 June 2008
The police also detained two persons from a nearby area of the blast scene who had supposedly seen the suicide bomber in order to help them prepare a sketch of the suicide bomber.

**Pictures from the blast site**

![Image of the blast scene](image)

**Who may be responsible?**

According to Pakistani officials, there is a similarity between the terrorist attack on the Embassy of Denmark and the attack on the FIA regional office in Lahore in March 2008.

On 5 June 2008, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the said terrorist attack. An Internet statement, signed by Al Qaeda’s leader in Afghanistan and head of Al Qaeda’s Finance Committee, Mustafa Abu al-Yazid aka Abu Saeed al-Masri, claimed responsibility for the terrorist suicide attack. According to the statement:

The attack was a “revenge against the infidel government ... of Denmark which published degrading drawings of the prophet ... and refused to apologise but continued ... and was followed by leading Crusader states, organisations and figures.”

The statement further said that a recorded message of the Al Qaeda suicide bomber will also be released soon.

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It needs to be mentioned that Abu Yazid, who succeeded Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi as head of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in late 2006 had issued a similar statement in which he claimed the brutal assassination of former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, on 27 December 2008. However, it could not be verified so far. Another aspect that needs to be looked into is whether Al Qaeda used its own militants – usually Arabs – for the said terrorist attack or employed local militants of Al Qaeda-linked Pakistani militant groups. There are strong possibilities that Al Qaeda could have employed a local militant group since Al Qaeda’s Arab militants have not conducted any terrorist attacks in Pakistan so far.

Some of these mainland Pakistani terrorist groups are Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ), Harkatul Mujahideen (HuM), Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami (HuJI), Jamiatul Ansar and Jamiatul Furqan. These groups were also involved in assassination attempts on President Musharraf (December 2003 and July 2007) and former prime minister, Shaukat Aziz (July 2004). They have a long history of conducting terrorist operations in Punjab and Sindh Provinces and have local recruits who know the place very well. All these groups are linked to Al Qaeda and receive their training and instructions from Al Qaeda leaders based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. One of their infamous militant leaders, Qari Zafar, is also believed to be involved in the terrorist attack on the FIA offices in Lahore in March 2008. All the above-mentioned groups now operate from the platform of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and their top leadership is mostly based in FATA.

The terrorist attack comes in the wake of Osama Bin Laden’s and Ayman al-Zawahiri’s, Al Qaeda’s top leaders, numerous audio and video messages released in recent months in which they had urged Muslims to attack Danish interests.15

So far, Pakistani militant groups have denied their involvement in the terrorist attack. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) spokesman, Maulvi Omar, expressed his ignorance about the blast, saying he had “no knowledge” about the blast and “is not in a position to immediately comment. He further said that he “cannot say who is responsible for this”.16 However, the Pakistani government has not ruled out the involvement of Pakistani Taliban militants in the terrorist attack.17 According to government officials, the attack would not affect the peace process between the TTP and the new government as the event was independent of the domestic situation inside of the country (Pakistan), and directed towards a “foreign enemy”.18

There were also speculations in Islamabad that the target of the attack was not the Danish embassy, but the motorcade of President Pervez Musharraf who had gone to the nearby National Defence College, and the vehicle had tried twice to enter Margalla Road, which was used as the route on which Musharraf travels. However, the government has rejected the speculation.19

16 “Suicide Blast at Danish Embassy Kills Eight”, Statesman, 3 June 2008
18 “Joint Investigation Team Formed”, Daily Times, 3 June 2008
19 Blast Rocks Danish Embassy in High-Security Area: 8 Killed’, Dawn, 3 June 2008
The Interior Secretary Syed Kamal Shah has said that investigations are underway to identify the terrorists and bring them to justice. There is mounting pressure on the Pakistani government to beef up security of foreigners and foreign missions inside the country.

Analysis

It is assumed that the attack was largely in retaliation to the publication of blasphemous caricatures of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in 2005. The same newspaper republished those caricatures in February 2008, which created a lot of uproar within the Muslims world, and were considered to be offensive to Muslims. According to an eyewitness of the terrorist attack, Sana Khalid, “Since the printing of cartoons, we always had this fear [of an attack on Danish Embassy]... But what they did to our religion, they deserve it.”

The Al Qaeda and Taliban have constructed their entire ideology around the myth of being the defenders of the Muslim faith. Hence their quest to derive legitimacy for their cause and militant activities could be a sufficient reason for these groups to undertake such an attack on Danish embassy.

Coupled with the cartoon controversy is the presence of 550 Danish troops in Afghanistan under ISAF-NATO command. The militant groups in Pakistan have declared a war against ISAF-NATO troops in Afghanistan and also believe in targeting NATO countries’ economic interests in Pakistan.

Implications

The Pakistani and Danish governments have condemned the suicide blasts. The Danish Prime Minister, Anders Rassmussen, has said that this will not result in any kind of change in the Danish Foreign Policy. The terrorist attack was also an attempt to harm the Pakistan-Denmark relationship. However, given the fact that both countries remain partners in the war on terror in Afghanistan, it would further strengthen their resolve to fight the menace of terrorism in its entirety.

However, it is likely that anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan sentiments may increase in the West, especially in Denmark, as a result of this attack. There is also a probability that Danish newspapers may reprint those cartoons, and open a new diatribe against Islam and the Muslims.

The attacks are testament to the fact that the Pakistani Taliban and other terrorist groups in the country remain strong and maintain a functional network. It seems that despite Pakistan’s efforts to sign peace agreements with Pakistani Taliban in FATA and NWFP, there would be terrorist

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groups, who are not covered under such peace agreements, who would continue to destabilize Pakistan by conducting terrorist attacks in the country.22

There has been an upsurge in attacks on foreigners in Pakistan, and these may continue to rise in the future, harming Pakistan’s long term economic and political interests. The terrorist attack on a restaurant in Islamabad in March 2008 that was frequented by foreigners, points to the fact that militants are out to target Western interests in the country, including Islamabad. One Turkish citizen was killed and many US and British diplomats were injured in the terrorist attack on the restaurant. It is worth mentioning that both the restaurant and Danish embassy are situated close to each other in the same residential quarter, F-6/1, in Islamabad.

Such terrorist attacks targeting hotels, foreign missions and foreign economic interests in Pakistan would negatively affect the inflow of foreign direct investment in the country. Additionally, it may also lead to the flight of foreign capital out of Pakistan which could adversely affect its already fragile economy. It can be noted that this trend may already have begun, with the Danish government ordering all Danish citizens not to travel to Pakistan, and the closure of both the Danish and Norway embassies inside of Islamabad.

22 “Pakistani Taliban likely behind Danish embassy blast: officials”, *Dawn*, 3 June 2008, [http://www.dawn.com/2008/06/03/welcome.htm](http://www.dawn.com/2008/06/03/welcome.htm)