Attack Analysis: Suicide Terrorist Strike in Cultural Capital of Pakistan, Lahore

The Incident
On Thursday, 10 January 2008 at 11:45 am (Pakistani Slandered Time), a suicide attacker blew himself up near policemen deployed at lawyers’ protest outside Lahore High Court. Police Officials revealed that a 25-year-old suicide bomber parked his motorcycle, walked up to the policemen under the cover of asking for directions, and detonated himself. The suicide bomber's head was found about 80 feet away from the actual location of attack. A pair of charred legs believed to be the attacker’s was found lying among the shoes and caps of the policemen. According to the police sources, the suicide bomber was carrying 14-kg explosive including 4-kg ball-bearings, which targeted the people in 50 meters area. An injured police official stated “I saw the burning bodies of my colleagues were lying around me. It was like a hell. The explosion was so horrible and powerful that I never saw or hear like this (attack) throughout my 19 years career” According to the media reports suicide attack claimed 26 lives and injured over 50 people.

Attack Analysis
The first terrorist attack in Pakistan in the year 2008 is also stated to be the very first in which the law enforcement agency has been targeted in Lahore, the capital of Punjab and a place that was considered to be the most peaceful city of Pakistan. The incident came amid extreme political tension following the assassination of Pakistan’s top political leader Benazir Bhutto. The terrible attack happened a day before the start of Muslim holy month of Muharram. There is speculation that it might be a start of sectarian violence against a specific sect. But, the fact that policemen were targeted would seem to eliminate this possibility. According to the circumstantial evidence, the policemen were the main target of the suicide bomber. Thus it might be a continuation of attacks on police and the army in apparent revenge for the siege and storming of red mosque in July 2007 and subsequent military operations against Taliban militants in Swat and Federally Administated Tribal Areas (FATA). In final six months of 2007, the aftermath of operation against red mosque, Pakistan faced 51 suicide attacks (mostly targeted at security forces) that killed at least 770 injuring another 1574 persons. The highest number of reported suicide attacks was in North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and tribal areas of FATA. By striking two battalions of police in Lahore, terrorists have demonstrated that death squad is no longer confined to the fringe land. They are now right in the middle of Pakistan. The intelligence agencies have warned about more suicide attacks and other terrorist activities across the country especially in Punjab capital. Better preventive and more organized security measures needed to be taken to maintain peace in the holy month of Muharram.

1 “26 killed in City suicide bombing” by Jalilur Rehman, The Post, Lahore, 11 January 2008
2 “Suicide blast shatters calm in Lahore” by Ashraf Javed, The Nation Lahore, 11 January 2008
3 “26 killed in City suicide bombing” by Jalilur Rehman, The Post, Lahore, 11 January 2008
4 Urdu Daily Waqt, Lahore, 11 January 2008
5 Urdu Daily Express, Lahore, 11 January 2008
6 “Suicide attack on police mows down 24 in Lahore” By Syed Faisal Shakeel, Dawn, Karachi, 11 January 2008
7 Pakistan Security Report 2007, by Pak Institute for Peace Studies Pakistan
Pictures from the Suicide Attack Site

Khurram Iqbal, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research

9 Courtesy Daily Times, Lahore
10 Courtesy Urdu Daily Khabrein
11 Courtesy Urdu Daily Express