ICPVTR Case Study

The Islamabad Marriott in Flames: Attack on the World’s Most Protected Hotel

by Rohan Gunaratna

Source: Telegraph TV

3 October 2008
OBJECTIVE OF THIS REPORT

The International Centre for Political Violence & Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist centre for counter-terrorism research in Singapore located at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in the Nanyang Technological University. As terrorists are constantly learning, the Centre seeks to identify lessons for improving security measures that can reduce the threat of terrorist attack. The objective of this report is to draw out the global best practices in counter-terrorism policies and measures for both the public and the private sector.

This case study is among a series of terrorist attacks on hotels and tourist infrastructure analysed by ICPVTR researchers. These studies are available in the ICPVTR Global Pathfinder II Terrorism Database. Global Pathfinder II is a one-stop repository for information on current and emerging terrorist threats. It is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles on terrorist groups, key terrorist personalities, terrorist and counter-terrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps. It also contains specific details and analyses of significant terrorist attacks in its attack profiles. Global Pathfinder also includes over a hundred terrorist training manuals, counter-terrorism legislations and conventions, analytical papers on terrorist ideologies, commentaries on terrorist trends and patterns, transcripts of landmark cases, and interviews with terrorists as well as photographs from different conflict zones across the world.

Access to Global Pathfinder II is by subscription only. For further information on subscriptions, please contact Elizabeth Ong at isbxong@ntu.edu.sg.
Executive Summary

Until recently, the Islamabad Marriott Hotel was arguably the most protected hotel in the world. Targeted twice previously by terrorists – in October 2004 and January 2007 – it had in place multiple physical target hardening measures as well as a well-trained security staff. But on 20 September 2008, these measures were no match for a massive truck bomb that while stopped from entering the hotel premises, somehow still triggered a fire that engulfed the hotel and burnt for two days. (There is as yet no evidence of a gas pipe leak.)

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack although explosives experts believe the modus operandi bears resemblance to the attacks on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad, the FIA building in Lahore, Hamza camp and the Pakistan Air Force base in Saragodha. The June 2008 suicide attack on the Danish Embassy has been claimed by al-Qaeda, which recently released the martyrdom video of the Saudi suicide bomber “Abu Ghareeb al-Makki” (a.k.a. Kamaal al-Hadhli).

This case study raises two troubling questions for hotel security that are just as applicable outside Pakistan:

1. How was it possible for a truck containing 600 kg of explosives to enter a sensitive 1-km city zone that includes the Prime Minister’s residence, the Presidential office and the Supreme Court? Once the truck bomb was on the road to the Marriott Hotel, the only thing stopping it from reaching its target were the physical barriers at the hotel gate. Fortunately the multiple layers of protection worked, but at the cost of the lives of the security guards manning them.

2. What more can a hotel do to enhance security without compromising its basic function – to encourage the public to enter its premises? If it is a question of when, not if, hotels succumb to terrorist attacks, how prepared are they to mitigate the consequences of an attack? A paradigm shift in response strategy, moving beyond perimeter security to include consequence management, is clearly required.
The Islamabad Marriott in Flames: The Attack on the World’s Most Protected Hotel*

by Professor Rohan Gunaratna, 
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Introduction

In the world of terrorism, yesterday’s embassies are today’s hotels. The threat against diplomatic targets persists but due to target hardening, the terrorists seek to attack international hotels. As westerners frequent international hotels, they should be considered second embassies. Failure to understand the threat and creatively harden international hotels, especially in conflict zones, could lead to loss of life, property and business.

Since the beginning of the current wave of terrorism on September 11, 2001, the damage to the Marriott Islamabad on September 20, 2008 is the worst terrorist attack on an international hotel. The attack originating from the Afghan-Pakistan border, the global epicentre of terrorism, demonstrates the recurrent and growing threat to the international hospitality industry.

The Context

During the past five years, the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan, has suffered three terrorist attacks. An explosives-laden laptop in the lobby injured seven persons in October 2004. The assassination targeted a VIP who escaped. Two years and three months after, the terrorists attacked the Marriott just hours before an Indian High Commission function to celebrate Republic Day. At the side entrance leading towards the Marriott’s basement nightclub, a suicide bomber intercepted by a security guard exploded, killing a security guard and injuring five others in January 2007.¹ The most recent attack killed 56, injured 265, and destroyed the majority of the upper floor rooms. Of the 56 reported deaths, 30 were hotel associates. A majority - 17 - were hotel security personnel. A valet driver, a doorman, two from the engineering department, and the front desk duty manager also died. Along with many others, the manager of food, beverages and banquet sales who was in the porte cochere (the roofed structure extending from the hotel entrance over the driveway) was badly injured. There were five registered guests killed: two Americans, including 34 year-old Air Force Maj. Rodolfo I. Rodriguez, Danish security and intelligence officer Karsten Krabbe, the Czech Ambassador Ivo Zdarek, and his Vietnamese partner. Eight persons were killed off-property. Fourteen non-registered guests died, one of them an American.

* I thank Susan Sim, Senior Fellow, RSIS, for valuable suggestions and for editing this report.
¹ Nadeeka Withana, “Deterring and Defending Against Suicide Terrorism, The Islamabad Marriott Bombing Case Study,” The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 2007.
Despite a 132-foot (40.23 m) setback from the gate to the hotel, the explosion caused unprecedented devastation. The standard rule is for diplomatic and other high value targets to maintain a standoff distance of 100 feet (30.5 m) from the public. Had the fortified gate not prevented the suicide truck from entering the hotel compound, the fatalities and injuries would have increased dramatically. Said Chief of Security for the hotel, Major Tahir Qureshi: “If not for the barrier, there would have been 1000 casualties.” At the time of the bombing, there were upwards of 1,500 people in the hotel. Most of them were non-registered guests who were there to celebrate Iftar - the breaking of the fast – practised during the Ramadan period when Muslims fast all day. The restaurants were full and the main ballroom was open for a buffet dinner. Major Qureshi added: “We never thought of this type of attack. It is like an unconventional attack. As if there were chemicals, there was a lightning effect. Everything exposed to the fireball was burnt, the hotel, the cars and even trees. It is the worst explosion Pakistan has seen.”

The explosion could be heard 18 miles (30 kilometres) away, created a deep crater 59 feet by 25 feet (18 m by 7.6 m) and ignited a fire that burnt for two days.

Source: Telegraph

On that fateful day, the entire Pakistani leadership – President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, Speaker of the National Assembly, the Army Chief – and other important figures were supposed to have dinner at the Marriott. A major tragedy for Pakistan was averted when the venue of the dinner was changed to the Prime Minister’s house at the last minute. The Interior Ministry announced after the attack that it had received a non-specific warning of an attack. On a visit to Washington, D.C. immediately after the bombing, Zardari commented: "I was supposed to be there with my Prime Minister, with my Speaker, with a lot of us. Just by chance that it was changed." Pakistani authorities are investigating if

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2 Author’s interview with Major Tahir Qureshi, Chief of Security for Islamabad Marriott Hotel, September 28, 2008
3 Author’s interview with Major Tahir Qureshi, September 28, 2008. Although chemicals were used, it was not a chemical attack.
5 “Zardari says he escaped assassination at Marriott hotel,” AFP, Washington D.C., October 1, 2008.
there was a leak. Although low-ranking military personnel were involved in two assassination attempts on former President General Pervez Musharraf, it is unlikely that the terrorists received prior information about the dinner plans of the Pakistani leadership on September 20. The plans made by the Speaker were kept secret; even the hotel was not informed.

Epicentre of the Explosion

At 55 seconds past 7.54 p.m. on September 20, 2008, an explosives-laden truck turned into the driveway of the Marriott Islamabad. Instead of running away, two security guards at the checkpoint barrier braced themselves for what looked like an imminent traffic accident. The headlights of the truck were on full beam. Anyone observing the approach would have to look away or be blinded by the lights. The headlights masked the truck, making it difficult to appreciate what exactly was happening. The body container carrying 600 kg (1,320 lb) of explosives, including artillery shells, mortar bombs and shrapnel, oversize the truck cab. The truck swung around in a small arc with the driver's side closest to the security booth, then straightened full on towards the Delta barrier and arm gate with headlights still on full beam. While one guard remained in position, the second guard stepped back quickly under a large tree as the truck went through the trolley wheel barrier.

The truck smashed into the Delta barriers and leaned to nearside. The front two wheels went over the top of the Delta barrier with nearside wheels appearing to puncture. The front of the cab hit the arm gate barrier, which held in position. The front axle and wheels of the cab hooked over the Delta barrier, resulting in the truck becoming stuck and unable to move forward or reverse.

Security worked - the Delta barrier contained the vehicle. As there was no movement from within the cab, there was no action by the security guards, who stood off and began to assess the situation. Their first action was completely consistent with someone thinking that they had just witnessed a road traffic accident.
accident. The body language of the security personnel did not display a reaction consistent with anyone shooting at or being fired at from the truck.

Surrounded by approaching security guards, the suicide driver could not move the truck stuck on the Delta barrier. Apparently concerned that he might be shot or apprehended, and unable to reach the intended target of the hotel building, he took the next best option of detonating the truck at the gate. Thirteen seconds after the impact on the Delta barrier, the suicide bomber initiated an explosion from within the cab area of the truck. The detonation by the bomber did not immediately initiate the larger charge in the truck. Although the rigged explosives device malfunctioned, it incapacitated the bomber instantly and caused a fire inside the cab area of the truck. The security officers backed off – they went off camera, the most credible device recording the events on that day.

After forming a cordon to prevent spectators from approaching the vehicle, the security personnel informed the CCTV operator inside the hotel. The fire brigade was called. The first explosion of bright white light was distinct from a typical engine on fire, but the security guards responded to it as if it was an automobile fire. While waiting for the fire brigade, the guards decided to fight the fire themselves. As there was no fire extinguisher at the security booth, an engineer brought one out from the hotel and proceeded to use it on the fire. The extinguisher, once activated, appeared not to dampen, but to escalate the burning with intense bright light.

It is obvious from the body language that no one thought the vehicle contained a bomb. As there were bricks on the back of the vehicle concealing the explosives, the truck deceived the security personnel and other hotel staff at the gate. (Please see Annex A for chronology of events as analysed from the hotel’s CCTV footage.)

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6 The truck hit the barrier at 7.54.58 and then blew at 7.55.11. Author’s email communication with Andy Williams, Regional Director Loss Prevention, Marriott Hotels International Ltd U.K., September 26, 2008
The Threat and Response

As Pakistan faced a very high threat from terrorism, the Marriott Islamabad was exceptionally well protected. Previously Islamabad had suffered ten suicide attacks starting with the bombing of the Egyptian Embassy on November 19, 1995, killing 14 persons. All the other nine attacks were after May 2006. The first attack that targeted Westerners occurred on March 15, 2008. One foreigner was killed and 15 persons were injured when a suicide bomber targeted an Italian restaurant. On June 2, 2008, an al-Qaeda member from Saudi Arabia attacked the Danish Embassy in a vehicle-borne IED, killing six and injuring 25. As such, the threat to Western nationals was well established in the lead-up to the Marriott attack. Described both by the US State Department and Pakistani media as Pakistan’s 9-11, the worst terrorist attack in Islamabad was the bombing of the Marriott Hotel.

Marriott Islamabad was the world’s most protected hotel until September 20, 2008. One of the two five-star hotels operating in the Federal Capital, Marriott Islamabad complied with the security standards established by Marriott International. With a full-bodied security system developed by Marriott’s Global Vice President for Security Alan Orlob for its hotels worldwide 15 years ago, the Marriott chain was considered the safest. As Orlob said: “Marriott has a robust crisis management programme. We employ two full time analysts - one in Washington and another based in Hong Kong - to assess security conditions on a worldwide basis. When we determine that a threat exists, hotels are directed to employ prescribed counter-measures in three tiers - blue, yellow and red. We audit compliance with these procedures or ‘threat conditions’ using a third party auditor.” At the time of the attack, the Marriott in Islamabad was operating at ‘Threat Condition Red’. Included in ‘Threat Condition Red’ are (a) mandatory vehicle inspections, (b) luggage inspections and, (c) metal detector screening of personnel. The hotel had been audited the month before and had been shown to be in 100% compliance. However, the terrorist attack mounted against Marriott Islamabad was unprecedented in its destructive force.

At the time of the attack, hotel security was robust. Scrutiny of CCTV footage as well as interviews with survivors and government investigators demonstrate the operation of effective security procedures and vigilance prior to the incident. In a 290-room hotel, the occupancy at the time of the attack was 47%. The hotel was protected by 196 hotel security personnel and four bomb-sniffing dogs. At the time of the attack, 60 hotel security personnel, a government intelligence officer, four policemen, and one sniffer dog were on shift. Most of the victims killed were security personnel, drivers, and other hotel employees. The security of the hotel is not outsourced but managed by Karakoram, the hotel’s own security company led by Colonel Zulficar. The Chief of Security for the hotel, Major Tahir Qureshi, said: “I have lost my entire evening shift. I have lost 17 security guards and officers including my deputy. 14 were injured, including five seriously. They included the assistant chief security officer, a security officer, three assistant security officers and 12 guards. They were excellent and outstanding, loyal and dedicated.” He added: “In addition, two government security officers assigned to the hotel were killed. They were from the Intelligence Bureau and traffic

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7 See the last will of the Saudi al-Qaeda suicide bomber responsible for the June 2008 suicide bombing attack of the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, available at http://www.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-prop.html#nefaabughareeb0608
8 Author’s interview with Alan Orlob, Vice President, Marriott International, September 27, 2008.
9 Author’s interview with Major Tahir Qureshi, September 28, 2008.
Most of the security personnel serving at the hotel, including Major Qureshi, were formerly with the military.

Over the years, the hotel enhanced its security. The hotel security personnel stationed on both sides of the entrance to the property were armed with shotguns. The security supervisors were armed with handguns. New bollards had been placed alongside the street - pushing the standoff further out. There were plain-clothes security personnel conducting surveillance detection. There was an officer from the Special Branch of Pakistan stationed at the vehicle checkpoint. He called the attack in when the truck first struck the Delta barrier.

Prior to the attack, the security consisted of 62 CCTV cameras that are always monitored by three security officers. The hotel placed window film on glass in all public areas to provide fragment retention in the event of explosions. In March 2008, the vehicle inspection area was enhanced. Included in that security enhancement was a combination of a drop-down barrier and hydraulic Delta barriers. It had under-vehicle cameras that sent pictures to a monitor in the security booth. These cameras also recorded on stand-alone CCTV in the security booth. Additional cameras recorded the license plates of vehicles.

The Response to the Attack

The CCTV camera recording events at the main entrance to the hotel provides invaluable details of the event. Of the two gate entrances to the hotel - Gate 1 and Gate 2 - the truck rammed Gate 2, which is to the right of Gate 1 when viewed from the hotel lobby. Separating the gates is a hedge, obscuring a security booth, where a CCTV operator monitored the underside of vehicles at the checkpoint barrier.

10 Author’s interview with Major Tahir Qureshi, September 28, 2008.
11 Major Qureshi served 24 years in the Pakistani army, including 10 years in Military Intelligence and Inter-Services Intelligence. In March 2008, he succeeded Colonel Javed Ashraff Bhattas as Chief of Security.
12 Six external CCTV cameras feeding into the security booth were lost during the explosion. There was no dedicated cable feed to the main CCTV control room in the hotel building. Crucial close up recording relating to

Security measures at the Marriott hotel entrance before the attack
Physical security of the gates began with a single trolley barrier at each gate. This small barrier on wheels indicated to drivers that a security checkpoint was ahead and he ought to slow down. In normal circumstances, when the car slows down, the security guard wheels the trolley barrier to one side. The car then moves slowly up to the Delta barrier in a position adjacent to the security booth. While the guard who wheels the trolley barrier then opens the trunk (boot) of the car, another guard inside the booth screens the underside of the car with the fixed underside CCTV camera. Another guard speaks to the driver and looks into the inside of the vehicle. If all is good, the guard inside the booth will operate the Delta barrier to lower. Directly in front of the Delta barrier is a heavy-duty arm gate barrier - as the Delta barrier lowers the arm gate barrier is raised manually through a rope. As the vehicle clears the arm gate barrier, the Delta barrier rises and the trolley barrier is rolled back into place.

Prior to the arrival of the truck, CCTV footage demonstrates that the physical security barriers were operating. The security officers were following standard procedures and also acting with vigilance, with at least two officers maintaining constant observation of oncoming traffic. In addition to the policeman, a sniffer dog was positioned between the two gate entrances. When the attack took place, the CCTV control room by the main loading dock operator went into full swing. After the initial explosion, the CCTV operator informed the assistant chief security officer. He sat next to the operator in the control room and watched the developments before moving to the gate to take charge of the situation. The Security Chief, Major Qureshi, was not at the site during the attack but returned to lead the rescue and relief operations.

The security personnel thought that it was an accident initially. The driver was on fire. “The body was in one whole piece but on fire.” If the driver had exploded a grenade or a suicide belt/vest, the body would not be intact. The CCTV controller and supervisor on duty in the hotel security control room who heard conversations during the two minutes when everyone was standing back from the truck said the driver was on fire but appeared to have died immediately during the first explosion in the cab. As the driver was apparently dead, the truck had not blown up, and the fire appeared to going out, the security and hotel emergency response team waited for the police. Their understanding was that the incident was now under the supervision of the police and they were awaiting further instruction.

Key actions minutes after the suicide truck approached the target identify seven security personnel at various times in the video. While the suicide vehicle was stuck at the barrier, vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians passed on the main road. Although the security personnel did not block the access road to the hotel entrance, with the help of the doormen and other staff, they formed a cordon in front of the hotel. The front entrance video does not show this effort but the cordon saved lives. The initial explosion gave sufficient warning for the emergency team to move the guests to safe areas. The emergency teams consisted of non-security staff trained by security staff to assist in a crisis. Their quick response perhaps
explains why only five registered guests perished during the ensuing fire. The Czech Ambassador, who was living on an upper floor of the hotel, was alive after the explosion. He was injured. He called for help and phoned the embassy to rescue him. But the intensity of the fire prevented the rescue teams from reaching him."  

Although it was Ramadan, there was no 'weakness' or dilution of security procedures at the time of the incident. The most glaring security lapse was the failure of the government’s security measures; they allowed a truck-full of explosives to enter the high security zone. Furthermore, government response was too slow. Although the hotel is located on the edge of the security Red Zone, police and emergency support did not arrive prior to the main blast. From the time people reappeared to tackle the incident following the 2-minute standoff to when the final explosion occurred, 25 vehicles drove past the scene at various intervals. In all, some 40 vehicles drove past from the start of the incident. The traffic police officer on duty who saw the initial crash and first explosion radioed this information to his HQ. Within this crucial seven minutes, the Assistant Chief Security Manager also called for the fire brigade on his cell phone. But, from the time the suicide bomber rammed into the retractable metal barrier and bar at the security checkpoint, until it turned into a fireball, there was no government response.

Although not captured on CCTV, one traffic policeman, an armed Sergeant and three policemen, a plain-clothes special branch surveillance office and one sniffer dog were also on duty. When the vehicle caught fire, the armed Sergeant and the three policemen left the site. When interviewed, the Chief of Security alleged that the police realized it was a bomb and abandoned the target area. While they survived the explosion, the IB officer at the hotel’s porch and the Traffic Sergeant across the road were killed. It was hotel security measures that worked to prevent an even greater loss of life and property. The anti-terrorist vehicle crash barrier worked effectively to prevent the suicide truck driver from gaining entrance to the hotel compound, the devastation would have been manifold.

![The hotel car park sign says it all](image_url)
Clues to Attack Planning on the Jihadi Websites?

The jihadi websites celebrated the attack. A jihadi website identified the Delta barrier as the single most important factor that prevented the destruction of the hotel. The website issued a report on the capabilities of barriers available.

Immediately after the attack, a jihadist website, the Islamic Falljuah Forum, posted pictures of the hotel before and after the attack. The insurance giant AIG and Marriott International initially believed that the photographs were terrorist pre-surveillance pictures. After researching the source of the images in the Islamic Falljuah Forum, ICPVTR-SITE Institute analysis concluded that the images of the hotel prior to the attack were not related to the attack or used as surveillance photographs. They appear to have come from the personal album of an individual using Photobucket.

The individual that took the pictures appears to have stayed at the hotel and took pictures from around the hotel, including shots of the bathroom and the bed in the hotel room, and furniture in the hotel, which indicates that it was not done for surveillance purposes. Furthermore, the same individual posted his Photobucket images of the hotel on the Urbanpk.com message board on November 10, 2006, nearly two years before the attack, which also indicates they were not surveillance photos. An Internet search on this individual reveals that he might be a student of architecture.

A Google image search using the words "islamabad marriott" provides the same photos of the hotel prior to the attack as the ones posted on Falljuah Forum; they are from the Urbanpk.com message board with the images from 2006. The message thread was also updated after the attack with images taken showing the aftermath of the bombing. Thus, it seems very likely that "Abu Usama", the user who posted the message with the images on the Falljuah Forum, simply did a Google image search for Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, found the urbanpk.com message board with all the images of the hotel, both before and after the attack, and then re-posted them to the Falljuah forum.

Unanswered Questions

As in every attack, there are many unanswered questions in the Marriott Islamabad bombing. As of today, there is no evidence of a gas leak. As such, the massive fire remains a puzzle. The Government of Pakistan claimed that the main charge in the IED was RDX and TNT - military explosives. However, foreign EOD specialists argue that it was a Potassium Chlorate and possibly diesel oil bomb. They argue that the attack modus operandi was similar to the attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad, FIA building in Lahore, Hamza camp and Pakistan Air Force, Saragodha attacks.

There are indications that the bomb used in the Marriott attack, while big at possibly 700-800 kilos, was not well-made. Al Qaeda and Taliban are poor at producing quality VBIEDs. Yet, as an EOD specialist points out: “When you stand next to one; it does not really matter, you

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will die. However it does matter when you move further away or if you are inside a building.”

The perpetrators have not been identified but it is very likely that Al Qaeda and Taliban are responsible for the attack. Today, multiple threat groups operate together in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, especially in Waziristan. As it marked the 9-11 attacks in September, Al Qaeda called for attacks in Pakistan.

The Future of Hospitality Security

Today, Marriott has over 3,000 hotels, 331 operating outside the United States, making it one of the world’s largest and most prestigious hotel chains. Marriott International is the parent group and Marriott Lodging manages Marriott, Renaissance and Courtyard hotels operating outside the US. Marriott International also owns Marriott Vacation Club and Ritz Carlton.

It was only in 1993 that Marriott started to expand internationally. At that time, Marriott only had three international hotels. The only properties Marriott had outside the US were in Cairo, Amsterdam and Athens. Starting with Latin America, they knew they were going to high risk countries. Marriott Lodgings President Ed Fuller came to Alan Orlob, the Vice President for Security, and asked him to develop a security plan. Orlob said: “15 years ago when we developed a crisis plan, people said it gathers dust. But today, it has become a bestseller. We developed threat conditions. Two analysts were dedicated to scanning and informing threat 24/7: when one watched, the other slept. Three years ago, we knew that an outside audit was necessary to maintain the credibility of the programme. We hired Control Risks to audit the hotels. An announced audit, they use a check list that we developed.”

Referring to Marriott Islamabad, Orlob said: “This hotel has always been operating at threat condition Red. A month ago, it was audited and passed the audit with 100% compliance. We have more security at this hotel than most of our hotels in the system.”

Despite the attack against Marriott Islamabad, there is a spirit in the hospitality industry to fight back. Marriott will continue to look at projects in Iraq and Afghanistan and maintain its presence in Pakistan - the three countries in the world that suffer most from suicide terrorism. Orlob said: “Within the last six months, I visited all the three places: Baghdad (June), Afghanistan (July) and Pakistan (October).” It is likely that the Marriott hotels in Iraq and Afghanistan will be protected to the same degree as the U.S. embassies in Baghdad and Kabul.

Vowing that a new Marriott hotel will rise from ashes, the owner of Marriott Islamabad, Sadruddin Hashwani is determined to start operating again on January 1st 2009. Hashwani personally visited and supervised the rebuilding and the refurbishing of the hotel. Within a week, the lobby was cleared and the workers started to repaint the premises. Hashwani’s

24 Confidential Source, EOD Specialist, Western security and intelligence service, September 24, 2008
25 Author’s interview with Alan Orlob, Vice President, Marriott International, September 27, 2008.
26 Author’s interview with Alan Orlob, Vice President, Marriott International, September 27, 2008.
27 Author’s interview with Alan Orlob, Vice President, Marriott International, September 27, 2008.
28 “Hashwani Vows a New Marriott will Rise from Ashes,” Pakistan Tribune, September 25, 2008
daughter Sara launched the Hashoo Foundation Sahara Fund to provide financial support to the families of the victims. Sara called them “martyrs”. More than ever before, there is a greater understanding internationally and a will to fight terrorism and extremism within the community. Although they all realize the limitations to securing hotels in high-risk countries, there is a tremendous will not to give up.

![The hotel lobby post-attack](image)

**Paradigm Shift in Response Strategy?**

When responding to natural and man-made disasters, hotel strategies are different. While natural disasters are inevitable, vulnerable targets can be protected from terrorist attacks. Ideally a hotel’s resources are allocated to managing the consequences of a natural disaster and protecting it from a terrorist attack.

Despite significant investment, the terrorists were successful in causing significant loss of life and property at Marriott Islamabad. Does the Marriott Islamabad case study change the paradigm? The lesson of Marriott Islamabad is that hotels and other open facilities should operate on the principle that a terrorist attack is inevitable. In future, hotels in conflict zones have to equally invest to protect as well as to manage consequences.

With international hotels becoming second embassies, hotels alone cannot protect their facilities. No longer can a hotel be protected only by securing its perimeter. To manage their security, hotels must build liaison with law enforcement authorities to protect, intelligence agencies to prevent, and emergency services to manage the crisis after an event. With 90-95% of the infrastructure owned or operated by the private sector, law enforcement authorities should create a specialist cadre of policemen to work with the private sector. Governments with access to intelligence and specialist resources should guide and assist the private sector, including the security industry, to develop the specialist understanding and knowledge to prevent, protect and respond.

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29 Author’s interview with Sara Hashwani, October 2, 2008.
Lessons Learnt

Today, the hospitality industry is facing a dilemma in high-risk countries. The question is how they can protect a hotel any more than they already are – how can they add another layer without creating the impression of a fortress?

In addition to a security plan to protect the hotel, there should be a robust response action plan. The focus must be not only to deter and prevent an attack but also to respond when an attack is successful. During the crucial seven minutes, the security personnel were perplexed as to the exact course of action to take against the truck. In any attack, unless personnel are trained to respond to specific scenarios, they take considerable time to make sense of the event. Was it an ordinary vehicle fire or a terrorist incident? Does a vehicle fire generate the white fumes and bright flames the truck generated? There should be training specific to meet the challenges of safety and security incidents. Such model training and rehearsals will enable security personnel to anticipate the most likely modus operandi and respond effectively.

Both the security and non-security personnel at the Islamabad Marriott had conducted exercises on emergency evaluation. In a crisis, most security and non-security staff are likely to respond the way they have been trained. In the crucial seven minutes, several hundred lives were saved because Marriott security and non-security staff collaborated to move guests away from harm’s way. If not for the staff training and exercises, several hundred guests might have become casualties.

To integrate and synergize capabilities, government-private sector partnership is crucial. To better understand and respond to the threat environment, future hotels should build robust and lasting partnerships with government. It is not only the private sector that must reach out to government, but government intelligence and law enforcement should create specialist liaison units. If there were a terrorist attack, it would erode investor confidence and tourism causing the entire country to suffer.\footnote{After the Marriott attack in Islamabad, British Airways temporarily suspended all flights to Pakistan.} Government leaders must thus understand the high cost of non-cooperation. The basic building block of an effective partnership with government is for hotels themselves to work together. For instance, every country under threat should form a hotel security association to share best practices. Unfortunately, there is severe competition between the hotels. Most hotels do not realize that if one single international hotel were attacked, it would impact the entire hospitality industry.\footnote{“Reservations at luxury hotels drop by 50%,” Daily Times, Pakistan, September 22, 2008. After the Serena Hotel was attacked in Kabul in 2008 and the Italian restaurant in Islamabad was attacked the same year, international NGOs, the UN, and embassies restricted their staff from frequenting hotels and restaurants.}

An Enduring Threat

With the Afghan-Pakistan border re-emerging as the global epicentre of terrorism, terrorists worldwide are likely to learn from the successes and failures of this attack.\footnote{Al Qaeda’s operations leader Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, the mastermind of 9-11 who was arrested not far away from the Marriott, developed the “lose and learn doctrine.”} As terrorists are constantly maximizing their successes and minimizing their failures, it is paramount for governments never to underestimate the terrorist threat. For instance, on the day of the attack,
Rehman Malik, the Interior Ministry chief, boasted to reporters outside parliament that terrorism had diminished “by 90%” after the new government came to power.\textsuperscript{33}

Until government forces establish territorial control of Pakistan’s frontier, the threat from Pakistani Taliban, Al Qaeda and their associated groups will persist. As the Taliban controls parts of tribal Pakistan, the Taliban collects taxes from businesses.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, the Taliban has access to contractors using heavy vehicles to transport construction material from tribal Pakistan to mainland Pakistan.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, the Taliban has access to explosives used to blast quarries.\textsuperscript{36} Merely by cordoning the Federal Capital and other urban centres, Pakistan cannot be protected from the threat emanating from tribal Pakistan. Unless dismantled, the Taliban capabilities to mount attacks of this scale on mainland Pakistan will grow.

\textbf{The Author}

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\textsuperscript{33} Omar Waraich, “Marriott Terror: A Challenge to Pakistan's Leaders,” Lahore Times, September 20, 2008
\textsuperscript{34} Ali Hazrat Bacha, “PESHAWAR: Swat forests at the mercy of militants,” Dawn, October 1, 2008
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
Annex A

Chronology of the Attack as recorded on CCTV

7.53.00: A dark four-wheel vehicle passes through gate and turns left into the lower external car park.

7.53.03: A security guard at public road perimeter boundary of entrance to Gate 1 rolls single trolley barrier back into place following entry of the dark vehicle and remains in position.

7.53.07: Another guard joins the first guard at Gate 1 perimeter road entrance. Facing direction of oncoming traffic, they appear to be talking.

7.53.42: A dark car turns left into Gate 2 entrance checkpoint. Two guards standing at Gate 1 entrance in position observe arrival of car and oncoming traffic.

7.53.58: Another two guards stationed on Gate 2 complete stop and search of dark car. Two officers at Gate 1 entrance are still in place.

7.54.09: Barriers seen to be fully functional, i.e. Delta barrier lowers, arm gate barrier lifts to allow car to go through. As soon as car passes, Delta barrier begins to rise and arm gate is lowered. As Delta barrier is fully raised, dark car turns left into lower car park.

7.54.54: The suicide truck with the headlights on full beam approaches the road leading to the entrance of the hotel. Two security guards have been in position since 7.53.07 are facing oncoming traffic. Unless they are to the side of the vehicle, the headlights mask the truck’s approach.

7.54.55: The security guards do not move as the truck turns sharply into the entrance of gate 2, then they appear to both step back in unison in anticipation.37

7.54.56: The truck goes through trolley wheel barrier - truck body container appears oversized to truck cab. The two guards at Gate 1 edge back towards large tree

7.54.57: Instead of running away, two security guards at Gate 2 brace themselves for what could be a traffic accident. The truck swings around in a small arc with the driver’s side closest to the security booth, then straightens full on towards the Delta barrier and arm gate with headlights still on full beam.

7.54.58: Two guards at Gate 2 move quickly across to Gate 2 from what appears to be the security booth as the truck smashes into the Delta barrier

7.55.00: Two additional guards run out from security booth area across to Gate 1 on the hotel side of the arm gate barrier. Another officer runs across from Gate 2 to Gate 1. Driver's side

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37 Freeze framing at this time gives a good view of the side of the truck and an indication of size and wheelbase.
headlight turns off, possibly damaged with the crash impact. Seven officers are now seen in area of Gate 1.

7.55.05: One guard walks from direction of Gate 1 to Gate 2 out of CCTV coverage, behind the security booth towards the truck cab

7.55.07: Second guard runs forward in same direction obscured from CCTV view.

7.55.08: A third guard runs forward from Gate 1 in same direction. A fourth person approaches from lower car park in bottom right hand of screen.

7.55.11: Bomber detonates the truck. From the point of impact and the first explosion of bright white light, the bomber took 13 seconds to make that decision.  

7.55.12: All persons in view of camera run out of sight in various directions. The person who walked up from the lower car park to approach the truck holds his hands over his ears and keeps them there directly after the explosion.

7.55.17: Everyone has now disappeared from view - the truck is left standing alone with white smoke billowing up from the cab. The truck remained still with a body inside for nearly 2 minutes (1955.17 - 1957.10). During the next one minute and 53 seconds, the security team formed a cordon in front of the hotel to keep people back from the truck. There was no traffic for 31 seconds (1954.59 - 1955.30).

7.56.20: Flames start to appear from truck cab.

7.57.10: People start to emerge into CCTV view from direction of hotel. Dressed in white, the valet car driver was the first to appear. He was joined a few seconds later by a security guard.

7.57.25: After approaching cautiously, the guard appears to be looking down at the bottom of the truck by the cab. He is joined by another security guard carrying a fire extinguisher in his right hand. The fire extinguisher, a powder or CO2 type, is brought out from the hotel; it appears there are no fire extinguishers at the security gate entrance. He does not approach the truck to try to extinguish the fire.

7.57.38: A group of security officers appear in view, approaching the Gate 1 barrier. They make sweeping move towards but at a cautious distance from the truck.

38 On first view of the cab explosion there appears to be debris or shrapnel flying across the top of the screen - however on analysis these are birds scattering from within the trees directly above and around the gates.

39 This event is not covered by CCTV.

40 No pedestrians or other activity is seen outside the gate or the opposite walkway during this period of time. Andy Williams considers this an anomaly compared to the rest of the video footage where there is consistent movement of traffic or pedestrians in either direction outside the gate entrance. There are 15 vehicles (9 x cars - 1 x 4x4 - 3 x m/cycles - 2 x mini vans - 1 x pedestrian in opposite carriageway) going past the truck at various intervals. Author’s interview with Andy Williams, Regional Director Loss Prevention, Marriott Hotels International Ltd U.K. September 28, 2008.
7.58.01: Black car slows down and appears to start to turn left into hotel but on seeing truck moves off and passes by hotel without trying to enter through Gate 1. Since the truck crashed into the gate, after a hiatus of three minutes, this is the first car that appears to try and enter the hotel.

7.58.13: The first guard on scene seems to be leading. Although the truck is still smouldering, the guard with the fire extinguisher moves away. Neither he nor anyone else has engaged the fire in the cab.

7.58.17: Two guards reappear with first guard, one carrying an extinguisher

7.58.24: There appears to be a short consultation between the three guards. Two guards then go out of sight in direction of the rear of the truck.

7.58.36: Two additional guards appear, followed by more, including one engineer. All stay in area of Gate 1.

7.58.46: First activation of fire extinguisher by security guard. He goes to the rear driver’s side of the truck. He moves forward so he can attack the fire from inside the truck. This is where the driver would be if the body is still on fire. There is one minute and 36 seconds elapsed from the time people approach the cab after the two minute standoff, to when a fire extinguisher is used (1957.10 - 1958.46).

7.59.00: The guards move away thinking that the extinguisher may be too small and they need a bigger one.

7.59.13: The fire becomes more intense. The fire is bright white light with blue haze.

8.00.01: Very intense white light fire from cab area rising vertically from front of truck, possibly molten white slick on roadway in front of truck.

8.00.22: Activity from security guards outside Gate 1 to the left of the tree.

8.00.29: One guard moves into view of Gate 1 entrance by roadway

8.00.33: A guard standing at Gate 1 appears to give the guard an instruction at 2000.29. The guard appears to run in roadway in direction of Gate 2.

8.00.36: This guard can be seen running down the road out of view in the same direction as where the truck originally came from.

8.00.53: Another guard appears from back of truck area or roadway. He is the original guard who appears to give an instruction - he eventually moves back out of site past Gate 1, and is joined by another guard who runs out from the hotel and turns left past Gate 1 out of site.

8.00.59: Engineer runs forward with another extinguisher - cab area burning more intensely - flames look like they may be coming from behind cab.

8.01.04: Engineer attacks front of cab, flames fan upwards
8.01.08: A small explosion at top right hand side of cab; fire becomes more intense.

8.01.11: Another flare-up or small explosion causing engineer to react to it and direct extinguisher to where flash comes from.

8.01.16: The arm gate at Gate 1 lifts possibly to allow easier access for emergency services to arrive and enter hotel compound.

8.01.19: Engineer continues to use extinguisher but fire now too intense; engineer cannot see but extinguisher is fanning flames upwards.

8.01.27: Everyone in front of truck starts to run away

8.01.31: Another small CO2/powder extinguisher is used to engage fire at front of truck but to no effect.

8.01.58: Truck cab area becomes a fireball; people start to move away and evacuate the area.

8.02.00: End of footage due to main blast explosion. All persons seen in footage appear to have been killed.
The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** was established in January 2007 as an autonomous School within the Nanyang Technological University. RSIS’ mission is to be a leading research and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. To accomplish this mission, it will:

- Provide a rigorous professional graduate education with a strong practical emphasis,
- Conduct policy-relevant research in defence, national security, international relations, strategic studies and diplomacy,
- Collaborate with like-minded schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence.

**Graduate Training in International Affairs**
RSIS offers an exacting graduate education in international affairs, taught by an international faculty of leading thinkers and practitioners. The teaching programme consists of the Master of Science (MSc) degrees in Strategic Studies, International Relations, International Political Economy, and Asian Studies as well as an MBA in International Studies taught jointly with the Nanyang Business School. The education provided is distinguished by its focus on the Asia Pacific, the professional practice of international affairs, and the emphasis on academic depth. Over 150 students, the majority from abroad, are enrolled with the School. A small and select Ph.D. programme caters to advanced students whose interests match those of specific faculty members.

**Research**
RSIS research is conducted by five constituent Institutes and Centres: the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS, founded 1996), the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR, 2002), the Centre of Excellence for National Security (CENS, 2006), the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (2008), and the soon-to-be launched Temasek Foundation Centre for Trade and Negotiations. The focus of research is on issues relating to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and their implications for Singapore and other countries in the region. The School has three professorships that bring distinguished scholars and practitioners to teach and to do research at the School. They are the S. Rajaratnam Professorship in Strategic Studies, the Ngee Ann Kongsi Professorship in International Relations, and the NTUC Professorship in International Economic Relations.

**International Collaboration**
Collaboration with other professional schools of international affairs to form a global network of excellence is a RSIS priority. RSIS will initiate links with other like-minded schools so as to enrich its research and teaching activities as well as adopt the best practices of successful schools.
ABOUT ICPVTR

The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist centre within RSIS. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with practical knowledge, which is essential for complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically motivated groups. Its research staff comprises functional and regional analysts from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Oceania, Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East. They are drawn from academia, and from government agencies and also includes Muslim religious scholars. The Centre seeks to maintain its unique cultural and linguistic diversity. More than fifty percent of ICPVTR staff are Muslims.

Mission

ICPVTR conducts research, training and outreach programmes aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and at mitigating its effects on the international system.

Core Objectives

- To conduct sustained research and analysis of terrorist, guerrilla, militia and extremist political groups and their support bases. To this end, the Centre collects and analyses literature seeking to politicize, radicalize and mobilize the public into supporting extremism and participating in violence.
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of international, state and societal responses in managing the threat of political violence.
- To provide high quality instruction and training for officials and future leaders engaged in combating terrorism and other forms of political violence.
- To advise government and inform societies affected by political violence on how best to manage the current and evolving threat.

Core Projects

Database
The ICPVTR terrorism database – the Global Pathfinder II - is a one-stop repository for information on current and emerging threats. The database consists of profiles of terrorists and terrorist groups, significant incidents, as well as profiles of training camps and individuals and institutions involved in terrorist financing. It also hosts primary and secondary documents including original documents collected from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines amongst others. Our special collection includes more than 250 videos recovered from Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, videos and training manuals from various conflict zones and over 400 jihadi websites.

Capacity Building
In addition to teaching courses at the Masters level, ICPVTR threat specialists conduct various levels of specialized courses for Singaporean and foreign law enforcement personnel from agencies like the military and police forces. The ICPVTR capacity building programme is geared towards providing world-class education and training for serving and future leaders in counter-terrorism.
Strategic Counter-Terrorism Projects
ICPVTR’s strategic counter-terrorism projects include ideological, legislative, educational, financial, media, informatics and developmental initiatives. These strategic projects seek to create an environment hostile to terrorist groups and unfriendly to their supporters and sympathisers. ICPVTR seeks to build a norm and an ethic against politically motivated violence, especially terrorism.

As terrorists and extremists emerge from the community in which they live, the ICPVTR popularized the phrase “Communities Defeat Terrorism” in Singapore. Our staff actively participates in the work of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), which is engaged in counselling and rehabilitation of Jemaah Islamiyah detainees in Singapore. The RRG also reaches out to the community to promote the value of religious tolerance in Singapore.

Similarly, ICPVTR pioneered the concept of engaging the financial sector and law enforcement agencies to deny terrorist groups access to the financial sector. In collaboration with the Association of Banks in Singapore, ICPVTR works to develop indicators and best practices in countering the financing of terrorism.