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Sectarian Terrorism in Pakistan During 2009 - International Terrorism Monitor

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The year 2009 ended with two attacks by suicide bombers on processions to mark the culmination of the period of Muharrum observed by the Shias of Pakistan. Fifteen persons were killed in the first incident at Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK), on December 27. Forty-two were killed in the second incident in Karachi on December 28.

2. Sectarian clashes between Shias and Sunnis occur frequently in the Northern Areas consisting of Gilgit and Baltistan, where the Shias constitute the largest single sectarian group. To counter the growing influence of Shia sectarian organizations such as the Tehrik-e-Jaffria Pakistan and its militant wing called the Sipah Mohammad, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had over the years encouraged and helped Sunni extremist organizations such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LEJ) to set up a presence in the Gilgit area. This has led to periodic clashes between the two communities.

3. The POK itself, where the Shias are in a very small minority, was till now relatively free of anti-Shia incidents. The attack on a Shia procession in Muzaffarabad has, therefore, comes as a surprise. One possible reason could be the anger of the Sunni organizations of the POK over the recent decision of the Government of President Asif Ali Zardari to upgrade the political status of the Northern Areas in order to make it a de facto separate province without giving it the de jure status of a separate province. This amounted to a rejection of the long-standing demand of the Sunni leaders and political organizations of the POK to merge the Northern Areas with the POK.

The Shias were strongly opposed to it. It is quite likely that the attack on the Muharrum procession at Muzaffarabad was in retaliation for this decision of the Zardari Govt to virtually recognize the separate status of the Kashmiri Shias in Pakistan.

4. Anti-Shia incidents and targeted assassinations of Shia professionals in Karachi have been a frequent occurrence ever since Pakistan became independent in 1947. When Pervez Musharraf was in power, a large number of Shia doctors were killed in Karachi by Sunni extremists. Sindh and the Baloch majority districts of Balochistan are the only areas of Pakistan where the extremist ideology of the Deobandi-Wahabi sects have spread the least. The majority of the Sunnis in these areas follow even today the more tolerant Barelvi sect and have kept away from the Deobandi/Wahabi groups. The Barelvis have more cordial relations with the Shias than the Deobandis and Wahabis. This has made both the Barelvi Sunnis and Shias of these areas the targets of periodic attacks by organizations such as the LEJ and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In 2006, the entire leadership of the Barelvi Sunni Tehrik in Karachi was wiped out in a terrorist attack by a Sunni suicide bomber.

5. Since 2007, the sectarian strife in Pakistan has been rendered more virulent by certain developments such as the following:

(a). In an interview disseminated in December, 2007, by As-Sahab, the propaganda wing of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, its No.2, accused Iran of stabbing the Ummah in the back by allegedly colluding in the US occupation of Afghanistan and Iran. He said: "Iran stabbed the Muslim Ummah in the back and recorded a historic mark of shame against itself and against the Shites who follow it. The effects of this stab will stay in the memory of Muslims for a long time to come."

(b). Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban suspected that the Pashtun Shias of the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas and the Dera Ismail Khan area of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) were colluding with the Americans in their operations against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. They nursed similar suspicion against the Hazaras of Balochistan, who are Shias.

6. This resulted in Al Qaeda joining hands with the Pakistani Taliban and Punjabi organizations such as the LEJ and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM) in attacking the Shias in the Kurram Agency of the FATA, where there are a large number of Shias and in the Dera Ismail Khan area of the NWFP.

7. The "Post", a Pakistani daily published from Peshawar,, reported as follows on December 31, 2007: "A delegation of notables from Kurram Agency has appealed to President Pervez Musharraf and Chief of Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani to stop the ongoing violence that has resulted in the loss of more than 100 lives and billions of rupees' worth of property. Haji Latif Hussain, President, Kurram Welfare Society, said the residents had been fighting the Taliban infiltrating from Afghanistan, North and South Waziristan and Al Qaeda operatives in the area who were thousands in number. He added over 70 people had been killed in furious clashes during the last 45 days. "The armed forces of Pakistan are playing the role of silent spectators instead of countering the attackers and protecting the residents under attack," he said. Latif Hussain said Al Qaeda fighters had occupied various areas of Kurram Agency and blocked

the main road from Peshawar to Parachinar, resulting in a shortage of basic commodities. "There is an acute shortage of medicines, food, electricity and water," he added. The Kurram Welfare Society President said that as a result of the war, hundreds of women, children and the elderly had taken refuge in Peshawar while over a hundred students who were unable to move to their native areas because of the war had been forced to stay in Islamabad. Mehdi Ghulam from Kurram Agency said Alizai, Balyamin, Tangi Amro Khail, Arravali, Santikot, Singk, Burqi and Pevar were under Taliban and Al Qaeda attacks while dozens of injured were waiting for their death in the Parachinar hospital owing to a shortage of medicines."

8. Muhammad Hussain Turi, Secretary of the Ittehad-e-Ummat Committee, said: "We are not only fighting for our lives and the area but also for the sovereignty of our country. We are fighting the international war against terrorism on our borders by shedding our blood but, instead of helping us, everyone is creating trouble for us by trying to stop us from defending our area." Turi appealed to the President and the Chief of the Army Staff to issue a directive to the army to intervene to save the lives of thousands of people. The Turis of Kurram, like the Hazaras of Afghanistan and Balochistan, are Shias.

9. Gull Ishrat, member, Kurram Welfare Society, said: "We are fighting the battle of the Pakistan Army against those who managed to escape from Swat, Bajaur, North and South Waziristan and Afghanistan and are involved in furious attacks on the Pakistan Army."

10. The clashes picked up fresh intensity since the beginning of July, 2008, reportedly resulting in over a thousand fatalities on both sides. The Shia leaders of Karachi strongly protested against the failure of the Pakistan Government and Army to protect the Shias in these areas. On September 1, 2008, the Shias of Karachi held a large demonstration to protest against the attacks on the Shias of Kurram and Dera Ismail Khan by Al Qaeda and the Taliban and threatened to take out a long march of the Shias from Karachi to these areas if the Govt. did not stop the atrocities on the Shias in those areas by Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the LEJ.

11. This made matters worse for the Shias all over Pakistan and particularly in the Pashtun tribal belt with many murderous acts of terrorism against the Shias during 2009. Among the major acts of terrorism against the Shias during 2009 before the Muzafarabad and Karachi attacks were the following:

- January 4: At least seven people were killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the Government Polytechnic College near a Shia imambargah on Multan Road in Dera Ismail Khan.
- January 26: At least five people were killed in a bomb blast in Dera Ismail Khan. Hussain Ali Yousafi, Chairman of the Hazara Democratic Party, was shot dead in Quetta.
- February 5: 32 people were killed when a suspected suicide bomber blew himself up amidst a crowd of Shia worshippers outside a Dera Ghazi Khan mosque. Police said the blast targeted dozens of people converging on the Shia Al Hussainia Mosque after dark, shortly before a religious gathering.
- February 20: A curfew was imposed in Dera Ismail Khan and the army called in to quell riots immediately after a suicide bomber killed at least 30 Shias and injured another 157 who were attending a funeral in southern Dera Ismail Khan district. Witnesses said police

ran away when gunfire broke out after the blast at the funeral of Shia leader Sher Zaman – who was gunned down a day earlier.

- March 2: A suicide bomber killed five and injured 12 people at a Shia girls' religious school in the Pishin District of Balochistan.
- March 5: One person was killed and 19 others injured when a hand-grenade hurled by unidentified elements at the worshippers exploded in the Ameer Hamza mosque in Dera Ismail Khan. In Peshawar, unidentified elements blew up the mausoleum of the most-revered mystic poet of the Pakhtun land Rahman Baba.
- March 27: 76 persons were killed and over 100 injured in an apparent suicide attack on a mosque on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway in Jamrud in the Khyber Agency.
- April 5: A suicide bomber blew himself up at a Shia religious gathering in an Imambargah in Chakwal, killing at least 22 people and wounding 60.
- June 5: At least 40 people were killed and another 70 injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a mosque in Hayagai Sharqai village in the Upper Dir District.
- June 12: A leading Sunni Barelvi cleric, Sarfraz Ahmed Naeemi with anti-Taliban views, and six others were killed by a suicide bomber at the Jamia Naeemia madrassa on the Allama Iqbal Road in the Garhi Shahu area of Lahore. In Nowshera, five worshippers were killed and 105 others injured when a suicide bomber rammed his explosives-laden van into a mosque in the Cantonment area on the Grand Trunk Road. The TTP claimed responsibility for the suicide attacks in Lahore and Nowshera.
- December 18: A suicide bombing occurred just outside a mosque in Taimergara in Lower Dir District. At least 12 people, most of them policemen, were killed and 28 wounded.

12. Jihadi terrorism in Pakistan was the outgrowth of anti-Shia terrorism encouraged by Zia ul-Haq after the success of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 in order to intimidate the Shias. Most of the jihadi terrorist leaders of Pakistan occupying important positions in the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) and the JEM had initially been members of the anti-Shia Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and the LEJ. After it captured power in Kabul in 1996 with the help of the ISI, the Afghan Taliban under Mulla Mohammad Omar indulged in a wave of violence against the Hazaras. The Shura of the Afghan Taliban, which now operates from the Pashtun majority areas of Balochistan, including Quetta, its capital, has been trying to intimidate the Hazaras of Balochistan.

13. The Mohajir Shias of Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh are largely migrants from India's Uttar Pradesh, the then undivided province of Bombay and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh and their descendants. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the ISI tried to weaken the leadership of Altaf Hussain, the Mohajir leader, who now lives in exile in the UK, by making overtures to the Mohajir Shias, but when they remained loyal to Altaf the ISI instigated the Sunni extremist organizations to attack the Shias. When the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) did well in the elections of December 1988 after the death of Zia, the Army then headed by Gen.Mirza Aslam Beg and the ISI then headed by Lt.Gen.Hamid Gul opposed Benazir Bhutto from becoming the Prime Minister on the ground that her mother Nusrat Bhutto was a Shia. Ultimately, she became the Prime Minister on strong US backing.

14. The post-2007 escalation in anti-Shia violence has been due to Al Qaeda, the TTP and the LEJ, which is now allied with Al Qaeda. It is difficult to explain the Army's silence and inaction

in the face of this escalation. No campaign against jihadi terrorism in Pakistan can succeed unless anti-Shia terrorism is eliminated. Hardly any attention is paid to it by any Government--- whether headed by the Army or by the political parties.