

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم وېر زنده پک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

AP News

Militants show sophisticated tactics in Pakistan

Commando-style attacks in Pakistan demonstrate militants' sophisticated tactics

ROHAN SULLIVAN

Jun 11, 2009

Two commando-style assaults in Pakistan in the past two weeks show militants can now pierce the iron-fortified gates, concrete barricades and cordons of armed guards that are meant to secure hotels, housing compounds and even police stations across the country.

The level of organization and sophistication of the attacks has been rarely seen in Pakistan. They are designed to send a message that if the military launches an offensive against the Taliban's stronghold near the Afghan border it will face a highly determined and well-prepared enemy, analysts say.

A team of suicide assailants in two vehicles opened fire on security guards, then were able to drive through the main gate of the luxury Pearl Continental Hotel in Peshawar late Tuesday and detonate a huge bomb close enough to the building to collapse part of the reinforced concrete structure.

The tactics mirrored closely an assault exactly two weeks earlier on a police building and a regional headquarters of Pakistan's top intelligence agency in the eastern city of Lahore.

In that attack, gunmen leaped from a van that stopped at a guard post blocking the street leading to the security buildings. They opened fire and lobbed grenades at guards, then lifted a heavy boom gate to allow the van through. About 30 died in the blast that erupted moments later.

Mahmood Shah, a former chief of security in the tribal region where Taliban and al-Qaida fighters have become entrenched, said the Peshawar and Lahore attacks mark a shift in strategy for the militants, whose attacks previously have often involved lone assailants with suicide vests, small improvised bombs or gun ambushes.

"It is an improvement in their tactics; they are trying to enter the target through use of force," Shah told The Associated Press. "It appears that they are in a hurry and they are becoming more aggressive."

The rush may be due to a widespread expectation that the military is planning to launch a major operation against the Taliban in the tribal areas of North and South Waziristan. No plans have been announced, but the military success of the month-old offensive to oust the Taliban from the Swat region has emboldened the government and the armed forces, officials say.

The purpose of the Taliban's carefully planned attacks was "to send a message to the government to stay away from Waziristan, which is their base," said Hasan Askari Rizvi, a Pakistani defense and political analyst.

"It seems that they are now going for a head-on collision" with the government, he said.

A day after the May 27 Lahore attack, a senior spokesman claimed responsibility for the Taliban and warned of a wider campaign of violence in major Pakistani cities in retaliation Swat offensive.

The offensive is seen as a test of Pakistan's resolve in fighting militancy and is strongly supported by Washington, where officials have said privately they would welcome a broader operation in the tribal belt.

In September, before the Swat offensive began, a dump truck loaded with explosives blew up outside the Marriott hotel in the capital, Islamabad, killing more than 50 people. In that attack, the truck was driven up to barriers blocking the entrance of the hotel but did not drive through.

Tuesday's attack prompted fresh concerns about security at embassies and other places where foreigners gather. At Western-styled stores and restaurants in Islamabad, gates and guards with shotguns are already the norm, while the U.S. Embassy and most other foreign missions are clustered within a compound surrounded by a high wall topped with razor wire and several other layers of security.

Security camera footage released Wednesday showed two vehicles approach the main gate to the Pearl Continental Hotel, a regular stop for international aid workers, journalists and other foreigners that is set well back from the street in a large compound surrounded by a high fence.

A white sedan pulls up at the gate's guard post, and a puff of smoke suggests shots fired from the front seat. A guard outside the car window collapses to the ground. Another, who seconds before had swung an already-open gate wider to let the car pull up, starts fleeing toward the hotel.

Unchallenged, the car and the truck drive into the compound, over a metal barrier that recesses into the driveway and through a chicane of concrete barriers positioned to slow vehicles down.

A flash of light a few moments later illuminates the compound and the street outside, and the lens is filled with a cloud of dust. Police said initial signs were that the truck was loaded with half a ton of military-grade explosives.

At least 11 people died, including several aid workers, two of whom were foreigners working for the U.N., officials said Wednesday.

Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert at Georgetown University in Washington, said such tactics have been used before by Pakistani militant groups fighting against Indian rule in the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir, but they have been limited in scope because of the level of military precision required.

"It is very difficult to defend against as it is a forced-entry attack by determined, even suicidal adversaries," Hoffman said in an e-mailed response to questions. "Like the Mumbai attacks last November, this attack shows a high level of training, discipline, command and control and pre-attack intelligence."

Other terrorist group may be studying such attacks "and may aspire to emulate them, but the level of training, discipline and command and control are not easily replicated," he said.

Shah, the former tribal zone official, said the best protection from such attacks was to post sharpshooters and machine guns on the roof of high-target buildings, who could spot assailants as they launched their assault and open fire before they could get close to their target.

"If you have enough imagination you can repel such attacks," he said.