**Don’t lose sight of the terrorist threat**

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The operation Zarb e Azabwas launched on 15 June 2014 in North Waziristan along the Durand Line against militancy after theattack on Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, for which the Tehreek-e-TalibanPakistan claimed responsibility.Operation Zarb e Azab was followed by Operation Radd ul Fasaad which began in February 2017, following resurgence in terrorist incidents.

In November 2014, weeks before the Peshawar school attack, a Tehreek Taliban Pakistan suicide bomber killed at least 60 people at the Wagah border crossing between India and Pakistan.

On December 14, 2014, six armed militants stormed the APS School in Peshawar. More than 1,000 students, from preschool to high school, were on the campus when the attack began. Militants entered classrooms and auditoriums and opened fire on students and teachers, killing 149 people, of which 132 were children.

The Tehreek Taliban Pakistan, an umbrella group of armed groups claimed responsibility for the assault. Maulana Fazlullah claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was in retaliation for Pakistani military operations in North Waziristan. We selected the army’s school for the attack because the government is targeting our families and females … we want them to feel the same pain, Fazlullah said in a video message days after the attack. In a statement, the Pakistan Taliban claimed that the children were legitimate targets because they were studying at a military-run school.

Army crackdown resulted in the number of attacks being reduced inside Pakistan, there are amid reports suggesting that there have been regrouping of Taliban in areas which had been cleared

In January 2015, at least 60 people were killed in a suicide bombing targeting members of the minority Shia Muslim sect in the southern city of Shikarpur.

In March 2016, at least 75 people were killed by a suicide bombing targeting Christians gathered at a Lahore park. Later that year, the Pakistan Taliban claimed responsibility for a bombing that killed more than 70 people at a hospital in the southwestern city of Quetta.

In October 2016, gunmen stormed a police training college in Quetta, killing at least 61 people. A month later, more than 52 people were killed in an attack on a Sufi shrine in Khuzdar district.

In February 2017, a suicide bomber attacked a crowded Sufi shrine in Sehwan Sharif, Sindh, killing 88 people.

In 2018, the Pakistan Taliban claimed responsibility for a series of attacks ahead of the country’s general election, including one in Mastung that killed at least 145 people.

A judicial inquiry commission was constituted on October 12, 2018, on the order of the Supreme Court and it had started working on Oct 19 the same year. A two-judge Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed heard the case based on a suo motu notice taken on complaints of the parents of the martyred children, who claimed that the real culprits involved in the gruesome incident had not yet been arrested by authorities. Following extensive proceedings spread over almost 20 months, the presiding officer of the commission, Justice Mohammad Ibrahim of the Peshawar High Court, had submitted the report to the apex court.

The 525-page report provides an insight into the security lapses and local facilitation to militants that apparently led to the horrific attack.The report in its conclusion noted that terrorism perpetrated by Pakistan’s enemies had reached its peak in the year 2013-14, but said “this [still] doesn’t obligate us to hold that our sensitive installation(s) and soft target(s) could be forsaken as a prey to the terrorists’ attack.”

It said the entry of terrorists from across the Afghan border into the school’s perimeter after befooling the security apparatus was mainly due to the porous nature of the border and unrestrained movement of Afghan refugees across the frontier.

Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed regretted that traditionally lower-ranked officials were held responsible for such incidents and “nothing is asked of the people at the top”. The judge observed that the militants were able to achieve the objective they had set out for, saying “security institutions should have been aware of this conspiracy.The people are not safe even in this much security. This tradition should stop,” the government should take action to prevent similar incidents in the future. The Chief Justice ordered to initiate the action from top officials so that such incidents could be avoided in future.

The intensive nation-wide operation Radd ul Fasaad against terror groups, steered by Army Chief General Qamar Bajwa, has successfully thwarted more than 400 terrorist plots across the country since 2017. According to official figures, the Pakistan Army has launched a total of 1,200 operations out of which 350 were large scale. Under the offensive, meant to rein in a host of militant threats from outside Pakistan, the military was also able to seal the porous 1,450 km of 2,611 km Afghanistan border with fences. The move was aimed to prevent unwanted incursions from Afghanistan.

“Three years on, that uncertainty no longer haunts Pakistan. The overall law and order situation has improved across the board. The country is safer than any time in history.” said Maj-Gen (retd) Inamul Haq in February this year.

Unfortunately on October 27, 2020, a powerful bomb blast ripped through the Jamia Zubairia, an Islamic seminary on the outskirts of the northwest Peshawar, killing at least seven students and wounding 70 others. Classes were underway early at the school, the Jamia Zuberia, located in a crowded suburban neighbourhood outside Peshawar, when the explosion shook the compound.

The seminary was attacked days after Pakistani intelligence alerted that militants could target public places and important building, including seminaries and mosques across Pakistan, including Peshawar.

However, the Tehreek e TalibanPakistan has been involved in almost every terrorist attack across Pakistan since 2001; the organisation distanced itself from the latest attack in Peshawar, and released a statement denying its involvement in the attack and called the targeting of students a reprehensible act.

Nonetheless, army crackdown in the years which followed resulted in the number of attacks being reduced inside Pakistan, there are amid reports suggesting that there have been regrouping of Taliban in areas which had been cleared. Where does Pakistan stand now?

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