

Terrorism in Pakistan: Monthly Review for June 2020

By Muhammad Amir Rana¹

1. An Overview

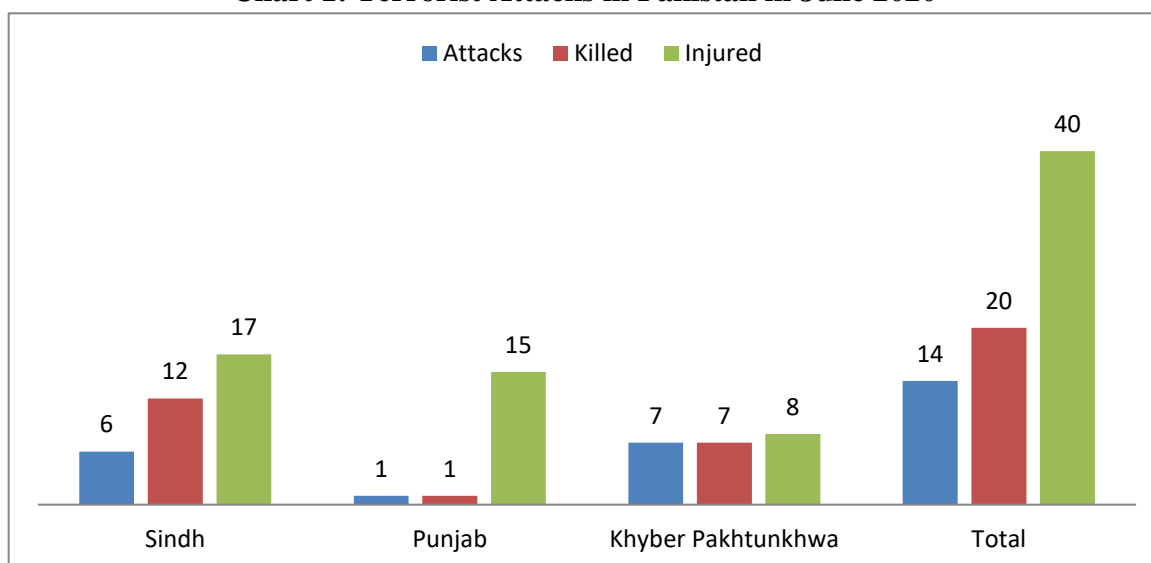
While no terrorist attack or violent incident of any other type was recorded in Balochistan, as many 14 terrorist attacks took place in other three provinces of Pakistan including seven in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, six in Sindh and one in Punjab. This represented an over 27 percent increase from terrorist attacks reported in the month before. In all, 20 people lost their lives and 40 others were injured in these attacks. Among those killed in terrorist attacks in June were 9 personnel of security forces (5 army soldiers, 2 policemen and 2 Rangers), six civilians as well as five militants.

In terms of casualties in terrorism-related incidents, Sindh was the most affected region of the country in June 2020. It has happened after a long time that Sindh including Karachi witnessed such a terror spree, where Baloch and Sindhi nationalist insurgent groups perpetrated six attacks claiming 12 lives and wounding 17 other.

Meanwhile, as in the month before, seven (7) terrorist attacks happened in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the month under review. These attacks claimed seven lives and injured eight others. One terrorist attack also happened in Rawalpindi district of Punjab, the twin city of the federal capital Islamabad, killing one and wounding 15 others.

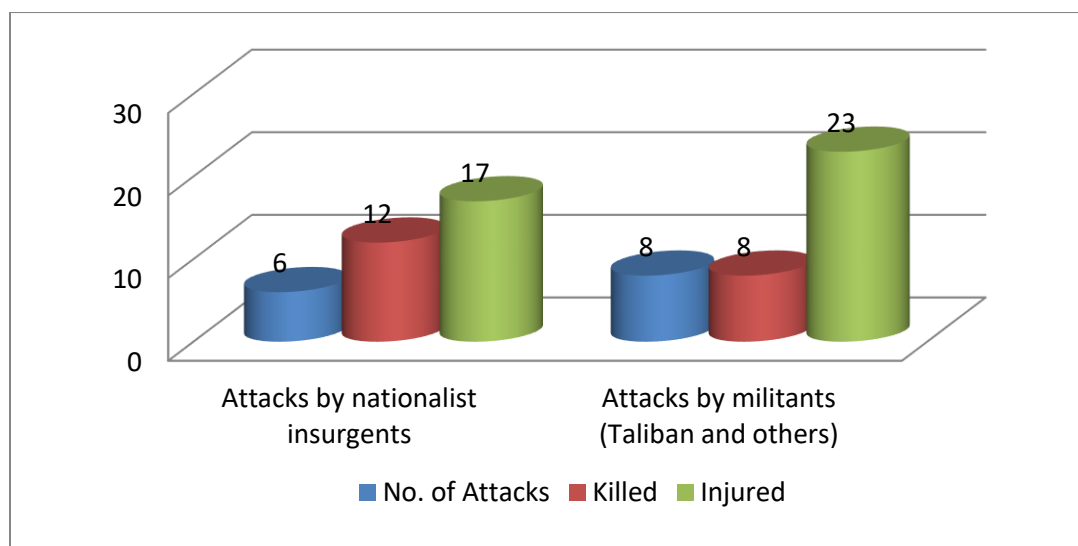
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Chart 1: Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in June 2020²



Sindhi and Baloch insurgents carried out six attacks – Sindhi insurgent groups perpetrated 5 attacks in parts of Sindh and the banned Baloch group BLA carried out a major assault in Karachi – killing a total of 12 people and injuring one. Religiously inspired militants including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and local Taliban militants were reportedly involved in eight attacks – 7 in KP and one in Punjab – killing eight people and wounding 23 others.

Chart 1a: Distribution of Terrorist Attacks by Perpetrators



Over 71 percent of the total reported attacks in June targeted security forces and law enforcement

² Source: PIPS database on Conflict and Security

personnel. Another three attacks apparently hit civilians, and one gun and bomb coordinated attack targeted Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) in Karachi.

Table 1: Targets Hit in Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in June 2020

Targets	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
Security forces/law enforcement	10	10	10
Civilians	3	2	23
Govt. offices/public property (Karachi Stock Exchange)	1	8	7
Total	14	20	40

On the whole, situation at the Line of Control (LoC) remained tense, where 14 cross-border attacks by Indian border security force (BSF) claimed seven lives and injured 15 others. One cross-border attack also happened from Afghanistan.

One less than in the month before, two (2) anti-militant operational strikes by security forces were reported during the month under review; both from KP. As many as two suspected militants were killed in these actions. Security forces also entered into an armed clash with the militants in North Waziristan, in which two militants were killed.

When counted together in 36 different types of incidents of violence – as given at Table 2 – as many as 31 people lost their lives in Pakistan in June and 62 others were injured.

2. Analysis of the emerging trends

The recent upsurge in incidents of terrorist violence, mainly in Sindh and Balochistan, by violent ethno-nationalist groups has revealed two things. First, the threat of terrorism from both religiously inspired and nationalist groups persists. Secondly, the underlying factors of terrorism as well as conflict cannot be eliminated through force alone; it requires a holistic approach including political reconciliation and negotiation.

In Balochistan, the state has largely tried cosmetic and half-hearted political options, which is why results have remained elusive. One reason for the state's reluctance to engage politically is related to the fear that a softer approach towards violent actors would be interpreted as the state's weakness. Critics of this attitude, however, argue that political engagement and negotiation will only earn the state the trust of the marginalised and aggrieved.

But state institutions believe they can deal with the issue through hard security approaches; even the weak reconciliatory processes of the past happened under the influence of this perception. While the nationalist insurgency in Sindh is not even considered a threat to national security, the one in Balochistan is assessed to be on a low to medium scale. But there are few prospects that these

movements, mainly the Baloch insurgency, will disappear soon. Constant security engagement, however, has its own financial and political costs, and it also builds up anger in communities, especially the youth.

2.1. The New Nexuses

The Balochistan Liberation Army has emerged as a major violent group in Balochistan, and its operations have increased, especially after the launch of CPEC. The BLA's Majeed Brigade is dedicated to targeting CPEC projects and other Chinese interests in the country. This BLA section conducted the recent attack on the Pakistan Stock Exchange. Though the attack was thwarted by the timely response of law enforcers, the group achieved what it wanted: international focus.

In recent weeks, Sindh has emerged as a violent flashpoint after a long hiatus. Though no religiously inspired militant group was involved, violent Sindhi actors drew domestic and international attention by carrying out five attacks in June. The Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) and Sindhudesh Liberation Army (SLA) carried out attacks in Karachi, Larkana and Ghotki, targeting the Rangers and an office of the Ehsaas programme. The media had reported that the federal interior ministry had decided to include these two Sindhi groups, along with the Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz, on its list of banned organisations under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Sindhi insurgent groups have a history of perpetrating sporadic, low-intensity attacks. However, in June, they managed to create more impact in terms of the number and intensity of attacks.

The increasing capacity of such Sindh-based groups is also seen as a result of their nexus with Baloch insurgent groups. Reportedly, the SLA and SRA have developed a nexus with the BLA, which is providing training to their militants in return for logistical support for its operations in Karachi. While the future impact of such links remains to be seen, there is very little space for an insurgent movement to develop in Sindh because of the growing middle class and the stakes of the educated youth in the system. The political landscape is not fertile for any popular separatist movement either.

2.2. The State approach to counter insurgency in Balochistan

Balochistan's situation is completely different; the grievances of the people are deep-rooted, and the province has a history of nationalist insurgency and armed conflict. The political governments have tried to give reconciliation a chance but in vain. In 2008, the PPP initiated a special package for the province, Aghaz-i-Huqooq-i-Balochistan. Similarly, former prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif introduced the Pur-Aman [peaceful] Balochistan initiative in 2015 for the return of angry Baloch into the national mainstream. Later, the PTI government decided to continue with the plan. The initiative was in line with the National Action Plan, which promised to empower the provincial government to deal with the problem politically. The approach was based on the conclusion that Baloch separatists shall not be conflated with Islamist militants, as the cause of the Baloch insurgency was purely economic and political, and solutions should be political too.

The 'securitisation' standpoints, however, overshadowed these political initiatives. The reconciliation processes begun by the provincial governments — including former chief ministers Nawab Aslam Raisani and Dr Abdul Malik Baloch — were abandoned on the way without providing sound reasons. The security institutions preferred the 'surrender policy' and announced incentives for surrendering

insurgents. Now Pur-Aman Balochistan revolves around the surrender policy, although most political leaders and analysts believe this is a flawed approach. Many influential sardars and political leaders exploited the policy and managed fake surrenders for financial and political advantages. The number of real fighters, called farari, surrendering to the authorities is far less than claimed.

Last year, the Balochistan government had announced it would facilitate 2,200 farari in getting employment, but little is known about the initiative, except that the federal government had committed to providing half the money (around Rs200 million) for it. But the provincial government claims the amount has not been received so far and that it is running the initiative through its own resources. The rehabilitation of these fighters is a challenge. But when the returning fighters are encouraged to form death squads to target the insurgents, it discourages those willing to enter the mainstream. These death squads also misuse power and do not bring a good name to the security institutions.

The government has also failed to address the genuine grievances of the people of Balochistan. Akhtar Mengal has parted ways with the PTI government's coalition, citing reasons of non-implementation of two agreements made with his party. These agreements revolved around 'six points' including the recovery of missing persons, implementation of the National Action Plan, implementation of a six per cent quota for Balochistan in the federal government, and the construction of dams in the province to resolve the acute water crisis.