

Taliban and Weapons of Mass Disruption Threat

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Summary

The article analyses the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's threat of use of chemical weapons inside Pakistan. It looks at the recent such instance of possible low scale use of chemical agents and argues that the recent threat is more of tactical nature.

In Late 2009, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the radical umbrella terror group operating Pakistan, had threatened to unleash a chemical warfare against Pakistan and planned to use the age old tactics of mass disruption by poisoning Multan, Karachi and Rawalpindi water supplies. According to Pakistan's intelligence agencies, the Taliban presently cornered in their own tribal strongholds, planning to use 'cyanide' and other poisonous chemical substances to the water supply lines in these cities. A faxed threat- letter was received by the Rawalpindi Directorate of Military Lands and Cantonment sometimes in November and as per the letter and other Intel inputs, Taliban has already procured and stockpiled 200 liters of poisonous material that would be used to contaminate water sources and reservoirs under Rawalpindi and Chakla cantonments and perhaps in Karachi. Early in November 2009, Multan administration has directed the concern authorities to stop supplying water to the people from storage tanks after receiving inputs about the Taliban's threat.

In April 2009 Pakistan's North West Front Province (NWFP) police chief Malik Navid told a Pakistan National Assembly's standing committee about Taliban's expertise in making chemical and biological weapons. Navid warned that the Pakistan government needed to urgently focus on containing militancy as it spread from its bases. Navid's testimony also highlighted the merger of al-Qaida and Taliban in AfPak region.

In April-May 2009, Afghan Taliban who have been campaigning against female education of any type, had targeted several girls schools located in north of Kabul in Kapisa and Parwan provinces. These attacks involved poisonous chemical gas and the victims complained of headaches, nausea, vomiting, itching in the eyes. Nearly two hundred students and teachers were affected in these attacks. However, no casualty reported and all of the victims were released shortly after treatment. Though the specific type of gas used remains mysterious it is suspected that Taliban and al Qaeda elements must have experimented with either chlorine or white phosphorus.

- April 26: Over 40 students and teachers were rushed to hospital after a militant suspect lobbed a bottle into the Sadiqi Padshah girl school premise in Charikar town in the Parwan province.
- May 11: Around 60 girl students in another school (Ura Jalili Girls' High School) located in Charikar town (Parwan province) went to the hospital after a similar gas attack with complaints ranging from headaches, dizziness and stinging eyes, with several girls losing consciousness.
- May 12: Chemical gas attack took place at the Qazaaq school in After Bache locality in Mahmud Razi, capital of Kapisa province. Nearly 130 people were affected, with 98 students and 6 teachers. Many of them were admitted in the local hospital.

Taliban, irrespective of AfPak locations, is not new to this whole war tactics of using weapons of mass disruption, especially chemical and biological weapons. They have Abu Khabab al-Masri's training of chemical and biological weapons handling and the guide book on the CB weapons use against potential targets. Masri (a.k.a Midhat Mursi al-Sayid Umar), believed to have headed al-Qaeda's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program 'Project al-Zabadi. According to experts and various reports, al-Masri provided Afghanistan Taliban poisons and explosives training in his hideout at Derunta camp, near Jalalabad (Afghanistan). Derunta camp came to limelight when videotapes showing al-Qaeda experiments poisoning dogs with chemical weapons surfaced in 2002.

According to al-Qaeda observers Masri received his chemical weapons training in the Egyptian army before defecting to the militant Islamic Jihad group founded by Ayman al-Zawahri. The latest threat calls for a recollection of a statement issued by Al-Qaeda top leadership. One such statement signed by Mustafa Abu al-Yazid had warned that al-Masri had "left behind [...] a generation of faithful students who will make you suffer the worst torture and avenge him and his brothers." The CB

weapon threat continues even after Masri's still mysterious death.

Historically speaking, the Afghan Taliban had reportedly received its first supply of chemical weapons during mid 1990s from Pakistan during its battle against then Afghan government. However, there is no concrete evidence to prove these reports.

Now Pakistan security agencies cannot ignore the water poisoning threat as Taliban's Afghan counterpart has already experimented chemical weapons. In what can be termed as scare tactics, TTP now intends to pressurize the Pakistani army to stop military operations in Waziristan. Issuing the water poisoning threats to the Rawalpindi and Chakla Cantonment Boards, it seems they aim to spread panic among the Armed forces presently engaged in the war in the tribal region, clearly sending out a message that their family back home is not safe from Taliban's wrath.