

From: "jeffrey E." <jeevacation@gmail.com>
To: Bill Gates <[REDACTED]>
Subject: polio attacks
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IPI backgrounder to 2 recent attacks:

18 March 2015, Nawagai, Bajaur (FATA):

The media reported that a polio worker was shot dead & a 2nd one was injured. The attackers fled on foot.

Note 1: All of Bajaur is of strategic importance, especially for the militants. The site of the attack is very close to the Afghan border, & serves as an unofficial transit route for all types of traffic of people & goods. Hence, after two days of research, including via interlocutors with good sources, IPI is of the view that it was the location which led to the attack, and not PEP or polio workers *per se*. Only Dawn newspaper reported that the Pak Taliban TTP had taken responsibility – but IPI research shows that the Dawn reporter does not have good sources, it was more guesswork on his part!

Note 2: There have been a number of attacks on polio teams in Bajaur tribal agency, eg.

(i) 10 Sept 2014, a Levies escort for a polio team was shot dead in Damadola village, a very restive area very close to the Afghan border, and a safe haven for militants at that time, also the site of many drone attacks;

(ii) 11 Sept 2014: a paramilitary soldier escorting a polio team was shot dead in Mamond/Mamund, a very sensitive area close to the Afghan border – the Mamund tribal elders are on both sides of the border;

(iii) 22 Oct 2014: 2 Levies escorts plus 1 driver of polio team were injured in a remote-controlled bomb blast in Mamond area – a day after pamphlets were distributed warning tribesmen of dire consequences of allowing PEP – more a ruse to keep non-locals & uniformed personnel away than anti-polio as such;

(iii) 11 Nov 2014: 3 Levies escorts guarding a polio team were killed and 3 others were injured in Salarzai area when their vehicle hit an IED planted by the roadside – the Salarzai tribe provides the bulk of the pro-Govt militias & are constantly the target of suicide & other attacks.

17 March 2015, Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa KP (on 2nd day of 3-day PEP;

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The media reported the death of 2 female polio workers & a police guard (1 polio worker & the policeman were shot dead, the 2nd polio worker succumbed later to her injuries).

Note 1: IPI has researched this attack. The team was giving anti-polio drops in Shaikhabad area near Mansehra city – in an Afghan refugee “camp”. There are many Afghan refugee settlements in the area, including seminaries with Afghan refugee students, 14 of whom were arrested mid-Jan 2015. After the Dec 2014 army school massacre & the ensuing Army crackdown, the authorities announced the deportation of all non-registered Afghan refugees (as are the majority in the Mansehra area). While this order was rescinded following meetings between Islamabad & Kabul at the highest levels, there is a great deal of nervousness and anxiety among all Afghan refugees, in particular the non-registered ones, and those who are in possession of fake registration papers as well as fake Pakistan ID cards & passports. Hence the arrival of a uniformed escort was seen as a threat in a very tense time & location.

Note 2: There have been previous incidents in Mansehra area and other parts of KP: Eg.

(i) 20 Jan 2014: Armed men shot dead 1 polio worker in Mansehra (the police arrested the attacker later, it was personal enmity, not polio-related); on the same day, an unescorted polio team was attacked in Qayyumabad area of Korangi, in Karachi, Sind, killing 2 female polio workers (in Jan 2015, Korangi was one of the districts where PEP was negatively affected as a result of security issues); another unescorted polio team's vehicle, mobile phones and cash were all snatched at gunpoint in Panjgur, Balochistan – a car-jacking & theft, not polio-related. Crime is high in the area, and criminals & militants very active – eg. rockets were fired at Panjgur Airport on 30 Dec 2013, 3 weeks prior to the car-jacking.

(ii) 22 Jan 2014: An 8-man police squad was on its way to escort a polio team in Charsadda, when an IED on a bicycle was exploded as the vehicle passed by – unequivocally an attack on the uniformed personnel, but “counted” as an anti-polio attack – among the dead & injured were 6 policemen.

End.



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