

SUICIDE BOMBER STRIKES NEAR PAKISTAN-INDIA FLAG- LOWERING BORDER SITE

The video above shows the elaborate ceremony that takes place daily at the Wagah border crossing just outside the Pakistani city of Lahore. On Sunday evening, a suicide bomber who was stopped at a checkpoint just outside the ceremonial site detonated his vest as Pakistanis were returning from the flag-lowering. The death toll now stands near 60 and over 100 were injured. Because thousands attend this ceremony every day, the crowds are quite dense as they leave the site. From the New York Times:

Spectators viewing the ceremony have to pass through two security checkpoints before entering the site.

Pakistani officials said the suicide bomber detonated the explosives in front of a line of shops 500 to 600 yards from the main site, at a time when security was lax after the flag-lowering ceremony had concluded.

Attendance was high on Sunday because it was a holiday, and many visitors had come from other towns and cities

At least two militant groups have claimed responsibility:

The Jamaat-ul-Ahrar splinter group of the proscribed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the Wagah border attack as its spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan, speaking to Dawn on telephone from Afghanistan, said it was carried out by one of their men.

When asked if it was more than one

suicide bomber, he said one man carried out the attack.

"We will continue such attacks in the future," Ehsan said.

"Some other groups have claimed responsibility of this attack, but these claims are baseless. We will soon release the video of this attack," he said.

"This attack is revenge for the killing of innocent people in North Waziristan," the banned militant group's spokesman said.

Earlier Jundullah, another outlawed group which was behind a suicide bombing that killed at least 78 Christians at a church in Peshawar last September, had also claimed responsibility for the Wagah border attack.

The spokesman of the splinter group of the TTP Ahmed Marwat via telephone said that the attack is a reaction to military operation Zarb-i-Azb and Waziristan operation.

Jundullah and the much larger Pakistani Taliban are among loosely aligned militant groups that frequently share personnel, tactics and agendas. Claims for specific incidents are often hard to verify.

Note that this Jundallah group is not the same one that carries out attacks on the Iran-Pakistan border.

Reuters reports that intelligence agencies for Pakistan and India had warning that an attack was coming and increased security measures prevented the bomber getting to the actual site of the flag-lowering:

"It appears the bomber wanted to target ground zero where Pakistan and India

border officials stand together to perform the flag ceremony but he could not enter due to tight security on the last gate," a Pakistani intelligence official told Reuters.

"Had he managed to reach the place, there would have been the worst scenario at both sides."

If successful, such an attack would likely have severely tested ties between India and Pakistan, already frayed after weeks of shelling further along the border killed 17 people in October.

Unrest is not very common in Lahore. It was, however, the scene of the Raymond Davis fiasco. I've long been of the opinion that Davis served as a recruiter both in the US and in Pakistan, so it would be irresponsible not to wonder whether any of his recruits had a hand in Sunday's event.