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**Subject:**

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## Report by IPI on 2 recent polio-related incidents, as requested:

*Note: IPI research began as usual, right after these incidents were reported in the Pak local media, IPI's data-base is kept updated on all such incidents.*

**(i) Zhob, Balochistan:** Zhob is of geo-strategic importance for the Taliban (both TTPakistan & TTAfghanistan) as it shares a border with South Waziristan, Dera Ismail Khan (& other trouble spots) as well as Afghanistan – & connects Balochistan with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & Punjab; Zhob is also important as a major landroute for goods transport between KP & Karachi port. Zhob Airport was used by NATO 2009-2011. The border area is protected by Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps. Zhob is an important passageway for militants, smugglers & Afghan refugees. There are a number of TTP "camps" in Zhob, with large caches of arms, ammunition, explosives. Hence for a number of years, security forces have carried out repeated operations in the area (including helicopters), leading to increased kidnappings & terror actions by militant groups to protect their camps, including attacks on Levies checkpoints especially in Murgha Kibzai. This makes Zhob a no-go + high-risk area. The polio-related kidnapping was most recently preceded by the kidnapping of six Pak Telecommunication Co. staff (including 2 engineers, all still missing). The most important political party in the Zhob area is the religion-based Jamiat Ulema e Islam (JUI). The important militant groups in Zhob are: TTP & some of its splinter groups; Jundallah – a militant group dating to pre-Taliban days, which has in recent years shown renewed terror activity; Jundallah claimed the 26 Nov 2012 attack (when it attacked a polio team in Eastern Bypass area of Quetta, killing 4 polio workers) & has in the past 12 months allied itself with other militant groups such as TTP & splinters, as well as the anti-shiite Lashkar Jhangvi.

**Polio incident:** On Friday 13 February 2015 ca. 23:00, the polio team (3 polio workers & 2 accompanying Levies) was last in contact, on their way back. Pak security forces launched a search/rescue operation (ca. 250 FC) in Toda Kibzai/Murgha Kibzai area; during an exchange of fire, two suicide bombers blew themselves up on Sunday 15 Feb pm – the 1<sup>st</sup> suicide bombing in connection with polio! Four bodies & the polio ambulance were recovered (3 so far identified: 1 ambulance driver & 2 Levies). The fate of the still-missing workers is not yet known, the militants switch locations to avoid detection. IPI is following up. The Balochistan Provincial Govt has postponed PEP in Quetta, Zhob, Sherani & Sibi districts.

**Refusals:** PEP refusals are related to parental refusal which pre-dates the Taliban ban.

**IPI recommendation:** As requested.

In view of the inter-related context as above, attacks by militants (whether shooting, kidnapping or other) is part of the strategy by militants, especially TTP, to attack security forces – it is not a new tactic. It pre-dates the Zarb Azab military operation begun in June 2014, but now, in response, all uniformed personnel, anywhere in Pakistan, are renewed targets of the TTP & its allies. The police and/or Levies accompanying polio teams offer the right target & polio workers are collateral damage, sometimes in gunfire by the security forces.

Since the December 2014 suicide operation on the Army Public School in Peshawar, a true game-changer, members of TTP, Lashkar Jhangvi, Jundallah & allies are being hanged by the authorities – hence any chance of a dialogue with any of the militant groups cited above is, for the present, neither possible nor recommended.

In addition, IPI notes that the 4 day 16-19 February PEP in Quetta was postponed both due to PM Sharif's visit as all security forces were diverted for his protection + Matriculation exams beginning 18 February. IPI therefore recommends that PEP be coordinated in advance regarding known events such as examinations. What cannot be foreseen are security-related postponements, as in December 2014. Also, the renewed campaign by UNICEF which focuses on parental refusal should be improved (it is criticized by the target group, *inter alia*, as not adequately taking into account local cultural traditions).

**(ii) Khyber Agency, FATA:** Khyber Agency is geo-strategically important, historically as well as in the present context. It touches Peshawar, KP's provincial capital, two other FATA agencies + Afghanistan, in addition to being the entry/exit point for the traffic & transport of people, goods, NATO supplies. As the military operation Zarb Azab progressed, militants fleeing North Waziristan have sought refuge in Khyber, leading the Pak military to launch a military operation titled Khyber I in mid-October 2014. Even prior to this launch, parts of Khyber (in particular Bara & Tirah Valley) saw combat between militant groups & Pak military – the former composed of a combination of 3 militant groups which elsewhere have been fighting each other, but are here defending a prized transit route for massive smuggling. Khyber I is also aimed at clearing the transit route for NATO's retrograde mission (supplies & equipment being withdrawn from Afghanistan). Khyber has valuable mineral deposits & mines, exploited by militant groups for income.

**Polio incident:** On Sat 14 February 2015, gunmen fired at a van carrying a polio vaccination team, killing the driver, as it was preparing for a 3-day PEP 16-18 February. The shots were fired from a nearby hill in the Lowi Shalman area of Landi Kotal, Khyber, which has, in addition to the aspects cited above, valuable mineral deposits which are mined & sold by the militants. On the same day, a number of militants were killed by Pak forces in an adjacent FATA area, as Pak forces began preparations to launch a fresh crackdown in Bara, & locals were ordered to evacuate the area by that pm. IPI does not see this as either a direct attack on the polio team, nor an attempted abduction – the militants shoot from surrounding hilltops at anything which moves & go into hiding only when Pak helicopters secure the air above.

**Other polio-related recent attacks:**

- 19 January 2015, in Orangi Town, Karachi, a junior police official belonging to the Anti-Encroachment Police was shot when he was guarding a polio team nearby – however, IPI would point out that encroachment & illegally occupied urban land, especially in Karachi, is a major combat arena between the “land mafia” and the authorities;
- 26 Jan 2015, in Nazimabad, Karachi, a police recruit under training was shot dead as he guarded a polio team – this attack, too, was aimed at the uniform, not at the polio workers who escaped into a house – the attackers on a motorbike could easily have targeted them too.
- 4 Feb 2015 in Quetta, 1 policeman guarding a polio team was killed near the Basic Health Unit in Pashtunabad, on his way back from prayers in a nearby mosque – hence not polio but the uniform was the direct target;
- 4 Feb 2015 in Jacobabad distt, Sindh, 2 brothers administering anti-polio drops without police escort were attacked by 6 men armed with hachets & clubs, the leader of the attackers was identified – IPI research has so far not yielded the true motive but the *modus operandi* & names lead to the suspicion that family or business rivalry was involved.

END.