

November
2012

Attack at PAF Base Minhas

16 August 2012



TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity
(TRISA)

Complex Operational Environment and
Threat Integration Directorate (CTID)





OEA Team Threat Report



Purpose

- To inform the Army training community of the militant Islamist threat against military forces in Pakistan.
- To lay out the tactics, techniques, and procedures used in the recent attack against Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Base Minhas.
- To identify the actors and motivations for the attack.

Executive Summary

- PAF Base Minhas was attacked by a group of nine Islamist militants on 16 August 2012, during the final days of Ramadan.
- The attackers, who were armed with **AK-47s, RPGs, hand grenades, mines, and suicide vests**, breached the outer perimeter of the base – most likely by scaling a nine-foot wall topped with barbed wire.
- Security forces contained the militants and subsequently killed eight of them during an extended firefight. A ninth attacker detonated his suicide vest after being surrounded by police.
- Casualties were nine militants dead, two security personnel dead, and three security personnel wounded. One plane and one hangar were also damaged.
- The **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**, a militant Islamist group based in North Waziristan, claimed credit for the attack.

Cover: Pakistan Air Force Saab 2000 plane with Erieye airborne early warning & control system.



OEA Team Threat Report



Area Map



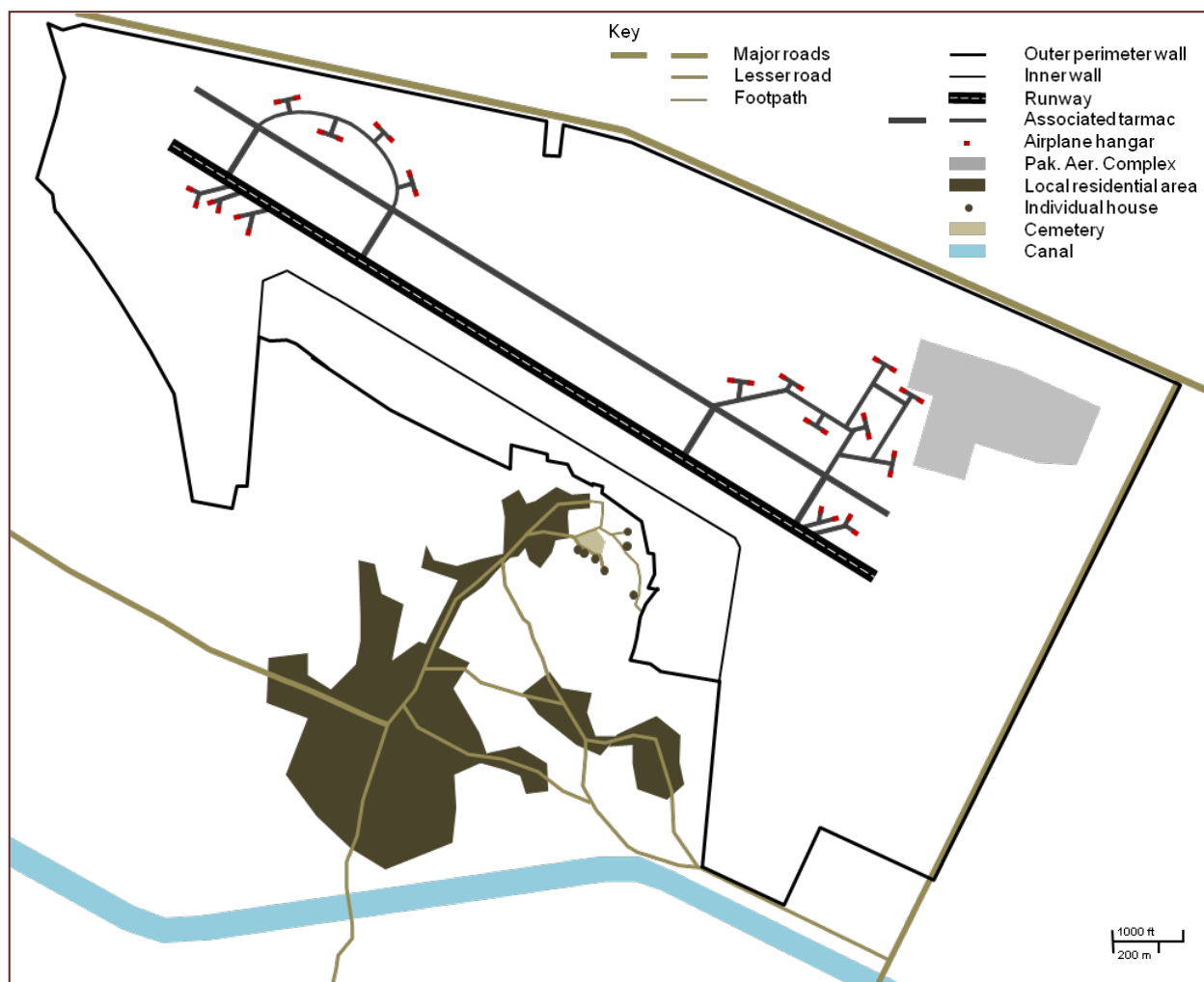
*Map and location of Pakistan, CIA Factbook, 2012
Location of PAF Base Minhas denoted by red circle*

PAF Base Minhas

Base Minhas is one of the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF's) largest air bases. It lies some 40 miles northwest of Islamabad in Kamra Cantonment, Attock District, Punjab Province. Also called PAF Base Kamra, Base Minhas is named after Pakistani pilot Rashid Minhas, a hero of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. The Pakistan Aeronautical Complex is located adjacent to the base in the same military facility, and is the assembly and overhaul location for Pakistan's Mirage and JF-17 Thunder fighters. Other planes housed on base include F-16s, P-3 Orions, and Saab 2000s. Around 30-40 military aircraft may be present at any given time.



OEA Team Threat Report



Selected features of PAF Base Minhas and surrounding area, TRISA, 2012

Attack Basics

Shortly after 0200 on Thursday, 16 August 2012, nine Islamist militants breached the outer perimeter of PAF Base Minhas in an apparent attempt to destroy aircraft that were located on base. It was during the final days of the month-long fast of Ramadan, and many people on base and in the surrounding towns were awake and either eating or attending mosque. The attackers were armed with AK-47s, hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), mines, and suicide vests. Though able to successfully enter the base, they were quickly engaged by security forces. The ensuing firefight lasted for 2-5 hours (reports vary), and resulted in nine militants dead, two



OEA Team Threat Report



security force personnel dead, and three security force members wounded. One airplane hangar and one aircraft were also damaged in the fight.

Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

Note: Reports vary on how and where the attackers gained entry to the base and their subsequent movements. The following is the assessment of events based on available open-source information.

On the night of 15-16 August, nine militants made their way through Pind Salman Makhan village to the nearby graveyard, likely by vehicle, then to the perimeter wall of Base Minhas on foot. The men were clad in Pakistani Army uniforms to mimic base security personnel, and were wearing suicide vests. Eight of them proceeded to the point on the wall with the least visibility, which was between two watchtowers and opposite a local house. The ninth man positioned himself on a mound some 100 meters away, opposite a watchtower. The attackers used a ladder in order to reach the barb wire topping the nine-foot high outer wall, which they cut. After scaling the wall, the eight men proceeded toward the inner wall in the direction of the aircraft hangers, some 750 meters away.

Despite their best efforts, the militants' actions had not gone unnoticed. A watchman in one of the nearby towers noticed their presence and reported the intrusion. At the inner wall, a lone soldier challenged the militants as they approached. A firefight broke out in which the soldier received fatal injuries, but he was able to prevent the attackers from passing before reinforcements arrived some ten minutes later. The attackers threw five hand grenades at the newly-arrived security forces, but only one or two of them exploded. The ninth militant, who had maintained his position outside the perimeter wall, fired three RPGs in the direction of the airplane hangars. One of them hit a hangar, and the shrapnel damaged a Saab 2000 aircraft that was parked inside.

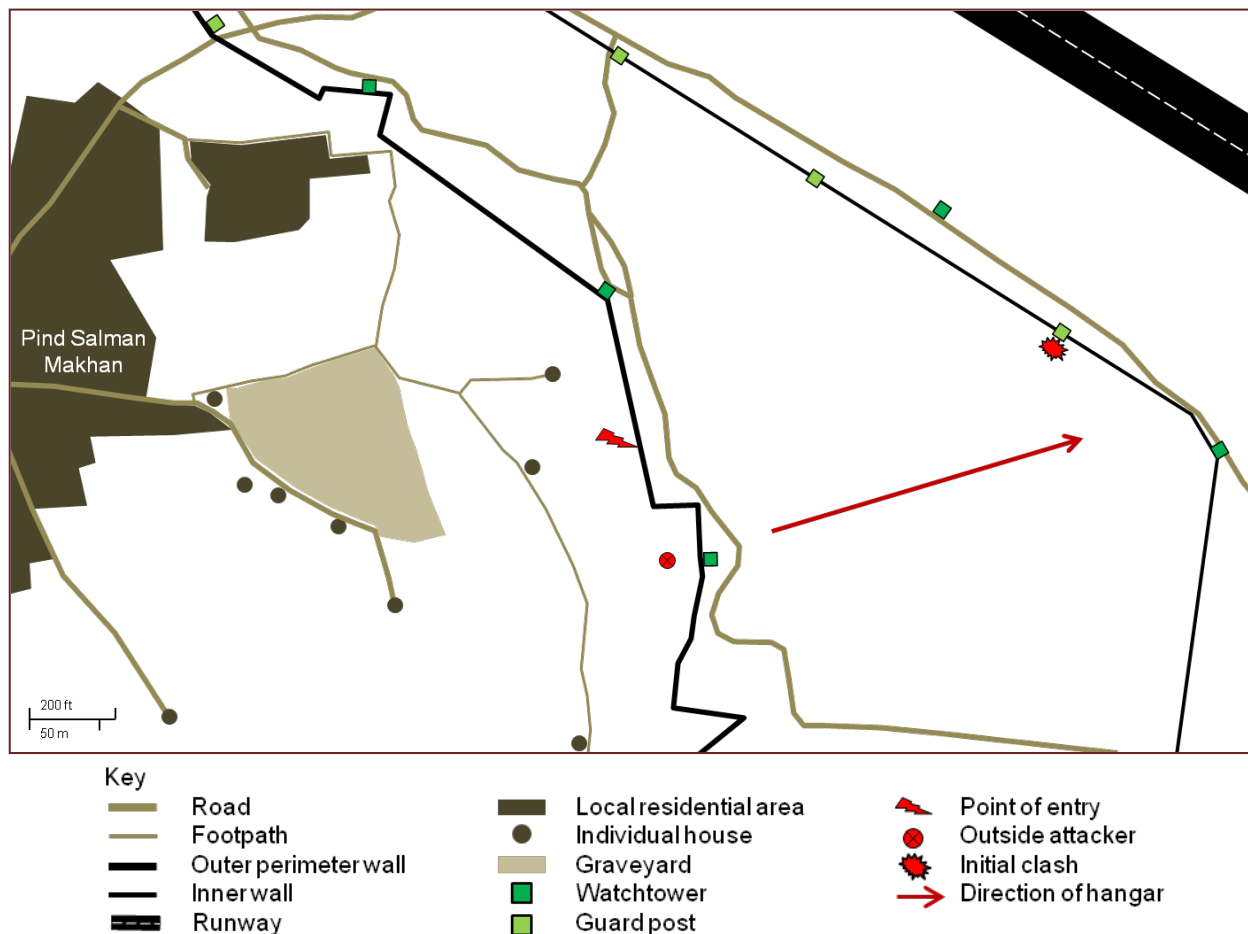
The Pakistani Army's Special Services Group (Special Forces) and the local police were called in to assist with defense of the base. The base commander personally led the defensive operation, in which security personnel cordoned off the area and then encircled the attackers. The base terrain offered little cover, with only a few trees that bordered the interior wall. Responders were able to contain the attackers outside of the interior wall and eliminate them over the next 2-5 hours. The ninth militant, still outside the perimeter wall, detonated his suicide vest after he was surrounded by local police. Once the attackers had been killed, security forces began a search of the base and surrounding villages. The militants had been able to emplace two mines that, when found, were deemed unsafe to move and were detonated in place. The base was declared secure within 8-10 hours of the attack.



OEA Team Threat Report



Security force casualties were minimal. Two military personnel died: the lone guard at the interior wall and a soldier that sustained fatal injuries when he fell off a truck while responding to the alarm. Three additional personnel were wounded – including the base commander, who was shot in the shoulder.



Analyst interpretation of PAF Base Minhas attack, TRISA, 2012

Responsibility and Motives

The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant Islamist group that is based in North Waziristan, northwestern Pakistan, was quick to claim credit for the attack. Group spokesman Ihsanullah Ihsan made multiple statements to the press, claiming anywhere from four to nine attackers,



OEA Team Threat Report



three to “dozens” of security personnel killed, and one to three aircraft destroyed. The motives given were likewise mixed but related: The attack was in revenge for the death of former TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud, the death of Osama bin Laden, and/or the deaths of TTP members from military operations (mainly U.S. drone strikes) in the group’s home area. The attackers’ apparent target was the military aircraft housed on base.

Threats and Security

Recent Pakistani intelligence had indicated the possibility that the TTP was planning to attack a Punjabi air base around the end of Ramadan. Base Minhas had reportedly been warned of this threat, and had subsequently gone to high alert and rehearsed defense measures. Base defense included a 9-foot perimeter wall topped with barbed wire, watchtowers at frequent intervals (400-500 ft), guard posts at wall gates, and a quick reaction force. Though airport and air base security was heightened throughout the country after the attack, there have been no subsequent indications of fundamental changes to security protocols.

Post-Incident Investigation

After the attack, Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority was called in to help identify the attackers through fingerprints. Two intact mobile phones were discovered on the militants, which intelligence agencies analyzed to assist in both identification and network analysis. Security forces also performed searches in several local villages in the weeks after the attack. These efforts have led to the identification of all nine militants, confirmed their ties to the TTP, and netted dozens of arrests to date, including at least one former member of the Pakistani military.

Analyst Assessment

The attack against the base appeared to be well-planned: the militants were able to not only approach the perimeter wall undetected, but to actually gain entry to the base over a nine-foot barb wire-topped fence – no easy feat. Reports imply that they also knew the layout of the base and exactly where they were headed, which led many to speculate about the possibility of insider assistance. Though this may have occurred, it would not have been difficult to gain the planning information required. Overheard comments and a few casual questions to locals may have revealed which hangars to aim for, and use of basic reconnaissance combined with open-source satellite images could have provided the rest.



OEA Team Threat Report



The militants' actual intended target is unknown. The attackers' point of entry and subsequent movements, combined with information gleaned from press reports, seem to indicate that the target was aircraft. But which platform specifically was the target? The base housed both fighter and surveillance craft, and the fact that a Saab 2000 was damaged is not an indication of intent. As the closest hangar was over 700 meters away and on the other side of a nine-foot wall, the RPG would have been shot almost blindly as indirect fire. Even if the attacker was intentionally aiming for that particular hangar, he may have done so because his primary target was out of the RPG's range.

It should be noted that Western news reports implied – or even stated outright – that nuclear weapons or their components may have been located on base. This was consistently denied by the Pakistani authorities, who bluntly stated that no such objects were stored on any military facility.

An additional motive for the attack may have stemmed from press reports about an intended Pakistani military operation in North Waziristan. Whether or not these reports were accurate, the TTP may have decided to take preemptive action. If this was the case, then the attack may have been intended as a warning to the Pakistani government against such action. It may also have been a diversionary measure, in order to distract the military and induce it to use forces for defensive, instead of offensive, purposes.

As with any attack, both individuals and the press have raised questions regarding base security in Pakistan. This analyst assesses that security at Base Minhas was adequate. The intelligence of an impending attack was not specific enough to warrant a full alert on base that night. Though the attackers were successful in breaching the exterior wall, they were discovered quickly and were unable to penetrate the interior wall. The soldier who challenged the militants was able to prevent their progress, and security forces responded rapidly and effectively. Of the two military members who died, one was the result of a freak accident. The other was the guard who had held the eight attackers off single-handedly. Only three additional security force personnel were wounded, while all nine of the heavily-armed attackers died in the raid.

Training Implications

Introducing small-group attacks such as the one against PAF Base Minhas in a training scenario can provide several benefits:

- Useful scenario for MI and MP units
- Small number of attackers allows for efficient use of role-players



OEA Team Threat Report



- Discovery of bombs complicates clearing of the area
- Permits use of investigation techniques such as fingerprints and mobile phone exploitation
- Allows focus on incident investigation skills without the distraction or delay caused by crowd control requirements
- Easy to mimic in home-training environment

Need to also link it with Dave attack at Camp Bastion.



OEA Team Threat Report



Related Products

Follow these links to view related products:

- [Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan \(TTP\)](#)
- [Bannu, Pakistan Prison Attack](#) (15 April 2012)
- [Pakistan Naval Bus Bombings](#) (May 2011)
- [Pakistan Operational Environment Analysis](#) (2009)

See also the [Red Diamond Newsletter](#), which contains current articles on a variety of topics useful to both soldiers and civilians ranging from enemy TTP to the latest news on cyberspace developments.

For detailed information on weapons and equipment, see the [Worldwide Equipment Guide](#).

AKO: <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/portal/index.jsp>

Threat Products: AKO“Easy-Link”
Contemporary Operational Environment and Threat Integration Directorate

The screenshot displays the AKO Army Online portal. On the left, a login box is labeled '1' and 'Login'. The main content area shows a search bar labeled '2' and a list of favorites labeled '3'. A red arrow points to the 'TRISA-CTID' link in the favorites list, labeled '4'.

1. Login
2. “Click” Files
3. Search to:
TRADOC G2
TRISA-CTID
4. “Click” & Find !



OEA Team Threat Report



POCs

OEA Team
913-684-7920 (COMM)
552-7920 (DSN)

TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity (TRISA)
700 Scott Ave, Bldg 53
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027

References

- AFP. "[Gunmen attack Pakistan air base, 10 dead.](#)" *Channel News Asia*. 16 August 2012.
- AFP. "[Taliban attack Pakistan air base, 10 dead.](#)" *Channel News Asia*. 17 August 2012.
- Agencies. "[Pakistan air force base comes under attack.](#)" *Guardian*. 15 August 2012.
- Ali, Kalbe. "[Lone terrorist spent four hours outside base.](#)" *Dawn*. 17 August 2012.
- Anjum, Shakeel. "[Nine militants killed in raid on Kamra airbase.](#)" *News International*. 17 August 2012.
- AP. "[Taleban attack on Pakistan air force base.](#)" *Khaleej Times*. 16 August 2012.
- Asghar, Mohammad. "[Nadra team collects fingerprints.](#)" *Dawn*. 17 August 2012.
- CIA. "[Location of Pakistan.](#)" *CIA Factbook*. 4 October 2012
- CIA. "[Map of Pakistan.](#)" *CIA Factbook*. 4 October 2012.
- Dawn News and Agencies. "[Taliban claim attack on Minhas base; nine militants killed.](#)" *Dawn*. 16 August 2012.
- Hussain, Shaiq. "[Militants storm Pakistan air base; 10 killed.](#)" *Washington Post*. 15 August 2012.
- IANS. "[Nine militants killed in Pakistan air base attack.](#)" *Two Circles*. 16 August 2012.
- INP. "[4 Afghans among 5 arrested from Kamra.](#)" *Nation*. 7 September 2012.
- Khallid, Hanif. "[Damaged Awacs aircraft repairable.](#)" *News International*. 17 August 2012.
- Klasra, Kaswar. "[Two more Kamra attack accused held.](#)" *Nation*. 26 September 2012.
- Malik, Yaqoob. "[Kamra attack mastermind identified.](#)" *Dawn*. 26 August 2012.
- Marwat, Abdul Zahoor Khan. "[Lessons from Kamra attack.](#)" *News International*. 27 August 2012.
- Milborne One. "SE-045 Saab 2000 with Erieve AEW&C." *Wikimedia Commons*. 15 July 2008.
- Nauman, Qasim. "[Militants attack major Pakistan air base; nine killed.](#)" *Reuters*. 17 August 2012.
- NNI. "[Two brothers of Kamra attacker held.](#)" *Nation*. 20 August 2012.
- NNI. "[Two more Kamra suicide bombers identified.](#)" *Nation*. 25 August 2012.
- PPI. "[9 Kamra base attackers identified: Malik.](#)" *News International*. 19 August 2012.
- Saleem, Farrukh. "[200 million dollars questions for PAF.](#)" *News International*. 7 September 2012.
- Shaheen, Sikander. "[PAF disowns Malik's Kamra disclosures.](#)" *Nation*. 19 August 2012.



OEA Team Threat Report



- Syed, Baqir Saijid. "[Fourth assault on Kamra base since 2007.](#)" *Dawn*. 17 August 2012.
- Walsh, Declan. "[Militants Attack Pakistani Air Force Base.](#)" *New York Times*. 16 August 2012.
- Yasin, Aamir. "[Three 'terror suspects' held near Chaklala.](#)" *Dawn*. 19 August 2012.
- . "[Adnan Rasheed suspected in Kamra attack.](#)" *News International*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Five Afghans held in Attock for illegal stay.](#)" *Dawn*. 9 September 2012.
- . "[Four Kamra attackers indetified: Malik.](#)" *News International*. 17 August 2012.
- . "[Google Maps.](#)" *Google*. 10-12 September 2012.
- . "[Gunmen storm military air base in Pakistan.](#)" *BBC*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Kamra airbase attack suspects picked up.](#)" *Dawn*. 26 September 2012.
- . "[Kamra airbase attackers devise future strategy.](#)" *News International*. 22 September 2012.
- . "[Kamra attack contained; 6 terrorists killed.](#)" *SAMAA*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Kamra base attack: two more held.](#)" *News International*. 25 September 2012.
- . "[Mastermind of Kamra Airbase attack arrested.](#)" *Dawn*. 20 August 2012.
- . "[NEWS IN BRIEF: Compensation announced.](#)" *Dawn*. 19 August 2012.
- . "[9 militants killed in Kamra operation.](#)" *News International*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Preliminary investigation report on Kamra air base attack ready.](#)" *Dawn*. 17 August 2012.
- . "[Operation completed at Kamra base: PAF.](#)" *News International*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Rs 1m each for Kamra Air Base martyred.](#)" *News International*. 18 August 2012.
- . "[Several killed in Pakistan airbase raid.](#)" *Al Jazeera*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Soldiers repulse attack on Kamra base.](#)" *Nation*. 17 August 2012.
- . "[10 killed in Pakistani air base attack.](#)" *CNN*. 16 August 2012.
- . "[Three suspects arrested from vicinity of Chaklala Airbase.](#)" *News International*. 19 August 2012.