

# ISLAMABAD MARRIOTT BOMBING

**Situation:** Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan bombed.

On 20 September 2008, terrorists used a suicide vehicle-borne IED to attack the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan. The attack devastated the hotel and killed as many as 60 people, both foreign and local nationals.

This was an attack on both Western interests and the Pakistani government. Newly elected President Asif Ali Zardari was scheduled to be at the hotel at the time of the attack, but a last minute change in schedule may have saved his life. Terrorists often target symbols of American economic influence such as the Marriott Hotel. Additionally, the attackers may have believed that US military and CIA personnel were staying at the hotel.



The attack demonstrates the ability of terrorist organizations to plan and execute operations using large-scale weapons. It also demonstrates their willingness to inflict indiscriminate collateral damage in pursuit of their objectives.

[In high threat environments, try to avoid areas where Americans and Westerns congregate and stay. If this is not possible, choose hotels and restaurants that have adequate security to counter the local threat.](#)



At 7:52 p.m. on 20 September 2008, a six-wheeled construction truck, driven by a lone suicide bomber, attempted to crash through the security gate leading into the Marriott Hotel complex. Fortunately, the vehicle was not able to gain enough speed to defeat the barrier because of a sharp turn in the road.

Security personnel arrived shortly after the truck hit the gate. Following an exchange of gunfire between security personnel and the driver, a fire broke out in the cab of the truck. The hotel's CCTV system showed the truck burning for about four minutes before it exploded.

The truck was laden with nearly 2,000 pounds of explosives – a mixture of TNT, RDX, and aluminum powder. The concussion was felt nearly two miles away, blowing out windows in nearby buildings. The explosion created a twenty foot crater measuring sixty feet across, and cars parked near the hotel were lifted and tossed several feet. A severed gas line on the hotel's top floor started a fire that nearly gutted the entire structure.



If you witness a terrorist attack, leave the area immediately. Secondary explosions at the site of attacks are common and terrorists may plan secondary attacks to target emergency responders, news media, and curious on-lookers.

At least 54 people died in the bombing, including two US military personnel, a Danish intelligence agent, and the Ambassador to Pakistan from the Czech Republic. However, most of the dead were local Pakistanis, many of them employees of the hotel including members of the hotel security staff responding to the incident.

The attack was timed to inflict maximum casualties. It came the evening after the Ramadan fast concluded when affluent Pakistanis were going out to restaurants. The newly elected President Asif Ali Zardari was scheduled to attend an event at the hotel, and this would ensure additional security personnel, press, and government staff would be present. The terrorists may

have believed that US Service personnel occupied the top three floors of the hotel.

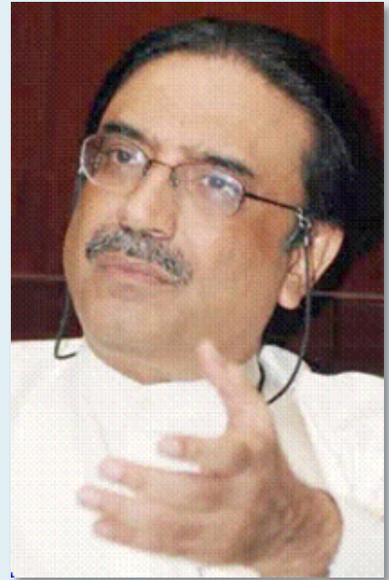


Fortunately, the casualty rate was much lower than intended. The Presidential event was cancelled earlier that evening and fewer Americans were staying at the hotel than the terrorists thought. In addition, the attack vehicle did not penetrate the gate and it exploded sixty yards from the hotel.

Stay alert to your surroundings and be aware of local cultural and political events. Terrorists may choose to attack on religious holidays and national anniversaries for symbolic reasons. The election of a government that opposes terrorist objectives may indicate increased terrorist activity.

After the bombing, a jihadi organization calling itself Fidayeen-e-Islam claimed responsibility for the attack. Since this is a relatively unknown organization, some experts dispute if it was capable of planning and executing an attack with nearly 2,000 pounds of explosives. Analysts suspect Harkatul Jihadul, a terrorist organization with links to al-Qaeda, is responsible for the attack.

Pakistan has experienced several terrorist attacks in recent years. The newly elected Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari is the husband of Benazir Bhutto, the former Pakistani Prime Minister who was assassinated in a terrorist attack in 2007. The Marriott Hotel, nearly destroyed in the attack, was a popular hotel for foreigners and Pakistani elites. It had been the site of a previous suicide bombing attempt in 2007.



Knowledge of the local environment can be key to survival. When traveling to a high threat location, become familiar with prior terrorist attacks in the area. Knowing the terrorists' targets and tactics can help you avoid possible target locations and recognize a potential threat.