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December 9, 2008

Facing Jehadi Terror: India's Reality

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The latest Mumbai terror strike highlighted the Indian political leadership's abysmal failure to address the phenomenon of jihadi terrorism, raising the question of whether or not New Delhi even has the political will to do so. According to newspaper reports, a group of Pakistani youths trained in marine warfare and special terrorist tactics by the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Pakistani Kashmir, set off from Karachi in a merchant vessel loaded with arms and ammunition. On the way, they hijacked a Porbandar-registered trawler to evade detection by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard patrols. Killing its crew, they reached the Sassoon Docks on the eastern shore of Mumbai, where they changed over to inflatable boats, disembarking at Badhwar Park in Cuffe Parade. Afterwards, they split up into smaller groups and headed towards their final destinations in the metropolis – the CST rail terminus, the Oberoi-Trident and Taj Mahal Hotels, and Nariman House – to carry out their sinister designs, which ultimately claimed over 200 lives, including 26 foreigners, and injured 300. They were also found to have been in possession of eight kilograms (17 pounds) of RDX at a restaurant near the Taj, indicating that they were planning further attacks. In carrying out their actions, they apparently received some logistical support from local Indian Muslims.

Objectively viewed, there is nothing herein that the political leadership in India could not have anticipated in advance. Indeed, recent speeches and observations of leading Indian

ministers and their aides, including National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan, demonstrated an awareness of the jihadi threat. Navy head Admiral Sureesh Mehta has long been warning of the danger of a sea-borne terrorist attack against India. As late as November 24, his superior, Defence Minister A. K. Antony, told a public gathering at Kochi that the country's land borders were secure, but not its seacoasts. Since 2006, former Home Minister Shivraj Patil had also been saying that terrorists had decided to use the sea route to penetrate into the country.

In the wake of the Mumbai attacks, Director-General of Police (Civil Defence) and Head of Coastal Security Group (CSG) J. M. Seshadri revealed that Indian intelligence agencies had determined as early as March 2007 that LeT had established a "Sea Wing" as part of a terrorist module. Mumbai Police Commissioner Hasan Gafoor has admitted that his force had received intelligence on possible terror strikes in the city in the wake of the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on September 21.

Of late, it has been revealed that United States intelligence agencies had warned India twice about a potential maritime attack on Mumbai at least a month before it occurred. CNN has sourced the report to two American counter-terrorism officials. Moreover, on November 18, Indian intelligence even intercepted a satellite phone call made to a Pakistan-based leader of LeT which indicated that a sea-borne attack was a distinct possibility.

In addition, the activities of the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and other terrorist groups have been no secret. Ideologically aligned with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Bangladeshi militant group Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, SIMI has been behind almost every major bomb attack in India since 1993. The newly emerged "Deccan Mujahedeen" (previously incarnate as the "Indiana Mujahedeen"), which initially claimed responsibility for the Mumbai attacks, is just one of its offshoots. Through SIMI, some Indian Muslims have received training by jihadi outfits in neighbouring countries. In an e-mail to various media in September, the Indian Mujahedeen had even warned of "the deadly attacks which Mumbaikars will face in the

future.”

In light of this body of evidence, one can only conclude that the Indian political leadership, both nationally and regionally, has virtually been sitting idle. Concerned primarily with advancing their individual interests, politicians of all hues have painted the jihadi phenomenon in a communal Hindu-Muslim colour and evaded their political responsibility to appropriately deal with the jihadi elements. Some of the central recommendations given by various Indian panels, including the one instituted by the Indian government in the wake of the 1999 attacks in the Kargil district of Kashmir, have so far not been implemented. India's defense services and internal security and intelligence agencies still do not have the kind of the infrastructure and autonomy that can help them checkmate jihadi terrorists.

No wonder, then, that India continues to be subjected to terror strikes of ever-increasing sophistication. The Mumbai jihadis, equipped with massive arms and ammunitions, satellite navigators, Global Positioning Systems, GPRS-enabled mobile phones and secure satellite telephones, were able to travel all the way from Karachi to the heart of India's financial capital, completely undetected by India's security and intelligence agencies! Moreover, India's initial response was extremely slow and confusing. Police officers with no experience in marine warfare were the first to respond, and National Security Guard units took nine hours to arrive in Mumbai.

If New Delhi is serious about combating terror, there has to be a consensus across the whole political spectrum that national security is a bipartisan matter. The central government and state authorities alike must immediately provide India's security and intelligence agencies with vital infrastructural support and functional autonomy. But the issue is complicated: there are elements within some of the state governments that are allegedly supportive of Islamist extremists. Former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Gulam Nabi Azad, reportedly wrote a letter detailing his accusations to the Ministry of Home Affairs. There are also a few influential politicians who have had family-level contacts with certain alleged terrorists. The security and intelligence

agencies should have the autonomy to keep tabs on them and make their findings public.

Externally, the Government must develop effective ways and means to dismantle the terrorists' bases or training camps in Pakistan. Recently, New Delhi has asked Pakistan to hand over Hafiz Saeed, founder leader of LeT, along with Mumbai underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, who is believed to be living in Pakistan, and Jaish-e-Mohammed leader Maulana Masood Azhar, a Pakistan national who had been freed from an Indian prison in exchange for passengers on a hijacked Indian Airlines plane. Given the clout of Islamist forces in Pakistani politics, it would be naive to expect that the current government in Islamabad will be able to crack down on its extremists.

It would also be naive for India to expect too much from Western countries. The latter still seem to calculate that Pakistan can be helpful in containing other Islamist terrorist threats and in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology. While India must further deepen its intelligence cooperation with countries such as America and England in order to crack the mind and method of the jihadis, as it has already begun to do in the wake of the Mumbai mayhem, New Delhi also needs to place special emphasis on expanding its links with Jerusalem, given their common unwavering conviction to fight all kinds of jihadi terrorism.

There is no confusion within the dominant Indo-Israeli strategic community as to the intent of jihadi terrorists. The ultimate agenda of jihadis has been to eliminate all Hindus, Jews, Christians and moderate Muslims. The Mumbai terrorism is not but a logical extension of this agenda, made clear by its inclusion of Chabad House, a popular centre for Israeli and Jewish tourists, in its list of targets. So does the fact that the gunmen reportedly entered the various sites and demanded that people with American and British passports identify themselves.

India and Israel can better combat this common threat by working together. Statesmanship demands that their leaderships build on the existing framework of friendship and cooperation and chart out a course crucial to the survival and development

of both countries. New Delhi could develop also a high -level security assistance programme modeled on Israel's Home Front Command. Also, India needs to fundamentally improve its medical response mechanisms in the event of a terrorist attack. At present, it does not have a sufficient number of paramedics and other rescue personnel to respond to such situations, nor can it deliver needed medical supplies and other equipment on time. In this regard, India could learn a good deal from Israel's international emergency medical organization, Magen David Adom.

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