SANCTIFYING VIOLENCE: JIHAD TERRORISM IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Since the last decade of the 20th century, India has been facing various forms of terrorist violence ranging from separatist and ethnic terrorism to ideological and religion driven terrorism. With the emergence of new and hybrid extremist and terror organizations and conglomerates, there have been a drastic change in the nature of terror tactics, technology and networks that spread in the hinterlands of India and beyond. Geographically speaking, the three zones which have been witnessing brisk terrorist activities are: Jammu and Kashmir (jihadi separatist, cross border terrorism), Northeastern States (separatists, ethno-islamist, cross border terrorism) and Central-Eastern States (left wing extremism/naxalite). However, in the beginning of this century, with the terror attack on Indian Parliament in December 13, 2001, the country has been experiencing serious menaces from the Islamic terrorist organizations that have infiltrated into India mostly from neighboring countries with the sole objective of perpetrating the so called jihad. Since then, the jihadists have expanded their terror bases and sleeper cells across the country thereby increasing their activities in urban centers of India, targeting strategic infrastructures and financial lifelines of the country.

This paper deals with the jihad terrorism in India with special focus on the major organizations operating and perpetrating terrorist violence in the country. In this context, two indigenous groups, Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Indian Mujahideen would be discussed elaborately to understand the homegrown factor of the terrorist movement.

After the demolition of Babri Masjid in North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in December 6, 1992, Pakistan started sponsoring cross-border terrorism as proxy war against India. Later it turned out to be a systematic terrorist movement against India with the involvement of at least two sets of players. The first set of terror groups comprises of Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-
e-Mohammad (JeM) and based in both Pakistan and Bangladesh Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami (HuJI). The second set is a network of disgruntled Muslim youths, students and criminal elements which largely work as a support system for the major terror outfits cited above, e.g. Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and of late, a full grown jihadi organization Indian Mujahideen (IM).

Following the demolition of Babri mosque, the homegrown jihadi terrorism has spread its tentacles extensively throughout the country. It was further strengthened after the 2002 Gujarat communal riots. In recent times, JeM and LeT along with the HuJI are collectively utilizing India's porous eastern border for anti-India activities and by establishing their bases in neighboring Bangladesh, Nepal and in the Middle East for movement of trained cadres and finances for their operations. These groups are recruiting Indian Muslim youths, sending them to Pakistan for training and re-inducting them via Bangladesh to carry out terrorist attacks in India. Many recent terror strikes like the serial blasts in Delhi, twin blasts in Varanasi and the Mumbai carnage are results of these collective efforts of these groups.

In its Annual Reports, the Home Ministry of India has also noted the involvement of JeM, LeT and HuJI in most of the terror strikes in the country. Recently, the emergence of Indian Mujahideen (IM) as indigenous (home grown) jihadi organization with active supports from all Pakistan based terror groups has raised concerns in Indian security establishment. These groups have been using their sleeper cells to carry out urban and mass casualty attacks.

PAN-INDIAN TERROR ORGANIZATIONS

LASHKAR- E -TAIBA: Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure), LeT is the most deadly Pakistan based terror outfit that has been spearheading maximum attacks in India. Although LeT has its old operational base in Jammu & Kashmir, it has spread its area of activities from Western Gujarat to eastern border of Manipur and West Bengal, and from southern state of Kerala to Jammu & Kashmir in the North. The LeT is the military wing of the erstwhile religious organization, Markaz Da'wat wa'l Irshad (MDI), which later changed its name into Jama'at-ud-Da'wah (JuD) following 9/11 attacks in the USA when the Lashkar outfit was banned and announced as Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed is the chief of Lashkar-e-Taiba. Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, Yahiya Mujahid (spokesman) Abdullah Muntazer Gaznavi (media handler) and Abu Hamza are some of the prominent LeT operatives.

In early 1990s, a terror outfit called Islami Inquilabi Mahaz was very active in the Poonch district of Jammu & Kashmir. During the same period, many Pakistani and Afghan mercenaries infiltrated across the Line of Control (LoC) and the presence of LeT was detected in tandem with the Islami Inquilabi Mahaz. However, the first ever LeT attack was reported in August 1992 when militants killed nearly 19 Indian Army soldiers in J&K. At a meeting held at Tehran in 1993, the LeT had forged an understanding with the Jammu and Kashmir People’s Conference (JKPC) and Al Barq. This paved the way for their joint operation/mission in J&K.

The JUD/LeT and their leaderships are affiliated to the Ahle-Hadith school of thought, a reformist Islamic movement. The objectives of LeT are to establish Nizam-e-Mustafa (God’s government) in the world and merger of J&K with Pakistan. Later, with Pakistan ISI’s behest, it added anti-India goals: to destabilize India and impede its economy. LeT has introduced
Fidayeen missions in Jammu and Kashmir and intermittently striking India's heartlands with its tactics of indiscriminate shooting and grenade attacks.

Pakistan’s July 2009 dossier for the first time admitted that the LeT has carried out the November 26, 2008 multiple Mumbai attacks. The dossier named Senior LeT operatives Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi as the mastermind. Among other attacks, the December 2005 Indian Institute of Science campus (Bangalore) attack and October 2005 Delhi serial bomb explosions were carried out by LeT operatives. The outfit carried out an audacious attack on a CRPF recruitment center in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, on January 1, 2008. The Rampur attack was considered to be the dress rehearsal for Mumbai mayhem later that year as it came just over a month after November 2007 multiple blasts in court premises in three major cities of Uttar Pradesh: Lucknow, Faizabad and Varanasi.

JAISH-E-MOHAMMED: Jaish-e-Mohammed (Army of the Prophet), JeM is a Pakistani based terrorist outfit. It was mainly active in Jammu and Kashmir in its initial phase, but later it collaborated with LeT for terror acts beyond J&K. Maulana Masood Azhar is its supreme leader. JeM is a splinter group of Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami (HuJI), an Islamic outfit that formed in early 1980s to fight war against former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Maulana Masood Azhar was a member of HuJI before he established JeM on January 31, 2000 in Karachi in Pakistan. Before that, Azhar was released from Indian prison in December 1999 in exchange of hostages in the hijacked Indian Airlines Flight IC 814.

JeM's main objective is the secession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and its merger with Pakistan and destabilization of India. The group claims that each of its offices in Pakistan would serve as schools of jihad. Most of the Jaish-e-Mohammed terror acts are fidaeeyen (suicide terrorist) attacks. In this mode, terrorists of the outfit storm a high security target, including security forces' bases, camps and convoys before they are killed by retaliatory action. JeM is closely linked through the Binoria Madarsas in Karachi, with the former Taliban regime of Afghanistan and its protégé, Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network. The outfit is also reported to have links with Sunni terrorist outfits operating in Pakistan such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). Its cadres are mostly Pakistanis and Kashmiris, but also include Afghans and Arab veterans of the Afghan war. The outfit was involved in the Indian Parliament attack on December 13, 2001. Prior to this, JeM had perpetrated similar kind of suicide operation storming J&K Legislative Assembly in October 2001, killing nearly 35 persons, including 10 security force personnel.

HARKAT-UL-JIHAD ISLAMI: Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami, (Movement of Islamic Holy War), HuJI has emerged as the largest international Sunni Islamic jihadi organization created in and by Pakistan after the Lashkar e Taiba. The outfit is broadly based on two countries as HuJI-Pakistan and HuJI-Bangladesh (HuJI-B) where the later is more potent than the earlier one. HuJI-B cadres are active in India and they are mostly infiltrated form India’s eastern corridors. HuJI, in collaboration with other Pakistan based outfits such as JeM, LeT and indigenous radical organization, Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) perpetrated terrorist attacks in various parts of the country. Although HuJI has existed in the subcontinent since the early 1980s with active support from Pakistan-based Deobandi religious bodies, including the Jamaat-ul-Ulema-e-Islami (JUI), most recently HuJI has set up Indian units in Uttar Pradesh. It also has bases in
Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. HuJI with direct logistical help from LeT, JeM and SIMI, has coordinated many attacks in India in recent past including the March 2006 Sankatmochan Temple blast in Varanasi, May 2007 twin blasts in Hyderabad and in the serial bomb blasts in May 2008 in Jaipur.

HuJI identified itself as the second line of defense for every Muslim. Its initial objective was to organize relief camps for the Afghan mujahedeen during the Soviet-Afghan war. Afterwards, it began to recruit and train mujahedeen with support from ISI and grew as a terrorist outfit. Since the outfit has different units in different countries, it has multiple objectives and activities. HuJI contingents operating in Pakistan or Jammu and Kashmir initially focused on liberating J&K, but its current mobilization outside J&K portrays its present strategy to spread terrorism across the country and destabilize India with support from the proscribed Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), ISI and other Islamist extremists. HuJI has its bases not only in Bangladesh, Pakistan, J&K and some other pockets in India, but also by 2005, it has spread its tentacles to almost 24 countries, including Chechnya, Fiji, Iran, Ireland, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and parts of Africa and the Middle East. In March 2008, the US has blacklisted Harakat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) for attacks in India and other countries, as a "global terrorist organization".

INDIGENOUS TERROR GROUPS

STUDENTS ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF INDIA (SIMI): Students Islamic Movement of India, SIMI was founded in 1977 at the University of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, as a radical student outfit. The interlinked triad of the ummah, caliphate and jihad determined SIMI’s postures and activities in the country. Therefore, the group’s logo includes a Quran, an AK-47 assault rifle and a globe. SIMI started as a united platform for Muslim students and youth in the country, with the objective to restore the Caliphate for the unity of the ummah by rejecting the concept of nationalism, secularism and democracy. The group’s aim was to establish Dar-ul-Islam (land of Islam) by using violence, if necessary, to convert non-Muslims.

In the early 1990s, SIMI activists were indoctrinated by Pakistan’s ISI and they travelled far and wide to garner support. The outfit convened an Ikhwanul (Muslim Brotherhood) conference in Kanpur city in October 1999 which was attended by around 20,000 people including Sheikh Yaseen (Hamas), Qazi Hussain Ahmed (JI, Pakistan) and the imam of the al Aqsa mosque. In 2001, SIMI again convened a mass conclave in Mumbai, especially for Muslim youths. It was here that SIMI urged fellow Indian Muslims to launch an armed jihad in India with the establishment of an Islamic caliphate as the goal. The SIMI network is actively involved in conversion in the southwestern states of India.

SIMI has had strong logistical and operational ties with Kashmir-centric Pakistani terrorist outfits like Hizbul Mujahedeen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad. In late 2002, Maharashtra police seized as many as 30 compact discs containing speeches of Maulana Masood Azhar, chief of Jaish-e-Muhammad, along with clippings of communal riots in Gujarat from SIMI offices in Aurangabad. Also, SIMI’s pro-Taliban stance in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the group’s anti-U.S. demonstrations in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra,
Gujarat and Rajasthan, and SIMI’s glorification of Osama bin Laden as the “ultimate jihadi” prompted the Indian government to impose a ban on the group in 2001.

After the government proscription, SIMI operated closely with the Hyderabad-based Tehreek Tahaffuz-e-Shair-e-Islam and the radical Islamic vigilante outfit, the Darsgah Jihad-o-Shahadat (“Institute for Holy War and Martyrdom”) which has countrywide centers teaching self-defense training to Muslim youths and aims to make the Quran the constitution of India. SIMI also operated through the Islamic Youth Front in Kerala and the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam. Intelligence agencies have established SIMI’s involvement in major terrorist strikes in India and believe that the outfit has created the country’s first homegrown terror network called the Indian Mujahideen (IM). SIMI attempts to indoctrinate Muslim youths by convincing them to fight for Islam. To accomplish this goal, SIMI uses provocative audio/video clippings which selectively depict the atrocities committed against Muslims from Gujarat to Kashmir and from Bosnia to Afghanistan.

What was started as a student movement, SIMI has become a major radical Islamist movement in due course with a strong presence in most of the northern and southern states of India. SIMI, along with other militant outfits, has jointly carried out many terrorist acts including the September 13, 2008 serial blasts in Delhi and multiple explosions in Ahmadabad and Jaipur as well as blasts in Uttar Pradesh courts in the recent past. SIMI has operational ties with many foreign militant student groups, including the Saudi Arabian Jamayyatul Ansar (JA), whose membership is comprised of former SIMI activists and expatriate Indian Muslims.

According to SIMI, a true Muslim cannot lead his life in accordance with Islam in a pluralist, secular society which is un-Islamic. Thus, an organized struggle to establish the Islamic state is largely imperative and a duty for each Muslim. It also believed in the jihad and ready to wage it against non-believers and whoever put hurdles in the path of the struggle for establishing the Caliphate. Gradually, SIMI’s adoption and vigorous persuasion of Quran, Jihad and Shahadat (Martyrdom) as constitution, path and desire respectively branded it as radical and violent outfit.

INDIAN MUJAHEDEEN: Indian Mujahedeen (IM) has emerged as a well-organized jihadi terrorist group in India, claiming responsibility for a number of terror attacks perpetrated in various urban centers of India during 2007-2008. The exact date of IM’s formation is not known. However, the recent arrest of a number of IM operatives has revealed its possible existence and involvement in terror strikes in India as far back as October 2005.

IM came into the open for the first time in November 2007, when simultaneous bomb blasts targeted lawyers in court premises in three Uttar Pradesh cities—Varanasi, Faizabad and Lucknow. IM described the attacks as “Islamic raids” and justified them as revenge against lawyers who had allegedly assaulted a couple of Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorist suspects. IM also alleged that the lawyers had refused to take cases involving other alleged terrorists, including suspected HuJi leader and Phulpur-based Islamic cleric Muhammad Waliullah, the alleged mastermind of the March 2006 Sankatmochan temple blasts in Varanasi.

Basically, members of IM are mainly drawn from proscribed outfits such as the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), the Pakistan-based LeT and the Bangladesh-based HuJI. IM’s email
statements indicate their ties with SIMI when they put forward demands for the release of SIMI cadres under detention or serving jail terms. However, the newly emerged IM continues to deny any connection with Pakistan, Bangladesh, or any of their agencies (e.g. Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] and Bangladesh’s Directorate General of Forces Intelligence [DGFI]). It also denies any links with terrorist groups such as LeT and HuJi.

In IM mode of terror strikes, email messages have typically been sent out to the media prior to the attacks, describing IM viewpoints on issues such as the Babri mosque demolition, the Mumbai riots, the communal violence in Gujarat that followed the 2002 torching of a train carrying Hindus, and various atrocities against the Muslim community in Gujarat and beyond. IM cites these incidents as reasons for their jihad. IM’s objectives could be comprehended from its email manifestos which calls for spreading Islam in India and waging jihad against the “infidels” (non-Muslims, i.e. Hindus) and establishing “God’s government” according to Quranic tenets.

The Indian Mujahedeen has been trying to garner support from India's teeming Muslim population, often by raising indigenous issues in its manifestos. Since the Uttar Pradesh Court attacks, IM, as a home-grown jihadi outfit, has claimed responsibility for at least four major terror strikes in 2008 that targeted civilians. Each attack came with prior emails to media citing a list of anti-Muslim atrocities in the country. The group justifies the violence by tagging the terror campaign as the “rise of jihad” and the “revenge for Gujarat.” The top leaders have been identified as Riyaz Bhatkal, Abdul Subhan Qureshi, Amir Reza, Iqbal Bhatkal, Muhammad Khalid, Shahzad Ahmed, and Ariz Khan. The most surprising revelation has been the many IT professionals found to be involved in IM’s activities, including wealthy professionals Asghar Peerbhoy, Salman Kadar Shaikh, and Asif Bashiruddin Shaikh, who have played pivotal roles in generating funds for the outfit and planning attacks.

The Indian Mujahedeen has four wings, each wing having a distinct responsibility for spreading terror in India with the LeT’s active assistance: Shahabuddin Ghouri Brigade which is headed by Amir Raza and largely responsible for planning and executing attacks in southern India. The Muhammad Ghaznavi Brigade is responsible for planning and executing terror strikes in northern India and Shaheed-al-Zarqawi Brigade is responsible for targeting political and other important personalities of the country as well as organizing suicide attacks. IM has a media Wing which is headquartered in Pune, Maharashtra. The wing is responsible for email and print media communications/press release of manifestos before or after the blasts. IM has claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist acts across India between 2006 and 2008, including the Mumbai commuter train blasts (July 2006); the serial blasts in Uttar Pradesh (November 2007); serial explosions in northeast India’s Assam and Tripura states, (October 2008); and attacks in Jaipur city (May 2008), Bengaluru (July 2008); Ahmadabad (July 2008); and Delhi (September 2008). The Assam and Tripura (Agartala) attacks were claimed by the previously unknown Islamic Security Force-Indian Mujahideen (ISF-IM), which appeared to be IM’s northeastern franchise. Lastly, investigations into the November 2008 Mumbai episode reveal tell-tale signs of IM’s footprint, though the evidence is not yet conclusive. According to intelligence sources, a huge amount of money was sent from the Gulf through IM's Riyaz Bhatkal to execute the Mumbai carnage. The recent probe into LeT’s Chicago conspiracy (which
is directly linked to the Mumbai terror events) revealed that prime suspect David Headley and Tahawwur Rana received logistical support from IM operatives while they were in India. IB believes that Bhatkal knew about the Mumbai attack plan and helped arrange local logistics through his underworld links in the city.

As IM cadres have been arrested from different parts of India, it clearly demonstrates the geographical reach of the outfit’s terror network that engulfs the length and breadth of the country and possibly extending into neighboring states. Though many details of IM’s organization remain unclear, some facets of the mystery were unraveled during the interrogations of arrested cadres, documented in the 1,809-page charge sheet filed by the Mumbai Crime Branch. 21 IM members have been charged for conspiracy, damaging a place of worship with intent to insult a particular religion, collecting arms for waging war, and waging war against the country. Most of the accused are from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh and are well-qualified professionals. Among the 21 suspects is Muhammed Saif, who was involved in the September 13, 2008, New Delhi serial blasts and was later captured during the controversial October 19, 2008, Batla House raids, in which two suspects were killed. Since his arrest, Muhammad Saif has provided details of the IM organization and its countrywide activities. According to his confession, the Indian Mujahedeen has four wings, each wing having a distinct responsibility for spreading terror in India with the LeT’s active assistance.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussions, it has been clearly observed that Pakistan is waging a proxy war against India through Kashmir centric cross-border terrorism for its territorial ambitions. Beyond Kashmir also it is actively supporting the home grown terror outfits to perpetrate violence in other parts of India especially the large and small cities thereby effecting massive damage and destruction of lives and properties. The central government had proscribed many outfits for their anti-India activities; but the outfits are changing their names frequently but not their nefarious activities making the mockery of the government proscriptions. Many terror outfits are still flourishing with political and religious patronage from across the borders. Outfits like HuJI, LeT, Jaish and Hizb are still focusing on India, getting all their support from Pakistan’s ISI and its Bangladeshi counterpart, Director General Field Intelligence (DGFI) who have formed a deadly alliance against India. Most of these above mentioned terrorist groups are members of Osama bin Laden’s International Islamic Front and vowed to fight for the Muslim Ummah (the community of believers). Indian government is finally pursuing the idea of proscribing nearly 100 terrorist entities, both regional and international. In August 2009, the Indian government issued an order detailing the implementation of Section 51A of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, which empowers the government to freeze and seize any financial assets or economic resources held by any suspected individuals or entities engaged in or suspected to be engaged in terrorism activities.

Adhering to U.N. guidelines, the Reserve Bank of India (the apex bank of the country) directed all banking and commercial institutions to scan all existing accounts to ensure that these are not held by or linked to any entity or individual figured in the U.N. list of terrorists and terror-related organizations. The Reserve Bank of India issued a similar directive to all financial institutions to be on the alert for entities linked with al-Qaeda and the Taliban and mentioned in the UNSC list
of designated terrorist groups (Indian Express, November 12, 2009). The revised list will include all the groups already designated as banned entities under the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1267, the U.N. sanctions regime which covers entities associated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban irrespective of their locations. Unlike some other countries and international agencies, India does not have a consolidated terrorist list which includes individuals, charities or undertakings associated with either al-Qaeda or Lashkar-e-Taiba. However, recently the Home Ministry of India has prepared a new updated list of terror entities which will certainly help to fight international terrorism.

The 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and subsequent national and international developments have forced India to realize that in order to curb transnational terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba or al-Qaeda, there is a need for strong international cooperation, mutual understanding and counter-terrorism mechanisms. In light of India’s experience with terrorist groups evading proscription by operating under different names, it is imperative that a comprehensive proscription be developed that would ban not only terrorist groups, but also their front organizations and sympathetic groups and individuals. A step in this direction was recently undertaken with the June 4 proscription of the Indian Mujahideen (IM), a group believed responsible for several bombing campaigns and allied to SIMI and the LeT. The government’s ban includes all of IM’s formations and front organizations.

Rather than just being a reflection of regional concerns, the expanded list of designated terrorist groups conveys India’s priorities and security interests at a global level. To remain a front-runner in the global fight against terrorism, it is necessary for India to step up its legal mechanism and counter-terrorism framework for dealing with transnational terrorism, including new measures related to financing and support for terrorism at home and beyond.

REFERENCES


ii The Ahle Hadith (also Ahle Hadees) has been influential in the subcontinent with active ties with Saudi Wahhabis and strong diaspora links. Literally meaning the “People of the Tradition of the Prophet,” Ahle Hadith is called as non-conformist by rival Islamic movements, mostly due to the movement’s non-conformism to any of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence or the commentaries and legal opinions based on them.


iv With a pan-Islamic world-view and strong international linkages, HuJI aims to fight for all Muslims. For one of the earliest publications on HuJI and its motto, see, Ahmed Khaled, “The biggest militia we know nothing about” Friday Times, May 20, 2002.

v Khurshchev Singh, “HuJI after the death of its India chief”, IDSA Strategic Comments, New Delhi, February 13, 2008.

