

## **“Bad Company: Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the Growing Ambition of Islamist Militancy in Pakistan”**

### **Testimony before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia**

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My name is Lisa Curtis. I am a senior research fellow at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

The Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a Pakistan-based terrorist organization, poses a threat to U.S. citizens as well as to critical U.S. national security interests, including promoting stability in South Asia and degrading the overall threat from terrorism emanating from the region. The U.S. government has previously associated the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT—“Army of the Pure”) primarily with the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir and has viewed the group as less inimical to U.S. interests than al-Qaeda, although the U.S. State Department has listed the LeT as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since December, 2001. In my testimony, I will argue that the U.S. must develop policies that approach the LeT with the same urgency as that which the U.S. deals with the threat from al-Qaeda. Given the potential for LeT-linked terrorist cells to conduct a Mumbai-style attack here in the U.S., Washington must pursue policies that contain and shut down the operations of this deadly organization. This will require close cooperation with the

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Pakistani government, which has in the past supported the LeT, and only recently and haltingly begun to take steps to rein in the group's activities.

## Mumbai Attacks

The world was shocked by the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai from November 26 to 28 that killed nearly 170 people, including six Americans. The ten perpetrators of the attacks had traveled from Pakistan by sea, and were armed with AK-56 automatic assault rifles, hand grenades, GPS devices, and cell phones. For nearly three days the attackers terrorized Mumbai, gunning down innocent civilians at a train station, hospital, two five-star hotels, a Jewish center, and a restaurant frequented by Westerners.

The attackers were in constant contact via cell phone with their controllers in Pakistan, who provided them detailed instructions on where to go and whom to murder. Released recordings of those cell phone conversations reveal the diabolical nature and sheer ruthlessness of the leaders of the LeT—a group that has long been supported by Pakistan's military and intelligence service. The attackers were clearly under the control of their masters in Pakistan, who reveled in the media attention given to the attacks and who exhorted the attackers to massacre as many innocents as possible, while ordering them not to let themselves be captured alive. The operation did not go according to plan, however, and the Indian authorities were able to capture one of the gunmen, Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab. Kasab confessed to being recruited and trained by the LeT and identified the leader of the operation as Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi.<sup>2</sup>

The Mumbai attacks represented a watershed event for most Indians. The country had faced a series of smaller-scale terrorist attacks in the 18 months leading up to the November 2008 attacks. Mumbai had also experienced a major terrorist attack just two years prior, in July 2006, when terrorists bombed commuter trains, killing 180—about the number killed in the 2008 attacks. What made the 2008 attacks unique was that multiple locations were targeted, including a train station and hospital, and five-star hotels that serve mainly Westerners and upper-class Indians. The 2008 rampage also differed from previous assaults in that they lasted over a period of three days, with the attackers holing up inside the hotels and Jewish center, where they fought Indian commandos to the death under the glare of the media. By attacking multiple targets almost simultaneously, the terrorists created a sense of chaos and fear throughout the city.

The inadequate response to the attacks by the Indian security forces provoked severe criticism of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government and prompted the resignation of Home Minister Shivraj Patil. Much like the effects of 9/11 on the U.S., the Mumbai attacks catalyzed Indian efforts to adopt a more integrated and structured approach to homeland security. Shortly after the attacks, the Indian cabinet approved proposals to increase the number of police officers in major cities, install closed-circuit televisions in busy areas, and create a research wing to investigate terrorist threats in the country's internal intelligence service.

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<sup>2</sup>Bruce Riedel, "The Mumbai Massacre and its Implications for America and South Asia," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63. No 1, (Fall/Winter 2009), p. 112.

Two major challenges India faces with securing its homeland are lack of information-sharing among the different intelligence agencies and difficulties in conducting investigations across state jurisdictions. To overcome these obstacles, the government passed legislation in late 2008 establishing a National Investigation Agency (NIA), much like America's FBI, to investigate threats or acts of terrorism. Senior NIA officers are granted unique authority to pursue and investigate terrorism cases throughout the country, thereby addressing the challenge of separate jurisdictions between Indian states. The new Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram also issued an executive order to start the functioning of the Multi-Agency Center (MAC) as an interagency counterterrorism center similar to the CIA's National Counterterrorism Center. The MAC was created several years ago, but it has been plagued by lack of staffing and resources.

One result of the Mumbai attacks was an unprecedented level of counterterrorism cooperation between India and the U.S., breaking down walls and bureaucratic obstacles between the two countries' intelligence and investigating agencies. The U.S. and India should continue to recognize the value of their shared experiences in dealing with terrorist threats and enhance their counterterrorism dialogue further and develop joint strategies, thereby improving the security of both nations.

## **Headley Investigations**

The arrest of Pakistani-American David Coleman Headley in the U.S. in October 2009 provided a major breakthrough in the Mumbai attack probe and shed fresh light on the operations and objectives of the LeT. On October 2, 2009, U.S. authorities in Chicago arrested David Coleman Headley (also known as Daood Gilani) for conspiring with LeT in Pakistan to conduct attacks in India, and for plotting an attack on the Danish newspaper that first published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed in 2005. Headley had apparently traveled frequently to Pakistan, where he received terrorist training from the LeT. He allegedly scouted the sites of the Mumbai attacks as well as sites for subsequent attacks in India, including the National Defence College in New Delhi and two well-known boarding schools. Headley's alleged co-conspirator, Pakistani-born Canadian citizen Tahawwur Rana was also arrested in the U.S. in mid-October 2009.

The findings from the Headley investigations have awokened U.S. officials to the gravity of the international threat posed by Pakistan's failure to crack down on terrorist groups, including those that have primarily targeted India. U.S. officials had previously viewed the LeT solely through an Indo-Pakistani lens rather than as an urgent international terrorist threat. The Headley investigations appear to be changing the way the U.S. government views the LeT. U.S. State Department Counterterrorism Coordinator Daniel Benjamin, for instance, recently said that the Headley investigations show the LeT has global ambitions and is willing to undertake bold, mass-casualty operations.

Most troubling about the Headley case is what it has revealed about the proximity of the Pakistani military to the LeT. The U.S. Department of Justice indictment that was unsealed on January 14, 2009 names a retired Pakistani army major, Abdul Rehman Hashim Syed, as Headley's handler, and Ilyas Kashmiri, a former commando with Pakistan's elite Special Services Group, and now leader of the Harakat-ul-Jihadi-Islami, as the operational commander behind the Mumbai attacks. While the allegations do not specify that serving Pakistani army or intelligence officials were involved in the attacks, they reveal that the Pakistani army's past

support and continued facilitation of the LeT contributed to the terror group's ability to conduct the assaults.

## Pakistan's Response

Pakistan initially denied any Pakistani or LeT involvement in the Mumbai attacks. It took several months for Islamabad to admit publicly that Pakistanis had been involved. Islamabad eventually arrested seven LeT operatives, including those that India had fingered as the ring leaders of the attacks—Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi and Zarar Shah. The Pakistani government also reportedly shut down some LeT offices throughout the country. Despite these actions, there are indications that the LeT continues to operate relatively freely in the country.

The revelations from the Headley investigations prompted fresh U.S. demarches on the Pakistani government to crack down more forcefully on the LeT. Just before the one-year anniversary of the attacks, and perhaps in response to this increased U.S. pressure, Pakistan finally charged the seven LeT operatives in an anti-terrorism court. Pakistani authorities have not charged LeT leader Hafez Muhammed Sayeed, however, even though Kasab has indicated that Sayeed gave his blessing to the attackers before they departed Pakistan. In fact, on February 5, 2009, Sayeed reportedly addressed a crowd of around 10,000 in Lahore, Pakistan, where he called for additional attacks on India. Eight days after Sayeed's speech, terrorists bombed a German bakery in Pune, India, killing nine and wounding dozens of others. Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram last week criticized Pakistan for allowing Sayeed to make provocative anti-Indian statements, especially after the Indian government had provided information on his role in the Mumbai attacks.<sup>3</sup>

Pakistan had detained Sayeed up until June 2009, when the Lahore High Court called for his release on grounds of insufficient evidence. Sayeed was one of the original founders of the LeT and is one of its most charismatic leaders, as evidenced by the crowd he attracted in early February. Sayeed's release from jail and ability to hold public rallies sends a strong signal that terrorism will be tolerated in Pakistan, especially if it is directed at arch-rival India. Pakistani parliamentarian and former Information Minister Sherry Rehman, during a recent address to Pakistan's parliament, criticized Pakistani authorities for allowing Sayeed to hold public rallies, noting that they undermined the authority of the state. She asked, "What is the point of our innocent civilians and soldiers dying in a borderless war against such terrorists, when armed, banned outfits can hold the whole nation hostage in the heart of Punjab's provincial capital?"

The degree of control that Pakistani intelligence retains over LeT's operations remains an open question. Some Pakistani officials claim that al-Qaeda has infiltrated the LeT, implying that Pakistani officials were not involved in the planning and execution of the Mumbai attacks, and that elements of the LeT were "freelancing." Regardless of whether the Pakistanis did or did not have control of the group that carried out the Mumbai attacks, they are now responsible for

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<sup>3</sup>"Pakistan Should Have Acted Against Saeed: Chidambaram," *Hindustan Times*, March 2, 2010 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Pakistan-should-have-acted-against-Saeed-Chidambaram/HI-Article1-514476.aspx> (March 10, 2010).

taking actions that seek to ensure the LeT and its affiliates are incapable of conducting additional attacks. The appearance of LeT leader Hafez Muhammed Sayeed at a public rally casts grave doubts about Pakistan's commitment to reining in the group's activities.

## **LeT Ambitions and Links to International Terrorism**

The U.S. government has viewed LeT primarily through an Indo-Pakistani lens and calculated that the group did not pose a direct threat to U.S. interests. This view is short-sighted. LeT leaders themselves view the group as part of a global jihad movement and seek not only to undermine India but also to attack any countries they view as threatening Muslim populations. The LeT's operational focus has evolved considerably over the last several years. Throughout the early and mid-1990s, the LeT focused primarily on attacking Indian security forces in Kashmir. By the late 1990s, the LeT began calling for the break-up of the Indian state. In 2001, the LeT and another group, the Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM), attacked the Indian parliament in the heart of New Delhi, precipitating a military crisis between India and Pakistan and demonstrating the LeT's ability to put the subcontinent on the edge of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

Even after the 2001 attack on the Indian parliament, U.S. officials tended to view the LeT (and the JeM) as less threatening to U.S. interests than al-Qaeda, despite well-known links between these groups and international terrorism. For instance, shoe bomber Richard Reid apparently trained at an LeT camp in Pakistan; one of the London subway bombers spent time at an LeT complex in Muridke, Pakistan; and al-Qaeda leader Abu Zubayda was captured from an LeT safe house in Faisalabad, Pakistan. But the LeT links to al-Qaeda go back even further. In 1998, the LeT signed Osama bin Laden's fatwa for Muslims to kill Americans and Israelis. The revelations from the Headley investigations that the LeT in coordination with the Harakat-ul-Jihadi-Islami planned to attack the U.S. Embassy and Indian High Commission in Bangladesh around the one-year anniversary of the 2008 Mumbai attacks should help convince U.S. officials that LeT ambitions include hitting U.S. targets.

LeT involvement in Afghanistan has picked up since 2006. LeT apparently trained at camps in Kunar and Nuristan provinces in the 1990s but did not fight alongside the Taliban at that time.<sup>4</sup> In the last four years, however, as the Taliban has regained influence in Afghanistan, the LeT has supported the insurgents by recruiting, training, and housing fighters and facilitating their infiltration into Afghanistan from the tribal areas of Pakistan. LeT has also helped al-Qaeda by recruiting men from the Jalozi refugee camp in Peshawar for training at al-Qaeda camps to become suicide bombers in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> LeT fighters were also likely part of the group that attacked a U.S. outpost in Wanat, Afghanistan in 2008 that killed nine U.S. soldiers.

## **U.S. Policy Moving Forward**

It has been a failure of U.S. policy to not insist Pakistan shut down the LeT long ago. U.S. officials have shied away from pressuring Pakistan on the LeT in the interest of garnering

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<sup>4</sup>Stephen Tanel, "Lashkar-e-Taiba in Perspective: An Evolving Threat," *Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper*, New America Foundation, February 2010, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

Pakistani cooperation against targets the U.S. believed were more critical to immediate U.S. objectives, i.e., al-Qaeda shortly after 9/11 and the Afghan Taliban more recently. But overlooking the activities of LeT in Pakistan is equivalent to standing next to a ticking time bomb waiting for it to explode. Furthermore, given that the LeT has cooperated with al-Qaeda and shares a similar virulent anti-west Islamist ideology, it makes little sense to believe one can dismantle al-Qaeda without also shutting down the operations of the LeT.

U.S. officials have begun to acknowledge the importance of Pakistan pursuing more consistent counterterrorism policies, rather than relying on its past tactic of fighting some terrorists, while supporting others. U.S. Defense Secretary Gates argued in a recent op-ed that ran in the Pakistani daily *The News* that seeking to distinguish between different terrorist groups is counterproductive. U.S. Director of National Intelligence Admiral Dennis Blair elaborated on this point when he testified before Congress on February 2, 2010 that, “Pakistan’s conviction that militant groups are strategically useful to counter India are hampering the fight against terrorism and helping al-Qaeda sustain its safe haven.”

To degrade the overall international terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan, the U.S. must convince Islamabad to confront those groups it has supported against India. The Mumbai attacks and subsequent Headley investigations reveal that the LeT has the international capabilities and ideological inclination to attack western targets whether they are located in South Asia or elsewhere. The boldness and sophistication of the Mumbai attacks demonstrate that Pakistan needs to take decisive action to neutralize the LeT before it conducts additional attacks that could well involve western targets and/or precipitate an Indo-Pakistani military conflict. More specifically the U.S. must:

- **Closely monitor Pakistani actions to dismantle the LeT.** Merely banning the organization has done little to degrade its capabilities. The U.S. in collaboration with other allies must increase pressure on Pakistan to take specific steps like denying the LeT leaders the ability to hold public rallies, collect donations, and engage in paramilitary training on Pakistani territory.
- **Avoid conveying a message that the U.S. is more interested in some terrorist groups than others,** which only encourages the Pakistani leadership to avoid addressing the issue of confronting the LeT. Washington should repeat Defense Secretary Gates’ message about the futility of trying to distinguish between terrorist groups that share more commonalities than differences.
- **Convey to the Pakistani leadership that the U.S. will monitor closely India’s military posture toward Pakistan as it dismantles groups like the LeT.**