

**Testimony of Dr. Marvin G. Weinbaum**, Scholar-in-Residence,  
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Growing Ambition of Islamist Militancy in Pakistan”

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Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), the Army of the Righteous, has evolved from being a government-sponsored Pakistani jihadi group dedicated to an insurgency in Indian Kashmir into a terrorist organization with regional and global ambitions and reach. In the U.S.’s focus on homeland security and al Qaeda it has failed to take into full account of the presence of other organizations capable of surpassing or replacing al Qaeda as a terrorist threat worldwide. LeT is probably the leading candidate for such a role. LeT is the largest militant network in Pakistan. It exceeds al Qaeda in its capacity for recruiting and fundraising across the Islamic world. Unlike al Qaeda, LeT has strong societal roots, and enjoys the protection of the institutions of a state.

LeT is determined to use violent means to inflict damage on American and Western interests internationally. Its leaders seek the creation of a purer Islamic state whose beliefs closely resemble Wahabism, a Sunni branch of Islam that subscribes to a literal interpretation of the Koran. But despite its transnational views that envision the reemergence of a caliphate across the Islamic world, the organization champions militant Pakistani nationalism and thrives on its association with domestic charitable activities.

#### LeT As a Domestic Organization

LeT was originally the offspring of Markaz-al-Dawa-wal-Irshad (MDI), a service organization founded at Muridke near Lahore in the early 1980s by a Palestinian, Abduallah Azzam, who was for a time an ideological mentor of Osama bin Laden. This parent organization created a militant wing, LeT, in 1990. LeT was principally designed to provide Pakistan’s military with a proxy force of recruited fighters to augment the Islamic insurgency in Indian Kashmir. But by the late 1990s, LeT was also engaged in training Islamic militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan coming from countries ranging from Egypt to the Philippines. In 2001, MDI became Jamaat-ud-Dawa and the following

year, after LeT was officially banned by the Pakistan government, it supposedly dissolved, leaving only the newly named charitable organization.

LeT's cover organization directs a wide network of social services and institutions, including madressahs, secondary schools, and a major medical mission. Its heavily guarded headquarters occupy a 200-acre site at Muridki on land given by the government for a religious educational center, a hospital, and residential complex. Whether as Jamaat-ud-Dawa or LeT, the organization is especially effective in rural areas where it does much of its recruiting and its collection boxes are widely found. LeT is especially successful in recruiting members from Tablighi Jammat, a popular Islamic moral rearmament movement.

LeT receives its main funding from multiple sources. It raises money from mosque collections, expatriate Pakistanis in the Gulf and Britain, Islamic NGOs, and Pakistani and Kashmiri businessmen. Like other extremist and militant organizations, money from drugs and smuggling also undoubtedly enter its coffers. There are suspicions that LeT receives financial assistance from Pakistan military's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI).

Until 2002, LeT had the full backing of the Pakistan military for its operations in Kashmir. When the Pakistan government curtailed assistance to Pakistani insurgents after a US-brokered ceasefire that year, the organization, with the knowledge of the ISI, shifted most of its training camps and militant operations to the western border with Afghanistan. Despite the government official ban of LeT, Pakistan's ISI continued to consider the organization as an asset. The ISI is believed to continue to share intelligence and provide protection to LeT.

It is a measure of the impunity with which LeT is allowed to operate in Pakistan that the authorities have been unwilling to contain LeT chief Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, who attracts thousands across the country with his fiery sermons. His inflammatory remarks would be expected to land him among the hundreds of disappeared political activists in the country. Although he has been periodically arrested, his house detentions have been cosmetic.

LeT has been allowed to gain notoriety and kudos for its relief activities in Pakistan. Its members worked alongside the U.S. military in the 2005 earthquake in Azad Kashmir, and the organization was visibly present in camps to care for displaced residents of Swat during the Pakistan's army 's campaign against Pakistani Taliban militants.

Although the U.S. provided the largest assistance package to the refugee camps, the Pakistan government denied U.S. aid workers the same opportunity to have a presence and identify the American contribution.

In reciprocation for government policies, the LeT has refrained from involvement in attacks against the Pakistani army and against Pakistani civilians. The Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), Pakistan's principal insurgent group, has accused the LeT of being too soft on the state of Pakistan, and other extremist groups are also skeptical of its strong linkages with ISI. At the same time, LeT's relations with the Pakistan government are under strain. The LeT has been displeased with the constraints placed on its jihadi operations as a result of Indian and international pressures. Some of the recent spectacular terrorists operations in India and Afghanistan may have been planned and executed without the approval of the ISI. The Islamabad government's cooperation with India in investigating and trying those accused in the November 2008 Mumbai attacks is also unwelcome. LeT is linked increasingly with the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a sectarian terrorist organization over which Pakistan's ISI has little control. In June 2009, plans by a major terrorist cell to target Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and a number of provincial chief ministers was reportedly disrupted in Karachi. Allegedly, the plotters included members of the LeT, al Qaeda and the TTP.

The current leadership in Pakistan may recognize better than any previous one the danger that LeT and groups like it pose to the state. But the organization's deep penetration of the country's social fabric makes any attempts to rein it in by the beleaguered Peoples Party impossible without the military's full commitment. Moreover, party and provincial politics add a further obstacle. The major opposition, Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, resists a challenge to a feared LeT that could put at risk the party's ascendant position in the Punjab.

### LeT's Ambitions and Reach

LeT's activities beyond Pakistan's borders are not new. For more than a decade, it was the most organized, trained, and heavily armed of the insurgent groups in Kashmir. LeT has not lost interest in Kashmir or in a jihad against India aimed at liberating "oppressed" Muslims in the Hindu majority state. Let's Hafiz Saeed calls for resistance against India's "water aggression," a reference to India's construction of several dams on rivers flowing into Pakistan. The

recent bakery bombing in Puna, India, has been traced to indigenous militants linked to LeT. A laptop from an alleged LeT communications specialist is said to have reveal 320 potential targets, most in India. The Pakistan army, for all of the challenges it faces from its domestic terrorists, still considers India its principal national security threat. Early last month, Pakistan's army chief, General Pervez Ashfaq Kayani, asserted that the Pakistan army was an "India-centric institution," adding this "reality will not change in any significant way until the Kashmir issue and water disputes are resolved." His words are not dissimilar in substance from the language used by Saeed in recent speeches.

Before 9/11, LeT operated camps in Afghanistan where it gave training to thousands of militants over more than five years. Among the Pakistanis fighting along with the Taliban during the 1990s, there were many belonging to LeT. There have been contradictory reports about the LeT's role in the ongoing fighting between Taliban and the U.S. and allied troops. LeT openly supports the cause of driving foreign forces out of Afghanistan. There is considerable evidence of logistical and technical training being offered by LeT to Afghan insurgents inside Pakistan. LeT often works abroad closely with other Pakistani extremist groups and those in Afghanistan and India. Last month's attack on guesthouses in Kabul that was aimed at Indian nationals appears to have a LeT imprint.

Members of LeT are also known to have fought in the 1990s Tajik civil war and the conflict in Bosnia. LeT is believed to have ties to militant religious groups worldwide, and claims to have its own chapters in 17 countries including the U.S. It has recruited and trained foreigners such as the would-be shoe bomber Richard Reid. More typically, as a terrorist organization, LeT creates cells of just a few people who come together for a specific operation. While there is less evidence of joint terrorist operations with al Qaeda, Abu Zubadah, the senior al Qaeda leader implicated in the 9/11 attacks, was captured in 2002 at a LeT safehouse.

#### Reason for U.S. Concern

If our counter-insurgency fails in Afghanistan, there should be little doubt that LeT will establish a major presence alongside the Taliban. While drone attacks and Pakistan raids have apparently disrupted al Qaeda and also eliminated leaders from among Pakistan's Taliban, LeT activities have been minimally disrupted. The U.S. may take some pleasure in seeing that the government of Pakistan and its

military are increasingly willing to cooperate tracing and destroying leaders of al Qaeda and the Pakistan Taliban. There is no similar interest on Pakistan's part to weaken LeT. And even were Pakistan to take a harder line on the LeT, the fluidity of membership among militant groups in Pakistan and their overlapping and shifting alliances makes it difficult for LeT's activities to be tracked. There is little doubt that LeT would find common purpose with other dissident groups, as well with al Qaeda, against an Islamabad civilian government that it sees as pro-West.

LeT appears to be drawing strength from a deepening hyper-nationalism that has taken hold at all levels of society in Pakistan. Fed by conspiracy theories, India and the U.S. are implicated in various plots, above all, to breakup Pakistan and seize its nuclear weapons. Stepped up American military efforts in Afghanistan and perceived threats from India over terrorist activity have increased a patriotic rhetoric that validates the need for extremist groups like LeT that have an international agenda. The case is easily made that LeT can provide an important tool for the Pakistan military's ability to respond to Indian aggression or for helping the country to secure a sphere of influence when, as expected, American and coalition forces' strategies will have failed in Afghanistan.

LeT could become even more empowered should it by adopting a domestic agenda join hands with other extremist groups to mobilize the wide popular resentments that exist in the country because of rampant corruption and economic hardship. When the TTP insurgency was at its apogee early in 2009, concerns were raised that the largely Pashtun tribally-based insurgency might link up with extremist forces across the country, but notably those in the southern Punjab where LeT has its strongest presence. That such a national movement failed to materialize resulted mainly from strategic miscalculations by the TTP, and a failure to develop a well-articulated program that could transcend ethnic differences to appeal to the large political underclass in Pakistani society.

LeT's organizational infrastructure, its network in the Islamic world, and its access to funds for stepping up acts of terrorism against the state of Pakistan make it attractive to many groups, including al Qaeda, that seek to step up acts of terrorism against the Pakistani state and beyond. Of particular note, LeT's chief Hafiz Saeed is believed to have many sympathizers within the Pakistan's scientific community, especially in the nuclear and missile fields, by virtue of having spent decades indoctrinating the youth of Pakistan while a

professor in one of the country's top engineering universities. Were Pakistan to become seriously destabilized, LeT's reputation for charity, piety and patriotism, together with its close ties to senior officers of the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment, would make it a potential vehicle to transform the Pakistani society into a Sharia state similar to that of Afghanistan in the 1990s. The U.S. would then be faced in Pakistan with the jihadi-dominated state that it has most to fear.