

Lashkar-i-Tayyiba Remains Committed to Jihad

By Farhana Ali and Mohammad Shehzad

LASHKAR-I-TAYYIBA (LET) is in the spotlight for allegedly masterminding attacks in India's financial capital of Mumbai on November 26, 2008. The event has caused authorities to question the Islamist group's growing strength, as well as its command and control structure. Since the deadly attacks in Mumbai, the Lashkar-i-Tayyiba and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa (JuD) network, the latter of which is allegedly a front for LeT, has been quick to deny involvement. With mounting evidence against them by Indian intelligence officials, Lashkar leaders have made public statements claiming a change in their terrorist policies that have previously justified a number of attacks in India. In January 2009, the Islamist organization appeared to take a new tack in Kashmir by toning down its "violent Kashmir-centric agenda," opting for a peaceful settlement to the decades-old crisis.¹ If LeT is serious about ridding itself of the terrorist label, this could prompt the Pakistani security services to engage local jihadist outfits to seek a solution to the conflict in Kashmir, the main axis of discord between two nuclear-armed neighbors.²

Whether the LeT has the capacity for change is questionable, however, and worth further examination. Sensitive sources from within LeT indicate that the group is not ready to alter its position vis-à-vis India. These sources state that Lashkar rejoiced over the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai.³ They apparently offered *nawafil shukrana*

1 Animesh Roul, "Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba Chooses Between Kashmir and the Global Jihad," *Terrorism Focus* 6:3 (2009).

2 Yaroslav Trofimov, "A New Tack in Kashmir," *Wall Street Journal*, December 15, 2008. It should be noted that Pakistan has a historical record for engaging local militant groups for national security interests; the most recent example of engagement is the government's truce with the Taliban in the Swat Valley (February 2009), a move that has prompted wide debate within the U.S. and Pakistan on the potential consequences of talking to a once hard-battled enemy.

3 Personal interview, JuD insiders, Pakistan, December 2008.

(special prayers) to celebrate their victory.⁴ Publicly, however, operational planners have denied a role in the attacks, and in recent weeks the LeT's political wing attempted to distance itself from extremism by allegedly renaming its organization Tehrik-i-Hurmat-i-Rasool.⁵

This article argues that initial claims by LeT/JuD that it will transform its image into that of a peaceful group are noteworthy if the organization withdraws from pitched warfare. Yet a stream of reports indicates that LeT/JuD in Pakistan remains devoted to violent jihad and will continue to galvanize support to transform South Asia into an Islamic-style regime.

Inside the Network

Formerly known as Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (Army of the Pure), the newly camouflaged extremist organization and armed wing of the JuD has been active since the early 1990s.⁶ LeT was the military offshoot of Markaz Dawat-ul-Irshad (Center for Religious Learning and Propagation),⁷ the latter of which morphed into Jama'at-ud-Da'wa after 2002.⁸ While the LeT and JuD are viewed as separate entities, the two groups are likely the same, enabling the JuD to increase its *da'wa* (missionary) and jihad activities under the LeT framework.⁹ The JuD's leader, Hafiz Saeed, has made this point clear in his written work and public statements. In the magazine

4 Ibid.

5 Various reports indicate that the JuD may attempt to change its name, albeit temporarily. See Roul and "JuD Planning Name Change," *Deccan Herald*, January 2, 2009. The name change is also cited in Pakistan's leading English daily, *Dawn*, on January 3, 2009. The name change has not yet been confirmed.

6 For background, see Jayshree Bajoria, "Profile: Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure) (a.k.a. Lashkar e-Tayyiba, Lashkar e-Toiba; Lashkar-i-Taiba)," Council on Foreign Relations, December 2, 2008.

7 The LeT was allegedly created by Pakistani intelligence services to balance India's control over Kashmir. For background, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *Pakistan: Nationalism Without a Nation?* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

8 Qandeel Siddique, "What is Lashkar-e-Taiba?" Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, 2009, p. 4.

9 The statement that the two groups are likely the same is based on the authors' assessment. Additionally, the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center identifies the link between the two groups as follows: "LT Coordinates its Charitable Activities through its Front Organization, Jamaat-ud-Dawa."

Takbeer,¹⁰ Saeed wrote, "Islam propounds both *da'wa* (proselytize) and jihad. Both are equally important and inseparable. Since our life revolves around Islam, therefore both *da'wa* and jihad are essential; we cannot prefer one over the other." The symbiosis of education (*da'wa*) with jihad forms the basis of LeT/JuD's political and religious power.¹¹

In addition to involvement in Kashmir, LeT/JuD allegedly participated in previous terrorism plots involving the United Kingdom¹² and orchestrated numerous attacks in India, including New Delhi's Laal Qila (Red Fort) on December 22, 2000, Srinagar Airport in Indian-held Kashmir on January 5, 2001, and the Indian Parliament in December 2001. A statement released by LeT after the attack in Srinagar reflects their aspirations today:

Prior to September 11, we were in a position to liberate Kashmir any time, but our target is the whole of India and Israel's turn after that. We only want the destruction of India...we are the ones fighting for the liberation of Kashmir and the future of Pakistan.

The LeT/JuD allegedly subscribes to a hadith that recognizes the importance and relevance of "Ghazwa Hind," a tradition that calls for Muslims to replace Hindu-dominated India with an Islamic style-government through the use of jihad. While the hadith is possibly unauthentic,¹³ it serves

10 This document was in Urdu in the JuD's magazine in 1999.

11 For background on the organization, see Muhammad Amir Rana (translated by Saba Ansari), *A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistan* (Lahore: Mashal, 2006), pp. 317-342; Mariam Abou Zahab, "I Shall be Waiting for You at the Door of Paradise: the Pakistani Martyrs of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure)," in Aparna Rao, Michael Bollig and Monika Bock, *The Practice of War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 133.

12 Benjamin Sand, "Pakistan Denies Islamic Charity Link to UK Bomb Plot," *Voice of America*, August 15, 2006.

13 Hadith literature varies widely depending on the source of the tradition. Islamic scholars agree that not all hadith is considered a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad, unless a scientific methodology of transmission can be attributed to Muhammad. As long as hadith does not contradict the main schools of Islamic thought and the books of Islam—the Qur'an and sunna—then it is acceptable. Only when a reliable chain of transmission is estab-

as the guiding principle for several jihadist groups in Pakistan, including the LeT/JuD. The idea that militants will “Islamicize” India by force after assumed victory in Afghanistan is not a new concept; it has been previously highlighted in the literature of Maulana Fazul Rahman Khalil¹⁴ and Masood Azhar, the latter the founder of Jaish-i-Muhammad (JeM). Ghazwa Hind and the narrative of restoring Islam in the world is allegedly taught to members at the JuD’s center in Muridke outside of Lahore; these spectacular congregations, attended by hundreds of members, reinforce religious activism to influence the process of an Islamic identity formation.¹⁵

Connected by a similar religious ideology and strategic goal, the JuD and LeT complement one another. To its members, the two organizations exist on paper only. The distinction is made by the JuD’s vast social services network in Pakistan. The social services provision the organization offers arguably keeps the Islamists alive and attractive to local communities in Pakistan. In recent history, the JuD played a pivotal role in aiding the victims of Pakistan’s 2005 earthquake; the group worked alongside the U.S. military and international aid organizations, such as the United Nations, to provide needed relief. As a result, the JuD is tolerated and welcomed by the Pakistani government for filling an important civic need. The JuD is considered the best organized Islamic charity in South Asia with a social network unmatched by other Islamic groups or militant outfits.

lished can a hadith be considered authentic. The Ghazwa Hind tradition is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad although there is little evidence to support this claim; the tradition is propagated by the late Shaykh Muhammad Akram Awan of the Naqshbandia Owaisiah, a major Sufi Islamic order. Local militant outfits in Pakistan believe that Ghazwa Hind legitimizes “jihad in Kashmir,” thereby justifying attacks against Indian targets. For more information on the Islamic order and application of Ghazwa Hind, see the Urdu-language website, www.ghazwatulhind.com.

14 For lectures by Rahman, see www.tauheed-sunnat.com/sunnat/content/ghazwa-uhud-ka-pas-manzar. Also note that Khalil, Azhar and Hafiz Saeed publish widely in their own publications. Since the crackdown on the LeT, the Pakistani government has banned these publications, although this move will unlikely preclude these organizations from circulating their message.

15 Jaffrelot, p. 133.

By responding to social and economic ills under the platform of Islamic social justice,¹⁶ groups such as the JuD have done exceptionally well to meet the population’s expectations in times of crises or natural disasters, and win their loyalty. Through the provision of social services, the JuD is able to connect with the people in a way that surpasses the state’s ability. Not only does this put pressure on the state, but it disallows external actors, such as neighboring countries and the international community, from exploiting the local

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population to steer them away from the Islamists’ camp. In doing so, the JuD and by extension the LeT are able to grow their organization through social networking. With local support and sympathy from a needy population, these Islamists produce awareness of their activities and promote a particular religious doctrine that guides their associational work. Similar to LeT/JuD, Lebanese Hizb Allah offers a fair comparison. Known for an extensive and transparent social services arm, the Lebanon-based organization is viewed as the champion of the local Shi’a population for rebuilding society in the aftermath of war. Yet, unlike the LeT/JuD network, Hizb Allah’s ambitious political agenda reflects the group’s desire to grow its influence, seek greater

16 The concept of “faith and good works” also has its origins in Christianity and Judaism. The concept of giving is referenced in at least 93 of the 114 verses of the Qur’an and is central to the faith, even though it is not one of its five pillars. Unlike *zakat* (a mandatory alms), charity is voluntary but highly encouraged to attain God’s pleasure. For Islamists, the goal extends beyond developing an Islamic society. Rather, it is the groups’ desire for political power—with the use of Islamic slogans and narratives—that lies at the heart of their strategic objectives. Employing language and themes drawn from the Islamic faith also has helped Islamists identify with the population in need, translating into the public’s admiration for the group’s political platform.

control of Lebanon’s municipalities, and likely use its social services infrastructure to “win the hearts and minds” of the people.¹⁷

As one of the largest Islamic charity’s in Pakistan, no political campaign or military activity promises the same rate of success as the LeT/JuD network. Granting people their “basic necessities of life,” including the right to (religious) education, employment, water, food, housing, and security, these organizations are viewed as progressive Islamists. As organized structures with personnel working in various capacities, from social workers to protectorates of the population, the LeT/JuD has established a national identity that builds solidarity among its participants. In doing so, they maintain a level of independence, can expand their Islamic agenda, and could qualify as legitimate authorities to a population that increasingly perceives the civilian government as corrupt and conceding to Western demands. All these factors demonstrate why the Pakistani state finds it difficult to eliminate the group.

Lifelong Ambitions

What accounts for the LeT/JuD’s ongoing effectiveness? It is apparent after the November 2008 attacks that the group proved to the international community its capabilities against India. Given its size and strength, one senior Pakistani journalist said in an interview that “LeT is the new Al-Qaeda.”¹⁸ His statement

17 During and after each conflict, Hizb Allah has quickly distributed aid to those most affected by war and developed plans for reconstruction. In its most recent war with Israel, a Kuwaiti-based journalist told the lead author that “Hizb Allah was quick to place the Iranian flag at the sites of homes it intended to rebuild, with Iranian money of course.” Hizb Allah’s immediate response to help the Lebanese people allowed it to gain popular support for militant retaliation against Israel.

18 Personal interview, Khawar Rizvi, U.S.-based Pakistani journalist, Washington, D.C., December 2008. Former U.S. security officials have also expressed concern over LeT’s global network. On March 8, 2009, Juan Zarate, the deputy national security adviser for counterterrorism in the Bush administration, stated, “We are and should be concerned about the threat LT poses, given its global network. It doesn’t just reside in South Asia. It is an organization that has potential reach all over the world, including the US.” See Josh Meyer, “Militant Threat from Pakistan Alarms U.S.: Officials See Indication of Presence within United States,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 2009.

indicates a heightened awareness of the group's emotional power and a need to indulge in surprising moves to maintain their elevated status. While LeT/JuD is local and al-Qa`ida a transnational movement, arrests of senior al-Qa`ida commanders in LeT safe houses suggest a link between the two groups, although the details of this relationship remain opaque.¹⁹

Nevertheless, there are similarities between al-Qa`ida and the LeT/JuD. The LeT/JuD appeals to a global audience despite being a local group. Like al-Qa`ida, the LeT/JuD network has an ideological framework that attracts members outside of Pakistan; it is not uncommon to find members from Central Asia and the Arab world with LeT, or to find Lashkar's participation in activities outside of Pakistan.²⁰ In addition, the LeT/JuD benefits from a support network outside of Pakistan that includes Saudi Arabia, a country with whom JuD leader Hafiz Saeed developed relations in 1985 when he studied in the kingdom, and subsequently received support from during and after the Afghan jihad. Many of the similarities end there, however. The LeT/JuD remains a local organization with local ties to Pakistani militant groups. Despite its shared strategic vision with al-Qa`ida, Lashkar is focused on attacks against Indian and Western targets inside the subcontinent.

It will be difficult for the Pakistani government to counter the LeT/JuD network. LeT/JuD is one of the largest jihadist outfits in the country. Not only does the organization draw in thousands of members in Pakistan, but recruits from Muslim communities throughout India. The Deccan Mujahidin, the group which claimed responsibility for the Mumbai attacks, is likely a pseudonym for Lashkar.²¹ The attacks in Mumbai

showed a level of sophistication that reflects the group's coming-of-age. The LeT/JuD's legitimate activities in the name of charity, education, and public service (all under the guise of religious ideological doctrine) provide the organization a cover for its extreme excesses. With a veneer of secrecy, Lashkar can operate under the radar and not raise suspicion from local authorities. Its camouflaged activities—networks of legitimate mosques, schools, media and publications work—help the organization sustain its presence inside Pakistan and abroad.

Moving Forward

In response to international pressure, Pakistan has taken a series of steps against the group, such as closing LeT/JuD offices, arresting hundreds of suspected members, including senior leaders, and intending to hold a public trial of key commanders. Additional pressure on Islamabad to delegitimize the JuD's authentic activities (such as charitable work), however, will have long-term consequences that could impact the country negatively. Thus, counterterrorism cooperation between Pakistan, India and the United States is deliberately protracted.

Inside India, officials appear dissatisfied with Pakistan's overall treatment of the dossier²² that New Delhi insists offers a wealth of evidence against Islamist group members, all of whom were allegedly recruited, trained, and directed from Pakistan. According to the report, Indian authorities expect Pakistan to hand over the conspirators to face trial in India, dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism and adhere to bilateral and international agreements, such as the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, which requires member states to provide mutual legal assistance to neighboring states in terrorism cases. Naturally, the "need-to-do-more" on an Indian timeline is unlikely to be well received in Pakistan.

and unfamiliar name to the public, but the name is significant. Deccan is a place in Hyderabad, a state in India with a Muslim majority population. There, LeT has a strong footprint and can manipulate Indian Muslims' anti-Hindu sentiment."

²² A scanned copy of the report can be read at www.thehindu.com/nic/mumbaiaattacksevidence-3.pdf.

A key obstacle for Islamabad is how to eliminate Islamists that once served its foreign policy agenda in Kashmir and Afghanistan.²³ According to Pakistani scholar Zahid Hussain, the state had no intention of clamping down on the LeT/JuD's propaganda machinery or its militant infrastructure, even though the group was added to the terrorist watch list in 2003.²⁴ Whether the government's crackdown on the network is cosmetic or convincing will depend on the final outcome of the Mumbai investigation, which is still pending.

Undoubtedly, the choices facing the United States will not be easy. Pushing Pakistan too far by forcing the shutdown of the LeT/JuD network will likely upset the bilateral relationship. The United States can, however, encourage Pakistan to move quickly to prosecute the suspects—it is the first step to restore faith and confidence with India, whose External Affairs minister recently announced his country's unwillingness to resume the composite dialogue on Kashmir unless Pakistan dismantles its terrorist infrastructure.²⁵ In truth, Pakistan is being pressed to "do more" by senior U.S. officials and the Indian government to "crush the ultras operating from its [Pakistan] soil,"²⁶ a statement that will likely arouse resentment inside Islamabad against an important ally and a regional partner for asking what it considers impossible.

In the short-term, Pakistan appears willing to act against members of the LeT/JuD to prove it has the courage to fight its own creation, but it is probably incapable of shutting down an organization important to its survival.²⁷ One senior Pakistani journalist doubts Pakistan's ability or willpower to effectively dismantle the LeT/JuD

²³ Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Pakistan Has To Do More to Dismantle Terror Infrastructure: Pranab," *Times of India*, February 24, 2009.

²⁶ "Pak Needs To Do More on Combating Terror: John Kerry," *Times of India*, February 26, 2009.

²⁷ Pakistan relies on groups such as the JuD to balance Indian hegemony in the region. Islamabad also probably understands the leverage and influence that the JuD network enjoys, thereby prohibiting the civilian government from taking too harsh an action against an organization that potentially threatens the state.

¹⁹ Siddique, pp. 8-9.

²⁰ Personal interview, various Pakistan experts, January-February 2009. A journalist in Pakistan told the authors that LeT/JuD draws on support from members in other Islamic countries. Students worldwide participate in Islamic training at the JuD institution in Muridke and LeT members are suspected of fighting in the Iraq war against U.S.-led forces. See Praveen Swami and Mohammad Shehzad, "Lashkar Raising Islamist Brigades for Iraq," *The Hindu*, June 13, 2004.

²¹ Personal interview, Khawar Rizvi, Washington, D.C., December 2008. Rizvi said that Deccan is "an unknown

because the state needs to “protect an important constituency—the jihadi networks.”²⁸ Not surprisingly, an initial crackdown against LeT/JuD will have little to no impact on the organization’s long-term existence. Therefore, the coming weeks are critical for Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan will need to reach a final agreement on the Mumbai investigation or risk further provocation.

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²⁸ Personal interview, Khawar Rizvi, Washington, D.C., December 2008.