

The Menace That Is Lashkar-e-Taiba

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Summary

Though the international community first began taking notice of the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) after its spectacular coordinated bombing and shooting attacks in Mumbai, India, in November 2008, the group was established in 1987 at a time when Pakistan was in the throes of Islamic ferment. Then, LeT had access to a steady supply of volunteers, funding, and—most important of all—concerted state support. Long bolstered by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, this Wahhabi group promotes the vision of a universal Islamic caliphate through *tableegh* and jihad—preaching and armed struggle. Though India and Kashmir have been LeT's primary area of operations so far, the group has an unsettling presence internationally.

It is clear that after al-Qaeda, LeT is the most dangerous terrorist group operating in South Asia because of its:

1. Global vision and international ambitions
2. Distinct ideology that underwrites Islamic revanchism, justifying collaboration with other terrorist groups
3. Loyalty to Pakistan and willingness to protect its patron state against domestic opponents
4. Diversified network for mobilizing resources, promoting its international presence, and recruiting members, which minimizes its dependence on the state
5. Involvement in terrorism and social development concurrently, which limits Pakistan's ability to target the group even if it were so inclined
6. Cohesive and hierarchic organizational structure that is effective at both the conduct of violence and the delivery of social programs
7. Proficiency at exploiting science and technology, extra-national social links, and state vulnerabilities in order to advance its political aims

LeT is a formidable and highly adaptable adversary with a genuinely global reach and the ability to grow roots and sustain operations in countries far removed from its primary theater of activity in South Asia. Though India's proximity to Pakistan has resulted in New Delhi absorbing most of the blows unleashed by LeT, the carnage in Mumbai demonstrates that the terrorism facing India is not simply a problem for New Delhi alone. An attack could even reach U.S. soil.

The only reasonable objective for the United States is the permanent evisceration of LeT and other vicious South Asian terrorist groups—with Pakistani cooperation if possible, but without it if necessary.

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Although the U.S. government has been closely tracking the murderous activities of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) since the early 1990s, the international community first began taking notice of this terrorist group only after its spectacular coordinated bombing and shooting attacks in Mumbai, India, in November 2008. Even in the immediate aftermath of these events, there was considerable confusion about what LeT represented and whether it was, in fact, responsible for the mayhem that occurred in India's largest city.

Since then, intercepted conversations between the LeT attackers and their handlers in Pakistan, along with information emerging from the Chicago trial of David Coleman Headley, an American charged in connection with the Mumbai attack, have confirmed the suspicion that LeT is a formidable terrorist group. In fact, it is the most dangerous terrorist group operating in South Asia after al-Qaeda. But the reasons for this judgment are sometimes not obvious and, therefore, merit clarification.

LeT's worldview goes far beyond India and the dissatisfactions that extremist Islam may have with New Delhi.

The Sevenfold Problem

LeT is the most dangerous indigenous terrorist group operating in South Asia for seven reasons, all of which bear on both regional and international security.

First, LeT has a global vision and international ambitions, even if it may be currently limited by capacity or focus. LeT is linked in popular perceptions to terrorism in the disputed regions of Jammu and Kashmir and, additionally, to violence directed at the Indian nation more generally. It is true that the group has long sought the "liberation" of the disputed Himalayan state and subsequently the incorporation of many other Indian territories into Pakistan. But LeT's worldview

goes far beyond India and the dissatisfactions that extremist Islam may have with New Delhi. In fact, since its establishment in 1987, LeT's objectives relating to Kashmir and, more generally, India were fundamentally embedded in wider ambitions, with its focus on the subcontinent deriving mainly from its practical circumstances.

LeT was formed in 1987 as the armed wing of the Markaz Dawat-ul Irshad (MDI), the Center for Proselytization and Preaching. The group was founded at a time when Pakistan was in the throes of Islamic ferment. General Zia ul-Haq's decade-long program (1977–1988) of Islamizing Pakistan had by then grown strong domestic roots, providing a plethora of armed groups such as LeT with a steady supply of volunteers, funding, and—most important of all—concerted state support. LeT's three founders—Hafiz Saeed, its current emir; Zafar Iqbal of the Engineering University of Lahore; and Abdullah Azzam of the International Islamic University in Islamabad—capitalized on this environment. Their desire to engage simultaneously in *tableegh*, or preaching, and jihad, or armed struggle, found manifestation in different ways from the moment of its founding.

As an Ahl-e-Hadith adherent to the principles of Sunni Wahhabism, LeT seeks first and foremost to establish a universal Islamic caliphate with a special emphasis on gradually recovering all lands that were once under Muslim rule. This strategic objective has made LeT a strong ideological ally of al-Qaeda, and the emphasis on recovering “lost Muslim lands” in Asia and Europe has taken LeT to diverse places such as Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories, Spain, Chechnya, Kosovo, and Eritrea.

Given this worldview, LeT's focus on India has been driven as much by ideology as by convenience. To begin with, India's achievement in becoming an economically dynamic, multiethnic, and secular democracy remains an affront to LeT's vision of a universal Islamic caliphate. This ideological obsession received a sharp fillip thanks to the interests of LeT's state patrons in Pakistan, namely the army and the country's principal intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). Moreover, India's growing counterterrorism collaboration with the United States and the West in general deepened the incentives for LeT-ISI collaboration. India's changing strategic orientation thus made it part of what LeT called the detestable “Zionist-Hindu-Crusader” axis that must be confronted by force. Finally, New Delhi's emergence as a rising global power represented a decisive impediment to LeT's core objective of recovering the “lost Muslim lands” en route to the re-creation of its Islamic caliphate.

Given the interaction of LeT's ideology and its sources of Pakistani state support, it is not surprising that Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, LeT's emir, wholeheartedly endorsed the objective of destroying India writ large. Asserting in a 1999 interview that “jihad is not about Kashmir only,” he went on to declare that “about fifteen years ago, people might have found it ridiculous if someone told them about the

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disintegration of the USSR. Today, I announce the break-up of India, Insha-Allah. We will not rest until the whole [of] India is dissolved into Pakistan.” In a later 2001 statement he reaffirmed the proposition that “our struggle will continue even if Kashmir is liberated. We still have to take revenge for East Pakistan.” In accordance with his declaration that Kashmir was merely a “gateway to capture India,” Saeed then directed his LeT cadres to focus their attention on capturing the Muslim-dominated areas outside of Jammu and Kashmir, such as Hyderabad, Junagadh, Munabao, and West Bengal, which he argued were forcibly occupied by India in 1947.

Judging from LeT’s operational record, Saeed has been as good as his word. The earliest LeT presence in India was detected in 1993, when a cohort of the group’s Punjabi cadres crossed the Line of Control that separates the Pakistan-controlled from the Indian-controlled portions of Jammu and Kashmir. The organization’s presence, however, was not publicly recognized until early 1996 when a group of LeT terrorists massacred sixteen Hindus in Barshalla in Kashmir’s Doda District. Since then, hundreds of terrorist attacks involving LeT militants have occurred throughout India. LeT was implicated in plots like the terrorist attacks in New Delhi in October 2005; in Bangalore in December 2005; in Varanasi in March 2006; in Nagpur in June 2006; and in the July 2007 train bombings in Mumbai.

Through these myriad efforts, LeT has attempted—consistent with both its own ideology and the interests of its state supporters—to cripple India’s economic growth, destroy national confidence in its political system, attack its open society, and provoke destabilizing communal rivalries. All the while, the group has tried to send a message that India will remain an adversary because its successes make it a hindrance to LeT’s larger cause.

It took, however, the devastating November 2008 Mumbai attacks—a bloodbath that claimed the lives of over 150 people, including 26 foreigners of fifteen nationalities—for the international community to recognize that LeT’s ambitions, transcending India, were actually part of a larger war with the West and with liberal democracies more generally. The barbarity in Mumbai thus represents the ugly face of a brand of Islamist terrorism that threatens India, the United States and its allies, the larger international system, and, though often missed, Pakistan as well.

LeT’s universal ambitions simply do not permit the group to confine itself only to South Asia. As Saeed has unequivocally declared, LeT intends to “plant the flag of Islam in Washington, Tel Aviv and New Delhi.” Such statements are not simply grandiose. That LeT has by no means restricted itself to keeping only India in its sights, even if it has focused on the latter disproportionately thus far—thanks to ISI objectives and support—is now acknowledged even by those who were initially skeptical of the group’s larger ambitions.

Like many other radical Islamist groups, the LeT leadership has on numerous occasions singled out the Jewish community and the United States as being among the natural enemies of Islam. Saeed warned, for example, that although his outfit may be presently consumed by the conflict with India, “Our struggle with the Jews is always there.” This enmity with the Jewish people is supposedly eternal and ordained by God himself. When Saeed was asked in the aftermath of the tragic 2005 earthquake in Pakistan whether then-president Pervez Musharraf’s solicitation of aid from Israel was appropriate, he had no hesitation in declaring forthrightly that Pakistan “should not solicit help from Israel. It is the question of Muslim honor and self-respect. The Jews can never be our friends. This is stated by Allah.”

This twisted worldview found grotesque expression during the November 2008 atrocities when the group deliberately targeted the Jewish Chabad center at Nariman House in Mumbai. Justifying this attack as reprisal for Israeli security cooperation with India, LeT did not simply murder the Jewish hostages at Nariman House but humiliated and brutally tortured them before finally killing them during the three-day siege.

Outside of al-Qaeda, LeT today therefore represents the most important South Asian terrorist group of “global reach.” Indian intelligence currently estimates that LeT maintains some kind of terrorist presence in 21 countries worldwide with the intention of either supporting or participating in what Saeed has called the perpetual “jihad against the infidels.” LeT has declared that it would provide free training to any Muslim desirous of joining the global jihad, and the group has since delivered on that promise, as now corroborated by the testimony in the cases involving the “Virginia paintball jihad network.” In that instance, a group of extremists played paintball in anticipation of the launch of a global jihad against the West. After offering support to LeT, several members of the group attended an LeT camp and received combat training to prepare for war against American soldiers in Afghanistan. Rather than being an isolated incident, the Virginia paintball jihad network is emblematic of LeT’s larger ambitions. LeT’s operatives have now been identified as engaging in:

- liaison and networking with numerous terrorist groups abroad, particularly in Central and Southeast Asia and the Middle East;
- the facilitation of terrorist acts, including in, but not restricted to, Chechnya and Iraq;
- fundraising in the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and the United States;
- the procurement of weapons, explosives, and communications equipment for terrorist operations from both the international arms markets and Pakistani state organizations such as the ISI;

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- the recruitment of volunteers for suicidal missions in South Asia as well as the Middle East;
- the creation of sleeper cells for executing or supporting future terrorist acts in Europe, Australia, and likely the United States; and
- actual armed combat in at least India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.

With recruitment, fundraising, and operations extending to Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asia, Europe, Africa, and Australia, LeT has rapidly become a formidable global threat. Today, LeT has close ties with al-Qaeda in Pakistan and supports the Afghan Taliban’s military operations (despite the divide between the two groups’ interpretations of Islam). It also closely collaborates with Jamiat al-Dawa al-Quran wal-Sunna, a Wahhabi group based in the Kunar Province of Afghanistan, in operations against American troops in Afghanistan’s Korengal Valley. These remain only the latest in a long line of hostile activities—most of which have remained sub rosa—affecting U.S. citizens, soldiers, and interests.

Second, LeT has a distinct ideology that underwrites a program of Islamic revanchism—and justifies collaboration with other terrorist groups. However diverse LeT’s activities are internationally, they are ultimately unified and draw sustenance from a distinct animating ideology. Immediately after it was founded in 1987, LeT’s earliest armed operations began in the Afghan provinces of Kunar and Paktia, where the organization set up a series of terrorist training camps that over time were incorporated into the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. These militant activities, which were initially intended as part of the ISI-managed war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, quickly became subordinated to either ISI-supervised efforts to bring Kabul under Pakistani influence or to its ongoing war against India—both “near” enemies. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda’s murderous terrorism missions were directed against other “far” enemies in the West.

Although LeT and al-Qaeda remain distinct organizations (albeit engaging in various forms of shadowy cooperation), their respective programs of Islamic revanchism are unified by a distinct ideology that at its heart dismisses the possibility of coexistence with other religious traditions or political systems. This view pits LeT—like al-Qaeda—against the United States both through the “Zionist-Hindu-Crusader” axis and more directly as well. Although the ideological denunciation of the United States as an immoral, decadent, and implacable enemy of Islam was part of LeT’s worldview from its founding, its war against the United States took a decidedly deadly turn, partly due to its ties to al-Qaeda. The Clinton administration launched missile attacks against several al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan in August 1998, and although these attacks did not kill their intended target, Osama bin Laden, they did kill many LeT operatives and trainers who had been bivouacked in these facilities. Shortly thereafter, LeT formally declared its

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jihad against the United States and began a variety of operations globally aimed at targeting U.S. interests. Since then, the group intensified its collaboration with al-Qaeda, supporting bin Laden's efforts as a junior partner wherever necessary while operating independently wherever possible.

That LeT is a constituent member of Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front should not be surprising, given that one of its three founders, Abdullah Azzam, was associated with Hamas and has been widely described as one of bin Laden's religious mentors. LeT's sprawling 200 acre headquarters at Muridke outside of Lahore is believed to have been constructed with an initial gift from Osama bin Laden's Afghan operations. These close ties continue to exist, as indicated by the fact that in 2002, a senior al-Qaeda operative, Abu Zubaydah, was captured in an LeT safe house in Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Furthermore, like al-Qaeda, LeT has demonstrated a remarkable ability to forge coalitions with like-minded terrorist groups. These alliances are most clearly on display within South Asia, where, in addition to al-Qaeda, LeT cooperates with other militant groups, such as the Afghan Taliban, in the areas of recruiting, training, tactical planning, financing, and operations. In India, for example, LeT has developed ties with Islamic extremists across the country, including in states distant from Pakistan such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. In Pakistan, LeT cooperates actively with the Afghan Taliban—and oddly, on occasion with the Pakistani Taliban as well—and also coordinates operations against Afghanistan with al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network. In Central Asia, LeT has cooperated with both the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and local Islamist rebels in the Caucasus. Finally, in Europe, LeT was actively involved in supporting the Muslim resistance in Bosnia while raising funds and building sleeper cells in countries such as Spain and Germany.

Third, when it comes to Pakistan, LeT not only does not bite the hand that feeds it but actually protects its patrons against other domestic opponents. From the very beginning, LeT became a favored ward of the Pakistani state because its local interests—fighting in Afghanistan and warring against India—dovetailed with the Pakistan Army's own ambitions: controlling Afghanistan in the west while keeping India off-balance in the east. For over two decades and up until the present, the ISI has maintained strong institutional, albeit subterranean, links with LeT and has supported its operations through generous financing and, as required, combat training. As Stephen Tankel reports in *Lashkar-e-Taiba: From 9/11 to Mumbai*, ISI assistance to LeT has become even more hidden since the inauguration of the global war on terror, but it has by no means ended—even though the organization was formally banned by then-Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf on January 12, 2002.

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The story of the LeT-ISI relationship begins in the fervid atmosphere of the 1980s. At that point, numerous extremist groups were emerging in Pakistan under the patronage of the ISI, but LeT's militant attitude to political change and its commitment to exploiting modern science and technology in support of its ideological ends quickly made it an ISI favorite because its uncompromising commitment to jihad could be manipulated to advance Pakistan's own strategic goals. As Saeed noted in a January 1998 interview with *Herald*, a Pakistani news magazine, "many Muslim organizations are preaching and working on the missionary level inside and outside Pakistan . . . but they have given up the path of jihad altogether. The need for jihad has always existed and the present conditions demand it more than ever." It was precisely this perspective that appealed to the generals in Rawalpindi. In its strategic thinking, the group found kindred spirits in its earliest official supporters, General Akhtar Abdur Rahman and Lieutenant General Hamid Gul, the ISI's director generals during the late 1980s, who were also tantalized by the lure of an international jihad.

LeT is composed primarily of Pakistani Punjabis and has been so from its inception. In fact, its Punjabi composition is another aspect of what made it so attractive to the ISI to begin with, because it could be controlled and directed far more effectively by its Punjabi-dominated sponsor, the Pakistan Army, than could any local Kashmiri resistance group. LeT's earliest operations in Kunar and Paktia provinces in Afghanistan in support of the jihad against the Soviet occupation are significant in this context if for no other reason than they refute the common misapprehension—that has been assiduously fostered since the early 1990s—that the group has always been a part of the indigenous Kashmiri insurgency. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is worth noting, though, that because of LeT's founding ties to al-Qaeda, its Punjabi core has over the years been episodically supplemented by Libyans, Central Asians, and Sudanese—although these non-Pakistani elements have always been marginal to the group's numerical strength.

The mujahideen's defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan empowered both the ISI and various jihadi groups within Pakistan, which came to see state-sponsored insurgency as the key to advancing Islamabad's myriad strategic interests. Jihad undertaken by subnational groups with state support would thus become the instrument that allowed Pakistan to punch above its geopolitical weight. Its campaign in Afghanistan had already contributed to the fall of a superpower—or so it was believed in Rawalpindi—and Pakistani military and intelligence officials were nothing if not ambitious, seeking to replicate the same outcome against India.

At first, the Pakistan Army attempted to back indigenous Indian insurgencies in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. But by 1993, both movements had been defeated by the Indian military. These twin defeats demonstrated that Pakistan's national strategy of supporting domestic insurgencies in order to check Indian power had failed conclusively. But the larger objective of keeping India "off-balance" and weakening it through persistent attacks would not disappear because it was rooted

in a dangerous medley of deep geopolitical dissatisfactions, the ambitions of a self-serving military that rules even when it does not govern, and the deterrent provided by its possession of nuclear weapons.

After it became clear that domestic insurgencies were not going to deliver the crushing blow that had been anticipated, Islamabad responded with a new strategy of fomenting terrorism instead. Using the instruments engendered by the jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan quickly shifted its approach. Instead of continuing to rely on dissatisfied indigenous populations to advance Islamabad's interests through their own struggles with New Delhi, the ISI focused on injecting combat-hardened aliens into India in order to sustain a large-scale campaign of murder and mayhem intended to bring New Delhi to its knees.

As part of this strategy, the ISI directed LeT, among other Pakistani terrorist groups, to shift its principal focus of operations from the Afghan theater to Jammu and Kashmir. This new orientation was paired with comprehensive support. Being a favored charge of the ISI's Directorate S, the organization with responsibilities for all external operations, LeT received assistance from its sponsors—including from ISI field stations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh—in the form of operational funding, specialized weapons, sophisticated communications equipment, combat training, safe havens for the leadership, shelter and operational bases for the cadres, intelligence on targets and threats, campaign guidance, infiltration assistance, and, in coordination with the Pakistan Army, fire support when crossing the border into India. A specialized section within Directorate S, with primary responsibility for covert operations against India and manned by Pakistan Army officers on secondment, traditionally had responsibility for liaising with all terrorist groups engaged in these operations.

The ISI's objectives in engineering LeT's shift from Afghanistan to India were threefold: First, it enabled the Pakistani military to replace what it saw as feckless local fighters pursuing the autonomous goal of independence with militants who were battle-hardened in Afghanistan, beholden to the Pakistani state, and dedicated to the more appropriate objective of incorporating Kashmir into Pakistan. Second, it permitted the moderate Kashmiris to be replaced by genuinely committed Wahhabi fighters who were capable of inflicting (and intended to unleash) an unprecedented level of brutality in their military operations because they shared no affinities whatsoever with the local population. Third, by employing ideologically charged Islamist foot soldiers from outside the disputed state—a cohort that, by virtue of hailing from the Pakistani Punjab, carried with it all of Islamabad's pent-up animosities toward India—the local struggle over Kashmir's status could be expanded into a larger war aimed at destroying India itself. Over time, there emerged a growing conviction within the Pakistani military that exactly such an expansion was necessary because of the realization that the war against India could never be won if the hostilities were to be confined only to Jammu and Kashmir.

There has been increasing international pressure on Pakistan to break off this intimate relationship between the ISI and LeT, but it has thus far come to naught. Ever since President George W. Bush initiated the global campaign against Islamist terrorism, the United States has struggled mightily to convince Pakistan that its deepest threats emerge from within its own country and not from the outside, but U.S. efforts to wean Pakistan, especially the military there, away from its obsession with India and away from fomenting terrorism to satisfy this obsession have failed. The evidence since 2001, in fact, demonstrates conclusively that Islamabad has been content to continually play to the American expectation that a fundamental shift in its national strategy might be in the offing—so as to avoid sacrificing the large quantity of U.S. assistance that seems always on offer. Meanwhile, it continues to implement a self-serving counterterrorism strategy that involves targeting only those terrorist groups that threaten its own security, such as the Pakistani Taliban, even as it continues to provide succor and support to those elements that threaten India and Afghanistan, such as LeT and the Afghan Taliban.

Given the objective of bleeding India through a thousand cuts but not wounding it to a point of automatically embarrassing Pakistan or precipitating a major subcontinental war, the ISI has sought—especially after the 2008 attacks in Mumbai—to “modulate” the object and intensity of LeT’s violence but emphatically not to end it. Although LeT planners do not require formal sanction or information from the ISI in regard to contemplated attacks, they are now especially conscious of the need to ensure that these attacks cannot be readily attributable to the ISI, the Pakistan Army, or formally to the Pakistani state. To the degree possible, they also attempt to maintain some vague limits on the violence inflicted on India. They do so not out of any particular compassion for the Indian people but because their ISI patrons have emphasized the importance of not provoking India excessively at a time when Pakistan has its hands full managing the continuing insurgency in its tribal areas and in Baluchistan, as well as navigating a deeply frayed relationship with the United States.

From the beginning, because the requirement of plausible deniability lay at the heart of the ISI’s relationship with LeT, the Pakistani intelligence service has always preferred directional rather than detailed control over this particular terrorist group. Detailed control has, however, been exercised whenever the ISI has deemed it appropriate. Even when Pakistan, under considerable U.S. pressure, formally banned LeT as a terrorist organization in 2002, the LeT leadership remained impregnable and impervious to all international political pressure. Not only did it continue to receive succor from the ISI, but its leadership, even when jailed or under house arrest, continued to hold meetings with various confederates, plan terrorist attacks, and liaise with other terrorist groups—all under the protection and the watchful support of the ISI.

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The ISI's continued fidelity to LeT has not gone unreciprocated. That LeT has tried to conform to the ISI's directives illustrates its continuing loyalty to the ISI and to the Pakistani state more generally, a point insistently emphasized by Stephen Tankel in the paper referred to earlier. In an environment where terrorist groups often turn against their patrons, there is no record of any LeT attacks either inside Pakistan or against Pakistan Army and ISI interests. This loyalty is owed partly to the common ethnic bonds among these entities and partly to the disproportionate support offered by the ISI.

Even more interestingly, LeT has on many occasions in recent years attempted to influence other terrorist groups, such as the Pakistani Taliban, to restrain their attacks on the Pakistan Army in favor of intensified violence against Pakistan's adversaries in Afghanistan, the United States, and India. C. Christine Fair, in her testimony during the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearing on "Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Other Extremist Groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan" on May 24, 2011, usefully highlighted the increasingly critical role that LeT has played in protecting the Pakistani state against the depredations of other Deobandi terrorist groups in Pakistan. And Indian intelligence sources have uncovered several instances when LeT—when failing to deflect other terrorist competitors away from the Pakistani state—has in fact warned its patrons in the Pakistani military and intelligence services of these impending attacks.

Thus, the threat posed by LeT today is not the danger posed by "a stateless sponsor of terrorism," as it was unfortunately described by President Bush on December 21, 2001. Rather, if groups like LeT continue to thrive and operate effectively—despite the risks of war attendant upon their actions—it is fundamentally because they are aided and supported by the Pakistani military. However regrettable it may be, the Pakistani military has concluded that its interests are more enhanced than subverted by the continued sustenance of such "strategic assets."

LeT thus represents a specific state-supported and state-protected instrument of terrorism that operates from the territory of a particular country—Pakistan—and exemplifies the subterranean war that Islamabad, or more specifically Rawalpindi, has been waging against India since at least the early 1980s. It is not a war that currently relies on "fomenting insurgencies"—the practice of exploiting the grievances of a dissatisfied section of the Indian populace against its state. Instead, it is a war that is centered on "fomenting terrorism"—the practice of unleashing groups that have little or no connection to any existing internal grievances within India to carry out murderous surprise attacks aimed at indiscriminately killing large numbers of civilians whose only fault lies in being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Beyond that, though, the LeT is a terrorist organization that also counts Israel and the United States as its enemies solely for ideological reasons. It therefore also represents the war that extremist forces in Pakistan, including some in its own government, are waging against the vision of a moderate Pakistani polity and against many liberal states in the international community.

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Fourth, LeT now runs a diversified network for mobilizing resources, promoting its international presence, and recruiting members—which minimizes its single-point dependence on the state. As LeT has grown over the years, in part by sequestering resources from its charities, which are run under the rubric of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, the group's autonomy from the ISI has gradually increased. LeT's ability to raise funds independently from mosques in Pakistan and businesses and charities in the Middle East and Europe has allowed it greater freedom of action than existed during the 1990s. For instance, LeT's Muridke headquarters—the nerve center from whence LeT's vast charitable and militant activities are directed—is sustained today not so much through contributions by the ISI but rather through local collections complemented by money from Saudi charities and Pakistani expatriates in Europe and the Middle East.

LeT has also expanded its influence throughout Pakistan. Its strongest bases of support are found in the Seraiki belt of southern Punjab and more generally in poor urban neighborhoods and in villages where the Pakistani state is conspicuously absent. Through a large network of front organizations kept in operation by affiliates and supporters, LeT has raised funds from a range of private financiers, Islamic nongovernmental organizations, regional and international businesses (both licit and illicit), and organized crime—in addition to the resources secured from the Pakistani state—to sustain both terrorist and welfare activities simultaneously. This diversity of funding sources has made LeT increasingly independent of the ISI, at least where basic survival is concerned.

Fifth, LeT is a Janus-faced entity that is involved in terrorism and social development concurrently—which limits Pakistan's ability to target it even if it were so inclined. Today, LeT is more than just a terrorist group, simpliciter. Rather, it is deeply enmeshed in the social fabric of Pakistan. LeT oversees not only numerous terrorist training facilities in the Pakistan-controlled territories of Azad Kashmir and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also numerous madrassas, mosques, offices, and health centers throughout the rest of the country. The LeT's headquarters alone house a madrassa, a hospital, a market, and a large residential area for Islamic scholars, as well as a fish farm and an agricultural tract on which produce is grown for the inhabitants of the facility. Throughout Pakistan, LeT is believed to operate close to twenty Islamic institutions of different kinds and close to 150 secondary schools; it is also known to operate an ambulance service, numerous mobile clinics and blood banks in rural areas, and several seminaries across Pakistan. This vast network of social-service institutions is supported by fundraising and administrative activities from some 2,200 field offices across the country.

LeT's prominence in humanitarian assistance, especially when the Pakistani state was seen to be almost absent, has only further increased its reputation—and its protection—in Pakistan. Thus, for example, operating under the alias of the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation, LeT moved quickly to aid the victims of the August

2010 floods in Pakistan. Although the foundation's activities were rapidly dwarfed by the efforts of the Pakistani and U.S. governments, the fact that it was among the first on the scene meant that it garnered great sympathy among the Pashtuns of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in the flood-afflicted district of Swat.

Such perceptions have proved to be an invaluable recruiting tool, and in recent years LeT has made great inroads among both the better educated youth in small towns of the southern Punjab as well as among women—a distinction held by few other Islamist organizations in Pakistan. The bottom line, therefore, is that LeT's intricate links with the body politic make it a difficult organization for the Pakistani state to target, assuming that it would ever be inclined to do so.

Sixth, LeT possesses a cohesive and hierarchic organizational structure that is effective at both the conduct of violence and the delivery of social programs. Unlike many of the other indigenous terrorist groups in South Asia whose command and control structures are casual and often disorganized, LeT's organizational structure is hierarchic and precise, reflecting its purposefulness. Modeled on a military system, LeT is led by a core leadership centered on its emir, Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, and his deputies, who oversee different aspects of the group's functional and charitable operations. These activities are implemented through various branch offices throughout Pakistan, which are responsible for recruitment and fundraising as well as for the delivery of social services such as education, health care, emergency services, and religious instruction.

LeT's military arm is led by a "supreme commander" and a "deputy supreme commander" who report to Saeed directly. Under them are several "divisional commanders" and their deputies. Within the South Asian region, the divisional commanders oversee specific geographic "theaters" of operation, which are then subdivided in certain defined districts. These are controlled by "district commanders," each of whom is ultimately responsible for various battalions and their subordinate formations.

The entire command edifice thus reflects a crude model of "detailed control," with orders being executed at the lowest level after they are approved by a chain of command that reaches to the top echelons of the group. This hierarchic command and control structure, although susceptible to decapitation in principle, became institutionalized because LeT owed its origins primarily to the charismatic leadership of three individuals—of which Hafiz Saeed quickly became the *primus inter pares*. A hierarchic structure was also particularly appropriate because of the covert activities carried out by LeT's military wing, both autonomously and for the ISI—with the latter in particular insisting on a combination of high effectiveness, unremitting brutality, durable control, and plausible deniability as the price for its continued support. Because LeT was from the very beginning a preferred ward of the ISI, enjoying all the protection offered by the Pakistani state, the vulnerability that traditionally afflicts all hierarchic terrorist groups was believed to be minimal.

LeT's prominence in humanitarian assistance, especially when the Pakistani state was seen to be almost absent, has only further increased its reputation—and its protection—in Pakistan.

LeT thus continued to enjoy all the benefits of a hierarchic structure with regard to efficiency where both the conduct of violence and the delivery of social programs are concerned—advantages not shared by many other extremist groups in Pakistan.

Seventh, LeT is an effective terrorist group that is adept at exploiting science and technology, extra-national social links, and state vulnerabilities in order to advance its political aims. The attacks in Mumbai unambiguously demonstrated LeT's sophistication in a way that few previous attacks had done. The meticulous planning, the enormous resources committed to a complex mission across great distances and long periods of time, and the burdens of a difficult sea-land operation all confirmed LeT's capacity to execute increasingly difficult terrorist attacks. This mission involved months of training in Pakistan and extensive reconnaissance of targets in Mumbai; after these tasks were complete, the terrorists left Karachi on local craft, hijacked a fishing trawler on the high seas, and, upon reaching India's territorial waters, transferred to inflatable speedboats which landed at two different locations on the city shores. Then the assaults began.

What happened thereafter reflected LeT's classic modus operandi: Since 1999, the group has utilized small but heavily armed and highly motivated two- to four-man squads operating independently or in combination with each other on suicidal—but not suicide—missions intended to inflict the largest numbers of casualties possible during attacks on politically significant or strategically symbolic sites. Invariably, these missions are complex and entail detailed tactical planning; historically, they have taken the form of surprise raids aimed at heavily guarded facilities such as Indian military installations, command headquarters, political institutions, or iconic buildings. They have all been intended to inflict the highest level of pain, underscore the vulnerability of the Indian state, and embarrass the Indian government. The LeT personnel involved in the majority of these attacks seek to escape the scene whenever possible—in fact, they come carefully prepared to endure yet exfiltrate—but appear quite willing to sacrifice themselves if in the process they can take down a larger number of bystanders, hostages, and security forces. Although the use of small arms—to include pistols, automatic rifles, grenades, plastic explosives, and occasionally mortars—has been the norm in most past LeT attacks, the group has also occasionally undertaken true suicide missions, including car bombings.

The targets attacked in Mumbai were consistent with this trademark pattern. They included the symbols of Indian success (luxury hotels), reflections of Indian history and state presence (a historic railway station), and emblems of India's international relationships (a restaurant frequented by tourists and a Jewish community center). The targeted killing of the Jewish residents at Nariman House, and possibly the murder of the Western tourists at the Leopold Café (if indeed they were deliberately

targeted), would also be consistent with LeT's past record, which has included the focused slaughter of non-Muslims such as Hindus and Sikhs.

LeT has not ossified in its ability to choose an appropriate operational style, however, and it remains capable of flexibly adopting different methods when faced with new tactical and strategic situations. In Afghanistan, for example, LeT operations have focused principally on targeting coalition forces, disrupting reconstruction efforts, and supporting other terrorist groups in their efforts to undermine the Karzai regime. Operations there have seen the use of larger crew-served weapons, mines, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and even primitive air defense systems, and recruitment for suicide bombings conducted by other groups appears to be a new LeT specialty. In support of all its operations, LeT operatives have been observed using cellular and satellite telephones, voice-over-Internet communications, couriers, coded messaging, and print media. But unlike other Islamist groups, they appear to have shied away from television, Internet propaganda, and audio and DVD dissemination so far.

What Does All This Add Up To?

Three main conclusions can be drawn from all this. First, LeT remains a terrorist organization of genuinely global reach. Although the nature of its presence and activities vary considerably by location, LeT has demonstrated the ability to grow roots and sustain operations in countries far removed from its primary theater of activity in southern Asia. It exhibits all the ideological animus, financial and material capabilities, motivation, and ruthlessness required to attack those even further afield that it believes are its enemies because of their adherence to different faiths or their residence in secular, liberal-democratic states.

These characteristics of LeT, which have been on display since the group first came into existence in the late 1980s, have made it the object of focused attention within the U.S. intelligence community. LeT's worldwide operations, whether they be merely facilitation and fundraising or more lethal activities such as planning, coordinating, and executing armed attacks either independently or in collusion with others, have marked LeT as a genuine threat to regional and global security. If the outfit previously escaped the popular attention it received after the 2008 atrocities in Mumbai, it was only because its earlier attacks did not extend to Western civilians and because its preferred combat tactics made it a lesser challenge to American interests in comparison to al-Qaeda.

This, however, should not be a consolation. If left unchecked and untargeted, LeT will evolve into a truly formidable threat, given its resourcefulness, its operational span, its evolving capabilities, its relatively robust sanctuary within Pakistan, and above all, its ideology of unremitting universal jihad.

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Second, India has unfortunately become the “sponge” that inadvertently protects the West. India’s proximity to Pakistan has resulted in New Delhi absorbing most of the blows unleashed by those terrorist groups that treat it as a common enemy along with Israel, the United States, and the West more generally. To the chagrin of its citizens, India has also turned out to be a terribly soft state neither able to prevent many of the terrorist acts that have confronted it over the years nor capable of retaliating effectively against either its terrorist adversaries or their state sponsors in Pakistan. The existence of unresolved problems, such as the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir, has also provided both Pakistani institutions and their terrorist clients with the excuses necessary to bleed India to death by a thousand cuts. Still, these unsettled disputes remain only excuses. They should be addressed by New Delhi seriously and with alacrity, but there is no assurance that even a satisfactory resolution of these problems will conclusively eliminate the threat of terrorism facing India and the West.

This is because the most vicious entities now engaged in attacks on India, like LeT, have objectives that go way beyond Kashmir itself. They seek to destroy what is perhaps the most successful example of a thriving democracy in the non-Western world, one that has prospered despite the presence of crushing poverty, incredible diversity, and a relatively short history of self-rule. India’s existence as a secular and liberal-democratic state that protects political rights and personal freedoms—despite all its failures and imperfections—thus remains a threat to groups such as LeT, with their narrow, blighted, and destructive worldviews. It is also a threat to other praetorian and antidemocratic institutions such as the Pakistan Army and the ISI. India, accordingly, becomes an attractive target, while its mistakes, inadequacies, and missteps only exacerbate the opportunities for violence directed at its citizenry.

It would be a gross error, however, to treat the terrorism facing India as simply a problem for New Delhi alone. When viewed from the perspective of the United States, it is safe to say that LeT has long undermined U.S. interests in the global war on terror. It threatens U.S. soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan and has now killed U.S. citizens in Mumbai. Thus far it has not mounted any direct attacks on the American homeland, but that is not for want of motivation. Given the juicier and far more vulnerable U.S. targets in South Asia, LeT has simply found it more convenient to attack these (and U.S. allies) in situ rather than overextend itself in reaching out to the continental United States, especially when al-Qaeda still remains focused on that task. An LeT attack on the U.S. homeland would also lead Washington to target the ISI and the Pakistani state directly, problems that the Pakistani military can do without at a time when groups like LeT and its regional partners are more than amply successful in advancing the Pakistan Army’s aims by undermining larger U.S. and coalition investments in Afghanistan.

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Yet, the deliberate killing of American citizens in Mumbai crossed a new line. In a very real sense, the carnage there was fundamentally a species of global terrorism not merely because the assailants happened to believe in an obscurantist brand of Islam but, more importantly, because killing Indians turned out to be interchangeable with killing citizens of some fifteen different nationalities for no apparent reason whatsoever. If the United States fails to recognize that the struggle against terrorism must be indivisible because Indian security is as important to New Delhi as American security is to Washington, future Indian governments could choose to respond to the problems posed by Pakistani groups such as LeT in ways that may undermine regional security and make the U.S. effort to transform Pakistan more difficult than it already is.

Third, although the most vicious terrorist groups in southern Asia, such as al-Qaeda, LeT, the Pakistani Taliban, Jaish-e-Mohammad, and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, are driven largely by a radical Islamist agenda rather than by any negotiable grievances, they still remain highly adaptable with respect to the lethal tactics chosen to achieve their goals. This reality makes such terrorists formidable adversaries. A successful antiterrorism policy must be able to cope with both their obdurate aims and their changing techniques.

The only reasonable objective for the United States in this context must be the permanent evisceration of these groups—especially al-Qaeda and LeT, which threaten American interests directly—with Pakistani cooperation if possible, but without it if necessary. This is particularly so because the unacceptable nature of their ambitions alone should rule out any consideration of policies centered on conciliation or compromise. It should also make Washington suspicious of any theory of terrorism that justifies its precipitation by so-called “root causes,” especially in South Asia—and saying so does not in any way obviate the need to resolve existing intra- and inter-state disputes so long as the resolutions are pursued through peaceful means.

Where the forms of violence are concerned, the evidence suggests that the uncompromising ideological motivations that often drive terrorism on the Indian subcontinent coexist quite comfortably with the presence of effective instrumental rationality, even if this is only oriented toward sinister purposes. As the attacks in Mumbai demonstrated, even ideologically charged terrorist groups such as LeT are capable of meticulous planning and strategic adaptability. Terrorists learn and change their tactics to outwit their state opponents. For instance, because Indian intelligence agencies successfully broke up several terrorist modules in recent years—groups that intended to transport explosives and conduct bombings by land—in Mumbai, LeT resorted to an unexpected course of action that involved arrival by sea and the use of trained and motivated attackers with relatively unsophisticated weapons to inflict a great deal of damage.

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There is little doubt that other terrorists will learn from Mumbai and could attempt to emulate LeT's actions. If LeT itself seeks to attack the U.S. homeland, it could well choose to replicate its experience in Mumbai by using sleepers possibly already resident in the country. Whether it does so or not, the important point is that the successes of U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies in neutralizing more complex kinds of attacks could well push various ideologically hostile terrorist groups to seek simpler solutions, using capabilities at hand or readily available, to attack U.S. citizens in unanticipated ways abroad or at home. LeT is one such group that certainly possesses the motivation to conduct such attacks on American soil if the opportunities arise and if the cost-benefit calculus shifts in favor of such assaults.

In light of these three conclusions, there are some unsettling trends that foreshadow a shift away from LeT's relatively low profile post-Mumbai. While the United States has never been able to convince the Pakistan Army to extirpate LeT from the fertile soil of the Pakistani state, the benefits of Washington's relationship with Islamabad—and the dangers to Pakistan arising from catastrophic terrorist attacks against India or the United States—have nevertheless helped to persuade the Pakistan Army to restrain LeT's more extreme tendencies. In particular, LeT's ideological imperative to take its war to Western homelands has not yet been consummated, in part because Pakistan fears the devastating fallout that would follow a total rupture in U.S.-Pakistani relations.

Over the last year, however, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has withered, and with it, so has the value of keeping on good terms with the United States. While the Pakistan Army as a whole, and its current leadership in particular, still firmly opposes any LeT attack on the United States, any unraveling of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship that intensifies the adversarial sentiments on both sides would only strengthen the more extreme constituencies supporting LeT within the army. Moreover, as the U.S. war in Afghanistan also winds up, LeT operatives will enjoy a richer field of Afghan and residual Western targets if Pakistan chooses to intervene more energetically in order to control Afghanistan's larger geopolitical destiny. Finally, the United States' effective decimation of much of al-Qaeda's senior leadership may also mean that the mantle of global jihad could pass to LeT, creating further incentives for the group to take the battle to its enemies' heartlands if it is not restrained by its traditional sponsors.

Even within the subcontinent, there is evidence that LeT's operatives are stirring. At the end of February, Indian police arrested two men associated with LeT. The pair was caught at a New Delhi railway station carrying explosive material. It is possible that this foiled attack was planned outside the control and knowledge of the ISI and the Pakistani military. But if so, then it would have taken place at a coincidental time in the history of the subcontinent. After years of tension the Indo-Pakistani relationship has recently experienced new flickers of hope. In November, Pakistan announced that it would grant India "Most Favored Nation"

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status. Since then, the civilian governments of both countries have begun to build upon that foundation to expand bilateral trade ties. It is yet unclear how much latitude the Pakistan Army would be willing to permit Pakistan's civilian leaders in their quest for peace with India, because the military knows all too well that a permanent rapprochement with New Delhi would threaten not only its own preeminence but also its own *raison d'être* in Pakistani statecraft. If the Pakistan Army wants to scuttle the budding Indo-Pakistani reengagement, then LeT may find itself called upon once again to implement the military's unique brand of pernicious politics.

Even if the army has reconciled itself to normalizing relations between the two countries, there is only so long that the Pakistani state can keep muzzling LeT. While the ISI currently seeks to modulate the object and intensity of LeT's violence as part of its wider Indian strategy, this terrorist group has its own set of bloodthirsty objectives. The indefinite postponement of these objectives in service to the Pakistani state's goals sits uneasily with LeT's ideology and internal dynamics, and there are already emerging murmurs of discontent among LeT cadres.

The status quo cannot hold forever. At some point, Pakistan must either act to eradicate or demobilize LeT, or allow it to resume its murderous rampage. However, as LeT increasingly incubates and grows stronger under the protection of the military, Pakistan may increasingly find that both eradication and demobilization have long ceased to be viable options.

This Policy Outlook is based on a lecture delivered at the National Defense University's Program on Irregular Warfare and Special Operations Studies.

Any unraveling of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship that intensifies the adversarial sentiments on both sides would only strengthen the more extreme constituencies supporting LeT within the army.

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