



CARNEGIE
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Congressional Testimony

**PROTECTING THE
HOMELAND AGAINST
MUMBAI-STYLE ATTACKS
AND THE THREAT FROM
LASHKAR-E-TAIBA**

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Lashkar-e-Taiba (the Army of the Pure or LeT) is one of Pakistan's oldest and most powerful militant groups. India has been its primary enemy since the early 1990s and the group has never considered itself to be an al-Qaeda affiliate, but the U.S. is clearly on its enemies list. Since 9/11, the group's anti-American rhetoric has turned into action. LeT has been actively attacking U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan since 2004-2005, its presence there increased in the last several years and it deployed a small number of fighters to Iraq following the U.S. invasion of that country. LeT has also killed Americans and other Westerners in terrorist attacks in India and contributed to other plots targeting them as well. The group has the capabilities to launch terrorist attacks outside of South Asia, including against the U.S., and is likely working to augment those capabilities. However, the question of LeT's intent to engage in a unilateral attack against the U.S. homeland remains hotly debated.

Before turning to LeT's capabilities and intent, it is important to recognize why Pakistan is unlikely to attempt dismantling the group in the near term. First, the Pakistani military and its Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) have long considered LeT to be the country's most reliable proxy against India and the group still provides utility in this regard. Second, Pakistan is facing a serious jihadist insurgency. LeT remains one of the few militant outfits whose policy is to refrain from launching attacks against the Pakistani state. Fearing LeT's capability to execute or assist with terrorist attacks in Pakistan's heartland, the security establishment does not want to take any action to change this calculus. LeT has built a robust social welfare apparatus via its above-ground wing, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), and assorted other legitimate relief organizations. As a result, concerns also exist regarding its capability to provoke social unrest in strongholds such as Lahore. Moreover, LeT actually provides assistance at times against some of the groups involved in anti-state violence. This assistance includes challenging the ideological underpinnings of waging jihad against a Muslim government, providing intelligence regarding anti-state militants' activities, and in some instances even targeting anti-state militants directly.¹ LeT has provided similar intelligence and direct action assistance against separatists in Balochistan as well. In short, the group has utility both externally *and* internally. Third, some of LeT's members enjoy strong personal relationships with members of Pakistan's armed forces.²

The safe haven LeT enjoys within Pakistan has provided it the freedom of movement necessary to develop capabilities and capacity that enable it to threaten the United States. At the same time, its integration with the Pakistani state raises questions as to whether LeT leaders would risk their group's position to execute such an attack. The following focuses on a LeT-led operation against the U.S. homeland. It is important to note, however, that the primary threat to U.S. citizens from LeT terrorist attacks remains in South Asia, either unilaterally as was the case with the 2008 Mumbai attacks or via operations executed in concert with the Indian Mujahideen.³ Further, LeT could act as part of a consortium, meaning it need not take the lead role in an attack in order for its capabilities to be used against the U.S. homeland.

¹ Regarding LeT's ideological utility see, for example, Sermon by LeT cleric Mubashir Ahmad Rabbani entitled "The Schism of Excommunication," undated. Al-Qaeda refuted points from "The Schism of Excommunication," in a book entitled, *Knowledgeable Judgment on the Mujrites of the (Present) Age*. C. Christine Fair, "Lashkar-e-Tayiba and the Pakistani State," *Survival* 53, no. 4, 2011. Information regarding LeT's intelligence gathering is based on field interviews in Pakistan. Regarding LeT direct action against anti-state actors see, for example, Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 196, 200-201. Tahir Khan, "Mohmand Agency: TTP accuses rival groups of plotting attacks on its bases," *The Express Tribune*, June 9, 2013.

² For a detailed analysis of LeT recruiting patterns and overlaps with those of Pakistan's military see, Anirban Ghosh et al, *The Fighters of Lashkar-e-Taiba: Recruitment, Training, Deployment and Death* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2013).

³ Networks associated with LeT were suspected of supplying the military-grade RDX used in the 2010 bombing of the German Bakery in Pune and an LeT commander (Mirza Himayat Baig) cooperated with the Indian Mujahideen to execute the attack. Praveen Swami, "Lashkar-linked terror charity raises fears," *The Hindu*, September 2, 2011. Chandan Haygunde, "Aspiring teacher to terror accused," *Indian Express*, April 19, 2013.

Capabilities to Launch an LeT-led Attack Against the U.S.

LeT's training camps in Pakistan remain open and the group boasts a stable of men who can provide instruction in small-unit commando tactics, reconnaissance, counter-intelligence and the construction and use of explosive devices. The group has transnational networks stretching across South Asia, the Persian Gulf and Europe, with a particularly strong connection to the United Kingdom, and reach into the U.S. and Canada. LeT operates a robust above-ground infrastructure that, combined with investments in legitimate enterprises in Pakistan and fundraising networks abroad, has enabled it to operate independent of direct ISI financial support. While it continues to enjoy reach-back capability into the Pakistani military and ISI, LeT also has leveraged its financial resources and operational freedom to develop an educated cadre among its membership. Collectively, these individuals amplify technical, training, and planning capabilities.

Training Apparatus

Soldiers on secondment from the military trained many of LeT's trainers, and some of them took early retirement to join the group. As a result, LeT militants and trainers are considered to be among the most tactically adept and its bomb-makers to be among the best in the region.⁴ Its own camps continue to operate in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Mansehra, and elsewhere in Pakistan. As LeT has deepened its collaboration with other outfits, cross-pollination among trainers and trainees has occurred. At the same time, LeT does not enjoy historically strong ties with other groups in the region and actually suffers from a deficit of trust with some of them. This should not discount the possibility that LeT trainers or camps might be used to prepare militants from another group for attacks against the U.S. However, the focus here is on the group's capabilities to plan, prepare, and execute a unilateral terrorist attack.

LeT's own training traditionally begins with the Daura-e-Suffa, which focuses on imbuing religious principles, including the obligatory nature of jihad, as well as proselytizing. It lasts approximately three weeks, is often conducted at the group's compound in Muridke and includes lectures by senior leaders. This is followed by the Daura-e-Aama, which consists of lectures, additional religious indoctrination and prayer, physical training, and some introductory weapons drills. It also lasts about three weeks and is typically conducted in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. A small number of those who go through the Daura-e-Suffa and Daura-e-Aama advance to the Daura-e-Khasa, which takes place at a higher elevation in Mansehra. This lasts approximately two to three months and includes physical training, guerrilla warfare tactics, survival techniques, firing different types of light weapons, and instruction on the use of hand grenades, rocket launchers, and mortars. These time frames are not fixed and militants may train for considerably longer as well as skipping the initial Daura-e-Suffa and Daura-e-Aama in some instances.⁵

LeT also runs a bevy of specialized programs providing instruction on a range of skills. In addition to maritime training for those who operate at sea and commando training for individuals who will undertake fidayeen attacks, these include instruction on counter-intelligence, IED construction, sabotage and surveillance, conducting reconnaissance, communicating in code, and the use of sophisticated communication technologies.⁶ The focus on support activities such as reconnaissance

⁴ The latter are reportedly responsible for building some of the improvised explosive devices used in Afghanistan as well as instructing others on how to do so. Tanel, *Storming the World Stage*, pp. 198-199.

⁵ For a detailed assessment of LeT's training infrastructure and programs see, Ibid, pp. 74-79.

⁶ "Testimony of David Coleman Headley to the Indian National Investigative Agency," 3-9 June 2010.

and communication is crucial to LeT's capability to execute complex operations abroad, as evidenced by the 2008 Mumbai attacks.⁷

Attack Planning Capabilities

LeT is a patient organization, known to perform surveillance of targets for the purpose of creating target packages that it could use in the future. For example, the 2008 Mumbai attacks began with surveillance of the Taj Mahal Hotel conducted two years prior and with no immediate attack in mind. David Headley, the Pakistani-American who undertook reconnaissance for the attacks, made multiple trips to Mumbai, conducting extensive surveillance of multiple targets. This included taking photographs and making video recordings. He was taught how to use a GPS and plotted out the future terrorists' movements around Mumbai, bringing that GPS with the coordinates back to Pakistan so the attackers could practice. LeT's close relationship with the Pakistani military enabled it to pull in a member of the navy to help plan the maritime insertion.⁸ The final operation also revealed several smart tactical decisions. Splitting the attackers into small teams made it more difficult to intercept all of them and also created the sense of a larger attack force. Exploding IED's away from the attack sites contributed to the confusion.

LeT used Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) during the Mumbai attacks and this made it more difficult (though clearly not impossible) to intercept its communications.⁹ According to Indian officials, LeT operatives based there now communicate almost exclusively with their handlers in Pakistan via VoIP or other technological means that are difficult to monitor. Notably, the group historically has focused significant resources on building up its technological capabilities, including sending members for graduate work in the field of Information Technology. This raises questions about LeT's capability to engage in clandestine communications with transnational operatives. Its significant financial assets likely enable the group to invest in sophisticated programs and to experiment with various technologies.¹⁰

Transnational Networks

LeT's transnational networks stretch across South Asia, the Gulf and into Europe and North America. These are used primarily for fundraising and to support its regional operations, including attacks against India. However, LeT operatives have been known to operate in a number of European countries that participate in the Visa Waiver Program.¹¹ Thus, it is believed to be capable of talent-spotting, recruiting, and vetting radicalized Westerners. LeT's use of social media geared toward English-speaking audiences suggest the group also is attempting to position itself as a destination of choice for Westerners, especially members of the Pakistani diaspora in the U.S. and Europe, interested in associating with jihadist groups.¹²

It must be noted that LeT historically has used Western operatives to support its own operations in

⁷ The Mumbai attacks were several years in the making and benefited from extensive surveillance by David Headley.

⁸ At one meeting, the men examined nautical charts and discussed various landing options. The naval frogman directed Headley to explore the position of Indian naval vessels in order to avoid a gunfight before entering Indian waters, which Headley did upon his trip to Mumbai. Ibid.

⁹ Transnational operatives were used to set up the VoIP, which also was intended to make it more difficult to trace.

¹⁰ The group reportedly purchased para-gliders and commissioned an expert in their use to train a small cadre of members. "Chinese training LeT men in paragliding: Abu Jundal," *DNA India*, July 3, 2012.

¹¹ Tankel, *Storming the World Stage*, pp. 96-102, 164-167.

¹² The group is active through its above-ground organization, JuD, on Twitter and Facebook. JuD previously had a youtube page that featured various LeT attacks in India and Pakistan.

South Asia. Nevertheless, networks or operatives used for support purposes can be re-directed to support terrorist attacks. There are several notable examples of LeT foreign operatives suspected of supporting al-Qaeda-led attacks, though it is unclear whether the Pakistan-based LeT leadership sanctioned these activities.¹³ The one example of the group using one of its operatives to launch an attack against a Western country occurred in 2002-2003. Sajid Mir, who is responsible for managing LeT's overseas operatives and oversaw the planning and execution of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, directed a French convert to Islam based in Paris to travel to Australia, where he was to assist an LeT-trained local to execute a terrorist attack.¹⁴ It is unclear from the open source whether the LeT-trained local in Australia was directed to execute the attack by LeT leaders or if he germinated the idea and reached out to the organization for assistance. If the latter, it is also not clear if the entire LeT leadership sanctioned deploying the Paris-based operative to assist or if Sajid Mir was acting independently or on behalf of a faction within the group. Thus, the operation illustrates not only LeT's capacity to project power far beyond South Asia, but also the difficulty of determining the dynamics behind the decision to do so.

Training Westerners

Pakistanis constitute the majority of those trained in LeT camps, but the group has a history of training foreigners too.¹⁵ After the U.S. counterattack against Afghanistan destroyed the training infrastructure there, LeT stepped in to train local militants as well as foreigners who pre-9/11 would have trained in al-Qaeda camps, but now were looking for other avenues of instruction.¹⁶ Since the mid-1990s, LeT has provided training to Indian Muslims for attacks against their own country, a practice that continues today. Some of these men have executed attacks on LeT's behalf, providing

¹³ For example, activists in Paris associated with the group are suspected of providing some logistical support to the "shoebomber" Richard Reid. LeT operatives in the U.K. are also suspected of providing money to those involved in the 2006 attempt to bomb transatlantic flights from the United Kingdom using liquid explosives. Regarding assistance to Richard Reid see, Judgment in *Republic of France vs. Rama et. al.*, Magistrates' Court of Paris, June 16, 2005. Regarding the 2006 bomb plot see, Dexter Filkins and Souad Mekhennet, "Pakistani Charity Under Scrutiny In Financing of Airline Bomb Plot," *New York Times*, Aug. 13, 2006. Joshua Partlow and Kamran Khan, "Charity Funds Said to Provide Clues to Alleged Terrorist Plot," *Washington Post*, Aug. 15, 2006. Henry Chu and Sebastian Rotella, "Three Britons convicted of plot to blow up planes," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 8, 2009. John Burns, "3 Sentenced in London for Airline Plot," *New York Times*, July 12, 2010.

¹⁴ Sajid Mir arranged for members of the group's network in Paris to provide money for the trip. Australian security officials said the men intended to select a suitable target and purchase the chemicals necessary to build a large bomb, though it remains unclear whether they intended to assemble it or LeT was planning to deploy another foreign explosives expert for that purpose. Regarding the role of LeT's French networks see, Jean-Louis Bruguière, *Ce que je n'ai pas pu dire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009), pp. 469-472. "Committal Hearing of Faheem Khalid Lodhi," Downing Centre Local Court, Sydney, Australia, Dec. 17, 2004. Natasha Wallace, "Court Battle Over Secret Evidence," *Sydney Morning Herald*, Dec. 18, 2004. Judgment in "Republic of France vs. Rama, et. al." Appeal Judgement in "Fahim Khalid Lodhi vs. Regina," New South Wales Court of Criminal Appeal, Dec. 20, 2007. "Frenchman Played 'Major' Role in Australia Terror Plot, Court Hears," *Agence France-Presse*, Feb. 8, 2007. Information regarding activities in Australia from, Australian security officials said the two men intended to select a suitable target and purchase the chemicals necessary to build a large bomb, though it remains unclear whether they intended to assemble it or LeT was planning to deploy another foreign explosives expert for that purpose. Interview with former member of the Australian security services. Appeal Judgement in "Fahim Khalid Lodhi vs. Regina." Martin Chulov, *Australian Jihad: The Battle Against Terrorism from Within and Without*, (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2006), p. 143. Liz Jackson, "Program Transcript: Willie Brigitte," *ABC*, Feb. 9, 2004.

¹⁵ It claims to have trained recruits during the 1990s for combat in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Kosovo, the southern Philippines, and, of course, Indian-administered Kashmir. MDI website, "A Brief Introduction to the Markaz and the Group X," undated.

¹⁶ Chulov, *Australian Jihad*, p. 151. Mariam Abou Zahab, 'Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement,' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009), p. 140. Amir Mir, *The True Face of Jihadists* (Lahore: Mashal Press, 2004), p. 70. Josh Meyer, 'Extremist group works in the open in Pakistan,' *LA Times* 18 Dec. 2007.

the group with plausible deniability, while others have proffered logistical support to Pakistani members of LeT who infiltrated India to carry out operations. Still others are associated with various indigenous jihadist networks, most notably the Indian Mujahideen, or have settled into life in India, essentially becoming sleeper agents the authorities fear could be activated at another time.¹⁷

LeT has long had a policy of training Westerners. The majority of them are members of the Pakistani and Kashmir diasporas in the U.K., but the group has been training Americans since 2000.¹⁸ The first Americans known to have trained with LeT were from Virginia and were part of a coterie of would-be jihadists that ultimately became known as the Virginia Jihad Network. Sajid Mir, the commander in charge of overseas operatives, arranged for several of them to provide assistance to a British LeT operative who traveled to the U.S. on multiple occasions from 2002-2003 to procure military gear for the group. Although the men clearly were used in a support capacity, one concern about such networks is that their purpose can change over time. Indeed, Sajid Mir also asked two of the trainees to undertake missions involving information gathering as well as the dissemination of propaganda.¹⁹ One of them told the FBI in 2004 that he was asked specifically to perform surveillance on a chemical plant in Maryland.²⁰ Precisely what LeT or elements within it planned to do with this information is unknown, though they clearly were interested in both surveillance and expanding the group's networks in the U.S.

In 2005, two men from Atlanta Georgia with ties to the 'Toronto 18' as well as to a British Pakistani who acted as a talent spotter for LeT identified possible targets for a terrorist attack in the U.S.²¹ A month later the duo traveled to Washington, DC, where they shot video recordings of possible targets, including the U.S. Capitol; the headquarters building of the World Bank; the Masonic Temple in Alexandria, Virginia; and a group of large fuel storage tanks near a highway in northern Virginia.²² One of the men traveled to Pakistan later that year intending to study in a madrasa and then train with LeT.²³ He arrived the week after the London Underground bombings that occurred on July 7th and was unable to realize his ambitions, possibly owing to the heightened security environment in Pakistan where two of the London bombers had trained. Notably, at least one of them is believed to have spent a night at Muridke, though there is no open source evidence suggesting LeT had any direct involvement in the 7/7 attacks.²⁴

LeT has trained others living in America since then, none more famous than Daood Gilani, who took the name David Coleman Headley in 2006 to help facilitate his reconnaissance trips in Mumbai and elsewhere for the group. He joined LeT in February 2002, participating in the Daura-e-Suffa that month. In August 2002 he went through the Daura-e-Aama and then in April 2003 the Daura-e-Khasa, LeT's three-month guerrilla warfare training program. More specialized trainings followed, and in 2006 he began conducting reconnaissance in India that ultimately led to the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

¹⁷ Regarding the Indian jihadist movement see, Stephen Tankel, *The Indian Jihadist Movement: Evolution and Dynamics*, Washington, DC: National Defense University, forthcoming (provisional title).

¹⁸ Indictment in "United States *vs.* Randall Todd Royer," The United States District Court for the Eastern-District of Virginia, Alexandria Division June 2003.

¹⁹ Memorandum Opinion in "United States *vs.* Masoud Khan *et al.*," The United States District Court for the Eastern-District of Virginia, Alexandria Division 4 March 2004.

²⁰ United States Attorney's Office Eastern District of Virginia, "Virginia Jihad Member Convicted of Perjury, Obstruction," Feb. 5, 2007.

²¹ United States Attorney's Office Northern District of Georgia, "Terrorism Defendants Sentenced: Ehsanul Islam Sadeque Receives 17 Years in Prison; Co-defendant Syed Haris Ahmed Receives 13 Years," Dec. 14, 2009.

²² Indictment in "United States of America *vs.* Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadeque," United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, July 19, 2006.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Tankel, *Storming the World Stage*, p. 163.

Headley was trained and handled jointly by LeT and Pakistani intelligence, and used in a support capacity. However, without his contributions in terms of reconnaissance, it is unlikely the 2008 Mumbai attacks would have been as operationally successful. Notably, despite his access to America and Americans, LeT used Headley overwhelmingly for operations against India. (Headley's involvement in an aborted plot against Denmark is discussed below.)

Given the benefits Headley provided to the group, it is reasonable to assume LeT may have increased its efforts to recruit and train other Westerners or to find ways for Pakistani members to acquire citizenship or residency in Western countries. For example, in September 2011, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested Jubair Ahmad, a 24 year-old Pakistani immigrant living in Woodbridge, Virginia. Ahmed received religious training from LeT as a teenager, and later attended its basic training camp while living in Pakistan, before entering the U.S. in 2007 with other members of his family. After moving to the U.S. he provided material support to LeT, producing and distributing propaganda.²⁵

As should be clear, LeT has all of the tools necessary to strike the homeland. The group's instructors are very proficient for a non-state actor, it has developed an array of sophisticated training programs and it enjoys significantly more freedom to conduct those programs than other groups in the region. LeT's transnational networks enable it to identify and vet possible Western recruits, including Americans or citizens from visa waiver countries in Europe. The group also has the operational space as well as the organizational wherewithal to build relationships in the Pakistani diaspora community. A cautious and calculating organization, LeT primarily has used its overseas operatives to support operations in South Asia. The danger of LeT's training apparatus and transnational networks, however, is that they can be redirected toward international attacks. As the 2008 Mumbai attacks demonstrated, given enough time and space to plan, LeT is capable of inflicting significant and spectacular damage once it decides to do so.

Intent to Launch an LeT-led Attack Against the U.S.

LeT is a pan-Islamist group committed to defending the umma and avenging what it perceives to be the oppression of or violence against Muslims. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to launch missile strikes in Pakistan and elsewhere make it an obvious ideological target. India remains the group's main enemy and if the group could only attack one country then that likely would remain its target, but LeT is a robust enough organization to launch attacks against multiple countries. And it added America to its enemies list long ago. LeT has killed U.S. citizens in Mumbai in 2008, though they were not the main targets of the attack. The group has also deployed fighters to Afghanistan, where they directly confront U.S. forces, and previously to Iraq. Yet there is no evidence LeT has ever attempted an attack against the U.S. homeland, despite access to some of its citizens and residents. So what's stopping it?

LeT's leadership retains an element of nationalism that is distinctly at odds with al-Qaeda and still finds common ground, as it has since the 1990s, with elements in the Pakistani military and ISI. LeT and its backers remain co-dependent: each afraid of the repercussions that might stem from splitting with the other. Furthermore, unlike al-Qaeda Central, which confronts a challenging security environment, LeT controls a robust social welfare infrastructure and its leaders value the influence that comes with it. In the 1990s the group needed the state to build up its infrastructure, whereas now it is reliant on the state not to tear it down. It is worth highlighting the leadership's devotion to dawa

²⁵ Stephen Tankel, "Lashkar-e-Taiba's American Connections," *Foreign Policy*, Sept. 6, 2011.

through the delivering of social services and the fact that protecting its domestic infrastructure has at times limited its military adventurism. This leadership operates openly in Pakistan's settled areas, not from a hidden redoubt.

This freedom of movement carries with it a number of benefits, but also serves as another leverage point that can be used to constrain LeT's activity. As a result, significant elements within the group are still "tamed by the ISI" as one former member observed.²⁶ Pakistan's security services are believed to use this and other means of leverage to put pressure on LeT to refrain from striking Western interests abroad. Unless the Pakistani security establishment wants a showdown with the United States, this is unlikely to change. At the same time, cracking down on LeT is not the top U.S. demand made on Pakistan. The group does not want that to change, nor does it wish to invite greater unilateral American action against it.

In short, LeT's restraint has more to do with strategic calculation than ideological inclination. If Pakistan were to crack down sincerely on LeT, then the group's cost-benefit calculus could change. However, key LeT leaders also might authorize a strike against the U.S. if they believed the group could avoid retribution or that it could withstand the costs and that these were outweighed by the benefits. It is also important to note LeT's history of using false names to claim its attacks and, in some instances, of training radicalized actors indigenous to their target country to carry them out. In other words, unlike al-Qaeda, the group is likely to do everything possible to hide its hand in any attack on the American homeland. It is impossible to predict with certainty whether the day will come when LeT changes its calculus or, if so, what the tipping point might be. A number of variables could inform such a shift. Two of the most important are inter-related: ISI situational awareness of and influence on LeT; and organizational dynamics within LeT.

ISI Situational Awareness and Influence

The level of Pakistani control over LeT is hotly debated and it is arguably more useful to think in terms of situational awareness and influence. The ISI reportedly retains a liaison relationship with LeT, meaning that there are designated go-betweens, with senior leaders also having specific handlers.²⁷ Local interlocutors in Pakistan, including one former and one current LeT member both of mid-rank, assert that the security services have informants within the organization and also engage in other forms of intelligence collection regarding its activities.²⁸ This provides a significant level of situational awareness. However, given the uncertainties associated with most principal-agent relationships of this nature, it is also reasonable to assume that LeT has taken countermeasures to enable some clandestine activities. In terms of influence and guidance, the ISI leadership generally provides descriptive rather than detailed instruction. This means it sets broad guidelines and leaves implementation up to line-level ISI officers and, in some cases, LeT militants themselves.

According to David Headley, his handler, known to him as Major Iqbal, was aware of all the targets chosen for the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Moreover, Major Iqbal reportedly was the person who recommended LeT target the Chabbad House, believing (wrongly) that it was a front for the Israeli Mossad.²⁹ Given the nature of relationships between LeT leaders and the ISI, it is reasonable to assume others were also aware of the operational details. This is reinforced by the fact that at times

²⁶ Author interview with former Lashkar-e-Taiba member, Jan. 2009 in Pakistan.

²⁷ "Testimony of David Coleman Headley to the Indian National Investigative Agency."

²⁸ David Headley's testimony supports this contention. See, *Ibid.*

²⁹ Sebastian Rotella, "Witness: Pakistani Intel Officer Ordered Hit on Mumbai Jews," *ProPublica*, May 24, 2011.

Headley met with Iqbal to brief him on information, which the latter already had.³⁰ It is unclear whether the ISI leadership was aware of the scope and scale of the attacks. If not, this may have resulted from LeT's handlers not passing information all the way up the chain of command or from the turnover that was taking place in the ISI at the time.³¹ In October 2008, one month before the Mumbai attacks, LeT began plotting a terrorist attack in Denmark. Major Iqbal was present for the initial discussions that took place between Sajid Mir and David Headley.³² Several months later, in the wake of the fallout from the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Sajid postponed the operation indefinitely as a result of what he told Headley was ISI pressure to do so.³³

In summation, regardless of what the ISI leadership may or may not have known about Mumbai, from LeT's perspective it was a sanctioned operation. And when the group allegedly was told to put an attack against a Western country on hold, its leaders apparently submitted. This suggests a reasonably high level of ISI situational awareness and influence. Yet with the 2014 drawdown of U.S. and Coalition forces from Afghanistan, there is cause for concern about how this might impact the LeT-ISI relationship.

First, LeT is likely to attempt to keep a small presence in Northeast Afghanistan, where its members have worked to carve out territory. If it succeeds, then access to safe haven in Afghanistan for LeT conceivably could reduce ISI situational awareness of what its members there are doing. At the very least, it could increase plausible deniability for LeT and, thus, for the Pakistani state itself. Each could conceivably claim they did not sanction plots orchestrated from across the border, even if planned in Pakistan, with the result being to heighten the likelihood such attacks might occur.

Second, LeT is likely to agitate for regenerating the jihad directly against India, both in the form of terrorist attacks against the mainland and increased activity in India-administered Kashmir. The latter has been torpid since the late 2000s. Several LeT-led attacks there this year suggest attempts to regenerate the conflict, but it is highly unlikely to succeed in spurring violence on the order of magnitude of that which existed before the conflict began to ebb. If the Pakistani security establishment is not deemed supportive enough of these efforts and they fail to bear fruit, this could heighten the chance that LeT or factions within it undertake unsanctioned attacks either against India or Western targets.

Third, if the situation in Pakistan continues to deteriorate, key LeT leaders could make the determination that the security establishment is in no position to severely punish the group or those individuals in it who are considered essential to keeping the rank-and-file in line. They may also assume—rightly or wrongly—that as the American presence in the region shrinks, Washington will have less leverage over Pakistan and thus fewer options for responding to an attack against the U.S. homeland.

³⁰ Superseding Indictment in “United States of America vs. Ilyas Kashmiri, Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed [a/k/a ‘Major Abdur Rehman,’ a/k/a ‘Pasha’], David Coleman Headley [a/k/a ‘Daood Gilani], Tahawwur Hussain Rana.” “Testimony of David Coleman Headley to the Indian National Investigative Agency.”

³¹ Ahmad Shuja Pasha became Director General of the ISI in October 2008, a month after the Mumbai attacks were originally scheduled to take place. He reportedly visited LeT's Operational Commander, Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, in jail following the latter's detention in the wake of the attacks in order to “understand the Mumbai attack conspiracy.” “Testimony of David Coleman Headley to the Indian National Investigative Agency.”

³² Ibid.

³³ Plea Agreement in “United States vs. David Coleman Headley [a/k/a ‘Daood Gilani],” The United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, Mar. 18, 2010.

Hence, these leaders could surmise that they, as individuals, and the group collectively were well enough positioned to withstand the consequences of an attack against the U.S. At the same time, a deterioration of the situation in Pakistan could mean that those anti-state jihadist groups with which LeT competes were going from strength to strength. Thus, attacking the U.S. homeland could bring significant prestige within the jihadist universe at a time when some LeT leaders felt the group needed a win. Such a decision would be inextricably linked to dynamics within the organization, discussed below.

Organizational Dynamics

LeT remains more coherent than most groups in Pakistan, but internal tensions exist regarding where the group should focus its energies and how close it should remain to the state. The most obvious point of tension concerns whether to remain regionally focused (i.e. primarily fighting against India and in Afghanistan) or to expand the group's involvement in the global jihad. David Headley's account suggests there was debate over the decision to include targets such as the Chabbad House for the Mumbai attacks.³⁴ Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, the Operational Commander of LeT, and Sajid Mir, the man responsible for overseeing transnational operatives, were in favor and clearly won the day. In short, two of the group's most important militant leaders promoted expanding LeT's target set.

Even those LeT leaders who favor a growing involvement in the global jihad against America do not believe this should come at the expense of war against India. However, this policy of attempting to have it both ways opens the group up to additional factionalism, which could be exacerbated if LeT is unable to regenerate its jihad against India post-2014 or it were to lose one or several of its founding members. LeT's involvement in Afghanistan has been a formative experience for some of those who comprise the next generation and possibly a transformative experience for some of the current crop of leaders. Just as more than two decades spent waging war against India hallowed that cause, almost ten years spent fighting against U.S. forces in Afghanistan may have influenced the preference structure for some of the group's members. The rise of new leaders who cut their teeth in the post 9/11 world could have important implications in terms of LeT's future behavior.

Another important point of tension concerns the degree to which LeT should sublimate its jihadist impulses in order to pursue a reformist agenda via its above-ground infrastructure. LeT and JuD are two sides of the same coin, but they also represent different sets of priorities. Hafiz Saeed may lead a militant organization, but he does so from his position as a cleric who lives comfortably in Lahore and values spreading his interpretation of the Ahl-e-Hadith faith and promoting reformism in Pakistan. Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi is a militant's militant. He has fought in Afghanistan and Indian-administered Kashmir, lost a son to jihad, and is currently on trial for his role in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. It is reasonable to assess that he is more committed to militancy than missionary outreach. Notably, these debates are about more than just ideological preferences. They are also about power within the organization.

Additional variables could inform whether these tensions inflame or abate, as well as how that process impacts LeT's behavior. First, fighting in Afghanistan has not only provided an opportunity to confront U.S. forces directly, but also necessitated collaboration with an array of other militant actors including al-Qaeda. This has the potential to create conditions in which other actors with more extreme agendas can influence LeT members. It also means the group is competing with those other

³⁴ "Testimony of David Coleman Headley to the Indian National Investigative Agency."

actors for credibility.³⁵ Second, and related, LeT's close ties to the Pakistani state open up its leaders to criticism from the rank-and-file as well as other militant groups seeking to poach some of its members. Although organizationally opposed to attacks in Pakistan, it is a myth that no LeT member has ever been involved in violence there. Some occasionally get out of line.³⁶ Others have left to join other militant groups engaged in violence against the state.³⁷ The desire to reset the narrative that the group is fighting the ISI's jihad and not Allah's jihad, which striking the U.S. would help to do, is unlikely to change LeT's calculus on its own. Nor should one expect the group to cross the strategic Rubicon and launch a unilateral attack against the U.S. homeland out of concern that some members, no matter how valuable, are breaking away. However, these could be among a number of factors that influence LeT leaders or factions within the group when they are considering whether or not to expand the group's operational footprint.

Recommendations

Any attempt made to disarm and demobilize LeT without Pakistani support, specifically from the military and ISI, is destined to fail. Without host country support, the U.S. would have to employ direct military action to target LeT's infrastructure, which is based in the settled areas of Pakistan near to population centers. Similarly, U.S. efforts to convince the Pakistani security establishment to break with its historical policy of supporting irregular outfits in general or LeT specifically are also unlikely to succeed in the short term. Nevertheless, there are steps the U.S. can continue to take to degrade LeT and areas where it could increase its efforts.

First, barring a resurgent al-Qaeda, the drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan could create space for Washington to focus more on LeT. Resource allocation should be realigned away from al-Qaeda Central and Afghan-centric militants, especially intelligence officers and analysts whose expertise will be essential for identifying emerging and evolving jihadist threats from LeT and other regional actors. This does not mean flooding Pakistan with clandestine officers focused on LeT. The Raymond Davis episode highlighted the dangers inherent in such activities. Rather, the U.S. could augment collection efforts in LeT's near abroad as well as increase analytical capacity further for intelligence collected. This might include commissioning a reassessment of LeT's historical involvement in international attacks in light of new information that has surely been gathered since the intelligence community enhanced its focus on the group post-Mumbai. Even this seemingly minor effort, could reveal important lessons about LeT's calculus at critical times in its evolution. Additionally, LeT has had the same leaders since the group was founded and these men are not getting any younger. It would be worthwhile to explore the scenarios that might eventuate were a battle for succession to occur. Finally, the United States should develop a response plan in the event of a LeT-led attack against the homeland that includes a mix of inducements, rewards, retributive measures, and unilateral actions vis-à-vis Pakistan. The United States should be prepared for a phased escalation in the event of Pakistani reticence and should develop oversight mechanisms to ensure Pakistan keeps any commitments it makes.

Second, the U.S. should continue to pursue actions necessary to degrade LeT's international networks and contain its operations outside Pakistan. The U.S.-India Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism is more than a decade old, but counterterrorism cooperation between the two

³⁵ For example, after LeT acceded to ISI demands to delay the Danish plot, David Headley began working with al-Qaeda to execute the operation.

³⁶ See for example, Amir Mir, "Lahore episode further blemishes Punjab govt's record," *The News*, Mar. 11, 2013. Tankel, *Storming the World Stage*, p. 202.

³⁷ See, for example, Tankel, *Storming the World Stage*, pp. 130-131.

countries really accelerated immediately after the 2008 Mumbai attacks.³⁸ However, engagement on counterterrorism has since leveled off. Regenerating this engagement and enhancing counterterrorism cooperation is in both countries' interest, and efforts to do so should be supported. In the last several years, the United States, India, and the United Kingdom all took steps to facilitate counterterrorism efforts in Bangladesh. As a result, the LeT presence is reduced, and maintaining vigilance on that front remains important. The Persian Gulf is still fertile soil in terms of a support base for South Asian militancy. U.S. counterterrorism efforts vis-à-vis the Gulf historically focused primarily on terrorist threat financing. The arrest and deportation by Saudi Arabia of two Indian LeT operatives suggests a greater focus has been given to monitoring and infiltrating Gulf-based networks that could be used to recruit operatives or provide logistical support for terrorist attacks.³⁹ The Gulf has not suddenly become a no-go area for LeT militants, but reducing their confidence that it is a guaranteed safe space for operations could have an impact on how militants conduct activities there. The U.S. should continue to press Gulf allies, especially Saudi Arabia, on these issues and to encourage their cooperation on counterterrorism efforts with India. Finally, the U.S. is already engaging in counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing vis-à-vis LeT with allies in Europe. Some Western allies place a higher premium on these efforts than others, suggesting there is room for improvement.

Third, the LeT threat must be taken seriously, but should not drive U.S. policy toward Pakistan. At the same time, Washington's objectives vis-à-vis Pakistan need to expand. When tough choices have had to be made, Washington's priority has been killing al-Qaeda and countering Pakistan-based insurgents fighting in Afghanistan. The 2014 drawdown in Afghanistan and success degrading al-Qaeda Central create an opportunity to elevate the priority given to LeT. They also demand revising the U.S. counterterrorism architecture in South Asia in line with the decreasing threat from al-Qaeda and evolving threats from regional actors like LeT against which unilateral direct action has less utility.⁴⁰ Any policies regarding LeT or counterterrorism more broadly must nest within a wider approach geared toward encouraging, enabling, and compelling Pakistan to address its myriad infirmities. Such an approach includes, but is not limited to, redressing the current civil-military imbalance and creating conditions for action against militancy that could bear fruit down the road. In the short term, this means gearing an overall approach toward maintaining a level of engagement and influence that allows Washington to execute transactions on narrow security issues, exploit opportunities to reinforce positive structural change within Pakistan when possible, and remain prepared to engage in crisis management should the need arise.

Laying the groundwork for future action against LeT is complicated and does not promise satisfaction. However, Washington is unlikely to have success attempting to force strategic steps Pakistan is not yet ready or able to take. Given the ground reality, the U.S. should remain focused on containing LeT in the short-term, but also mindful of opportunities that can be exploited to weaken it or separate the group from its support base. This means continuing to signal to the Pakistani security establishment the severe repercussions that would result were LeT, or elements within it, to attack the homeland. Additionally, Washington should increase pressure on Pakistan to identify, arrest, and extradite any Westerners training or attempting to train with LeT. While being mindful of the need to protect sources and methods of intelligence collection, U.S. officials should seize opportunities to enlighten their counterparts in Pakistan about the involvement of any current or former LeT militants

³⁸ The two countries also launched a Homeland Security Dialogue Ministerial in May 2011.

³⁹ U.S. intelligence is believed to have played an important role in the capture and handover of at least one of the men. Stephen Tinkel, "Sharing is Caring: Containing terrorism in South Asia," *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2012.

⁴⁰ While the U.S. should not abandon the option of drone strikes, it should use them in coordination with U.S. diplomats attuned to their impact on the broader political and security environment.

in anti-state violence as well as about activities the group attempts to keep hidden from the ISI. The U.S. should also explore the viability and potential consequences of efforts to exploit aforementioned fissures within the group. Finally, the U.S. should prepare for the possibility, albeit unlikely in the near-term, that Pakistan attempts to mainstream LeT or elements of it. This includes exploring how the U.S. might assist, overtly or covertly in such an enterprise, the costs and benefits of doing so, and the possible outcomes that might eventuate.

LeT is clearly capable of posing a threat to the United States, but one that must be kept in perspective. The group is not the proverbial shark in the water that must keep moving in order not to die. It has practiced a significant degree of strategic restraint given its capabilities, suggesting it can be deterred. This is not cause for indifference. LeT is also a patient organization and one for which the current strategic calculus is not fixed indefinitely. The U.S. must remain attentive to the evolving threat and vigilant in taking steps to degrade the group.