

INDIA

Mumbai Attacks: An Al-Qaida attempt to provoke India-Pakistan War?

Tuesday 9 December 2008, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 8 December 2008).

The butchery unleashed on Mumbai by a team of 10 black-hooded terrorists came to an end on November 29 at around 8.30 am. This is the sixth time Mumbai has come under some kind of attack since 1993.

This latest 60-hour drama left 183 people dead. Nine terrorists were also killed and one, Amir Kasab, was arrested.

According to media leaks, his revelations have confirmed Indian suspicions about a Pakistani link. Amir was trained by Laskar-e-Tayyaba /Army of Pious (LeT), a Jihadi outfit that has also been blamed for an attack on the Indian parliament in 2002.

Both times the alleged LeT actions have precipitated tension between Pakistan and India. According to Pakistani journalist and the author of *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Ahmed Rashid, the attack was a strategic decision directed by Al-Qaida in the hope of drawing Pakistan's focus away from Afghanistan.

"They are facing relentless attacks by American missiles and from Pakistan forces in the tribal areas [on the Afghan-Pakistan border]. They want to relieve the pressure. The one way to do that is to revive India-Pakistan tension", argued Rashid in the November 29 *Toronto Star*.

Zahid Hussain, a seasoned Pakistani journalist, confirms this argument. "Of late, [the] Pakistan army had renewed its efforts against [the] Taliban on the western front and Taliban were under pressure", he told *Green Left Weekly*.

"What is equally important is the fact that every time India-Pakistan relations are improving, some such incident happens", Zahid pointed out. He argued that Islamists are also against a normalisation of India-Pakistan relations.

Zahid's recently published book *Frontline Pakistan*, which documents Pakistan's Jihadi outfits, takes us inside the LeT network.

Founded in 1990 by Hafiz Saeed, LeT was a military arm of the Wahabist Markaz Dawa al Irshad (MDI). Saeed fought against the Russians in Afghanistan and there came in contact with bin Laden.

LeT's sprawling headquarters outside Lahore houses a university, a farm, a clothing factory, and a carpentry workshop. Its main publication *Al Dawat* had 80,000 copies printed and sold across Pakistan per issue. Some 10,000 to 30,000 youth have been trained at LeT camps. It also runs a huge network of hospitals and schools.

Officially, it opposes bin Laden claiming that "we do not agree with his call to overthrow the rulers of Muslim countries".

However, Abu Zubaydah, a high ranking member of Al-Qaida, was arrested in 2002 in a house rented by a LeT member. LeT has also been active in Indian-held Kashmir since 1993 and moved into mainland India in 2000 when three LeT men attacked Indian troops at the historic Red Fort in Delhi. It was officially banned in Pakistan in 2002 but the ban was mere a fig leaf as it simply changed its name while all LeT networks have remained functional.

Zahid, however, rules out an India-Pakistan war as “ties have improved in last few years and the Indian government has not blamed the Pakistan government for the attacks”.

His optimism, however, is not shared by Seema Mustafa, an Indian journalist, nor by A B Bardhan, secretary general of the Communist Party of India.

“India is not an imperialist country. But it is behaving like one”, said Seema while pointing out “how right-wing hawks in India are busy advocating US-style attacks on ‘terrorist camps’ inside Pakistan”.

She, like Bardhan, thinks the situation is alarming. Asked how the Left Front (an alliance of Indian left wing parties) will react in case there is an escalation, Bardhan told *Green Left Weekly*: “The Left Front has called on the government not to fall victim to any hawkish misadventure. We want the government to take this matter to the Security Council in line with the UN resolution, passed after 9/11, on terrorism emanating from another country.”

Meanwhile, Pakistan is busy making self-serving denials and the Pakistani media are busy spinning fantastic conspiracy theories.

Every one of these conspiracy theory blames India itself for plotting the Mumbai attacks to defame, implicate and damage Pakistan. This is a notion that Bardhan describes as rubbish while Seema thinks “no government in India would do it”. Zahid also thinks that no government can afford to plan such an act against its own people.

It is hard to say how many in Pakistan would buy this sort of conspiracy theory, but the on-the-ground reality is: not merely have India-Pakistan relations suffered a setback, but the Taliban may also get a breathing space as the Pakistani military has clearly hinted at moving troops from the Afghan border across to the Indian.

India, on the other hand, has placed her air force on high alert. At the time of writing these lines, official spokesman in Pakistan has declared next 24 hours as “crucial” while Condoleeza Rice is reaching New Delhi to defuse what can easily become a nuclear stand-off.

P.S.

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