

Understanding the Indian Mujahideen

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Understanding the Indian Mujahideen

Introduction

India has been plagued with insurgency and militancy over the last five decades. The long festering insurgency in Northeast India is presently at a low ebb. The Khalistani militancy was nipped in the bud in the early 1990s, although there have been renewed attempts at a revival. The militancy in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has been ongoing for the past two decades. These insurgencies, by and large, have remained confined to their own geographical precincts. However, a disturbing phenomenon has occurred over the past few years. Terrorism, by and large motivated by Islamic *jihād*, has spread to the Indian hinterland. Increasingly, the targets of attack are not restricted to the state symbols and the security forces, as was the feature in the heyday of the Northeast and J&K militantcies, but have now extended to the innocent and defenceless civilian populace. The terror attacks today target not only the populace in general but also the economic and commercial hubs of the Indian heartland in particular.

This terrorism, on a pan-Indian scale, has been scripted by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) through its strategic assets – the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI). To increase deniability and introduce a degree of calibration, the 'terror masters' across the border have now attempted to 'Indianise' terror, by aiding, abetting and nurturing a terrorist organisation called the 'Indian Mujahideen' (IM).

Terror, as India is witnessing today, made its first appearance in the Mumbai serial blasts of 1993, which claimed more than 300 lives. These terror blasts were traced to the Dawood Ibrahim crime syndicate. The October 2005 Delhi blasts, July 2006 Mumbai blasts, March 2007 Varanasi attacks, August 2007 Lumbini Park (Hyderabad) blasts – all left a trail of horror, death and fear as never before. These were quickly followed by blasts in Jaipur, Bengaluru,

Ahmedabad and Delhi in 2008. The distinct feature of these attacks, apart from being intensely ruthless and callous, was the fact that responsibility for them was taken by a group called “Indian Mujahideen”.

Who are the Indian Mujahideen? Is it Al Qaeda inspired? Or is it an outrider of the LeT, the HuJI or the ISI? Is it another name for the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) or a breakaway segment of SIMI? The IM has mutated into a radical extremist organisation, with a pan-Indian spread. Its emergence and radical stand has brought to the fore questions left to be answered by the security and intelligence agencies.

The IM has arrived on the Indian scene casting a deep shadow of Islamic terror, threatening to subsume and consume unsuspecting, poor and desperate sections of the Indian society. The threat that this group poses to the very fabric of the secular and democratic structure of this nation, begs an insight into this new terror signature called the Indian Mujahideen.

Origin and Brief History

The Pakistani military and ISI have been aiding and abetting terror in India for a long time. The ISI and other fanatic religious groups have been fanning communal hatred by exploiting perceived ‘victimisation’ or ‘marginalisation’ of the Muslim population, adding fuel to the fire whenever riots ravage the country. They have been giving different nuances to various ideologies like the Wahhabi and Deobandi schools of thought, to give legitimacy to their version of terror in the name of Islam. Drawing their own interpretations of various edicts as enshrined in the *Quran*, there has been an exponential spread of ‘radical’ teaching in the mushrooming *madrasas*. But it is not only the unsuspecting, helpless and poor sections of the society that have been indoctrinated and manipulated into waging *jihad* as a legitimate tool of war against non-believers. A study of the *modus operandi* of the IM has shown the role of educated, techno-savvy people in masterminding and executing terror attacks. One such tool that was exploited is the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), which gave birth to the IM.

Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) Connections

SIMI was founded with 250 members on 15 April 1977, by Mohammed Ahmedullah Siddiqui, as the students’ wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH).

JIH was the first organised Islamic reformist movement in India formed in Lahore on 26 August 1941, under the leadership of Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi. However, the alliance between the JIH and SIMI lasted only till 1981, when radical student members of SIMI protested against Yasser Arafat's visit to India, while the senior JIH leaders saw him as a champion. The rift in ideologies led JIH to abandon SIMI and float a new students' wing, the Students Islamic Organisation, while SIMI continued as a separate hardline Islamic organisation.

After breaking away from JIH, SIMI underwent radicalisation, influenced by a number of events, including the Islamic revolution in Iran. SIMI's fanatical position was dictated entirely by geo-political events taking place in the world, which were interpreted as direct attacks on Islam and Muslims. Events, both domestic and international, which led to a shift in SIMI's philosophy were:

- The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and toppling of the Shah of Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini.
- The imposition of harsh *Shariah* laws in Pakistan by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1980.
- The demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992.
- The militancy in the Kashmir Valley since 1989.

SIMI was first banned on 27 September 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The second ban came on 08 February 2008. However, a special tribunal formed under Section 4 of the Unlawful Activities Act 1967, lifted the ban on SIMI on 05 August 2008, finding insufficient cause for declaring the organisation unlawful. The ban was subsequently reinstated by the Government of India on 25 August 2008, after a Supreme Court judgement on the same.

Following the ban on SIMI in 2001, hundreds of SIMI activists were apprehended from various parts of the country. The ban prompted a number of SIMI members to adopt a radical stand and they met regularly to propagate their cause. These meetings saw the emergence of Safdar Nagori as a chief exponent of the radical militant ideology. Mohammed Islam, previously the chief coordinator of SIMI, however, stood opposed on a moderate stand. These ideological differences resulted in a rift in SIMI. One faction advocated the cause of *jihād* while the other adopted a softer stand. These differences

came to a head in the aftermath of the Godhra riots in 2002. Spurred on by the Godhra carnage, the hardline faction broke away to start a militant wing. This divide, abetted by the ISI, LeT and HuJI, eventually led to the creation of a new militant offshoot organisation of SIMI called the Indian Mujahideen. It was co-founded by Riyaz Shahbandri and Abdul Subhan Qureshi. The IM, at this point in time, consisted of students, most of them Kashmiris, studying in Deobandi *madrasas* in South Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Approximately 200 of its members reportedly went to Pakistan for arms and explosives training. It is now believed that the 2008 blasts in India were the handiwork of some of these members, who returned to India after receiving training. In fact, in 2006, 30 students went missing from *madrasas* in Gujarat and it is believed that they were sent to Pakistan to receive training on various aspects of inflicting terror. Three years hence, this group is still at large. On 18 September 2006, four students were arrested from the Tadkeshwar *madrasa* at Surat, who revealed the active involvement of LeT operatives in recruiting local *madrasa* students and sending them to Pakistan via Bangladesh for training in terror camps and to avenge the Godhra riots. Following these events, SIMI's, and now the IM's, radicalisation was complete, winning the support of a number of Deobandi Muslims in India, who perceived or were indoctrinated into thinking of themselves as 'victims' of both Hindus and the Indian state. The Indian Mujahideen was, thus, born, tasked by its masters to spread *jihadi* tendencies in India, through home-grown militants, aided, abetted and calibrated from across the borders.

Major Incidents and Casualties

The first terror attacks for which the IM claimed responsibility were the 23 November 2007 serial blasts in the district court premises of Lucknow, Varanasi and Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh. An e-mail claiming responsibility for the blasts was sent five minutes prior to the blasts to TV news channels from the e-mail address, 'id-guru-alhind@yahoo.fr'. The bombs were planted in tiffin boxes and mounted on bicycles, and contained ammonium nitrate and RDX. The investigation corroborated the role of HuJI-B (Bangladesh) as a key player. Evidence shows that the IM was, at this time, playing second fiddle to HuJI-B, and came to the forefront in keeping with its handlers' – the ISI – diktat to become a self-sustaining terror outfit and 'Indianise' *jihadi*

terror. However, the serial blasts across India in 2008 quickly established the IM as a prominent terror outfit. The year 2007 was utilised by the IM to carry out training camps inside India, in the jungles of Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Approximately 100 IM members were trained in the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The arrest of Safdar Nagori in March 2008 was the fuse that set off a wave of IED bombings across India. In fact, a number of cadres who had earlier gone to Pakistan, had come back in the early months of 2008. The IM claimed responsibility for the attacks in Jaipur (13 May 2008), Bengaluru (15 July 2008), Ahmedabad serial blasts (26 July 2008), planting of bombs (which were eventually detected and defused) in Surat (28 July to 31 July 2008) and the Delhi serial blasts (13 September 2008). The IM did not claim responsibility for the Mumbai 2006 train blasts, in which, increasingly, the IM hand is being revealed. Also, there have been reports of local support provided by the IM to the LeT assault on Mumbai on 26 November 2008. The major terror attacks carried out by the IM, their targets and the casualties inflicted, are tabulated as follows:

Major Terror Incidents Carried out by the IM

Place	Date	Attack on	Security Forces		Civilians	
			Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured
Mumbai *	11 July 2006	Commuter trains and railway platforms	-	-	216	700
Lucknow, Faizabad and Varanasi	23 November 2007	Outside Court complexes	-	-	14	50
Rampur *	01 January 2008	CRPF Group HQ	07	06	01	-
Jaipur	13 May 2008	Market places	-	-	60	200
Bengaluru	25 July 2008	08 serial blasts on street corners	-	-	02	15
Ahmedabad	26 July 2008	18 serial blasts on streets, in markets and hospitals	-	-	38	130

Surat	29 July 2008	17 live IEDs detected	-	-	-	-
New Delhi	13 September 2008	05 serial blasts in market places (05 live bombs recovered)	-	-	26	100
New Delhi	29-30 September 2008	Market place in Mehrauli	-	-	03	07

* Suspected IM role or support provided.
Source: Compiled from various news reports.

Analysis of Terror Incidents

Mumbai 7/11 Train Blasts: This is one of the few attacks in the past few years that the IM did not lay claim to. In fact, days after the 11 July 2006 bombing of Mumbai's suburban train system, the Prime Minister went on national television to assert that he was "certain that the terrorist modules responsible for the blasts are instigated from across the border."¹ More recently, in 2009, however, TV audiences were feted to a videotaped police interrogation that was leaked to the media in which Mumbai resident Mohammed Sadiq Sheikh confessed that he and four other men had carried out the bombings on behalf of an organisation that has since become well known as the IM. Yet, in November 2006, a 10,667-page chargesheet filed by Maharashtra prosecutors, alleged that seven Pakistani LeT operatives, each paired with an Indian partner, had planted the bombs. Sheikh's testimony leaves room for the possibility that the unidentified Pakistan perpetrators were, in fact, five Indians and more disturbing, that the Indians now being tried for planting the bombs may have had a peripheral role in the attacks or none at all.² "Although both the Government of India and Mumbai Police appear convinced that an unassailable case has been built up, serious questions remain on both the integrity and content of the evidence."³ The question marks over the role of the LeT or the IM or both remain, with Mohdammad Sheikh being discharged in May 2009 for his alleged role in the July 2006 Mumbai train blasts, after the Mumbai Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) stated that "there was no prima-facie evidence to prove his involvement but added that he was deeply involved."⁴

In fact, in September 2008, doubts over the real perpetrators had started when the Mumbai Police crime branch arrested five IM operatives and held them responsible for the Ahmedabad, Delhi, Mumbai 7/11 and all other blasts since 2005. Sheikh's release indicates the finesse with which IM terrorists operate, in that they leave very few (identifiable) signatures behind. Contradictory claims being made by police officials on different occasions cast serious doubts on investigations and whether the police is getting hold of the right people and is in possession of any evidence to convict or even charge them.

Blasts Outside Uttar Pradesh courts (23 November 2007): A series of near-simultaneous explosions ripped through court complexes in Lucknow, Faizabad and Varanasi, killing 14 and injuring nearly 50 people. An outfit calling itself the Al-Hind Mujahideen claimed responsibility in an e-mail to media houses. The blasts were purportedly carried out in retaliation to the assault by some lawyers on three JeM militants in a Lucknow court. It is now established that these blasts were carried out by a module of IM operatives, led by Mohammed Saif, who was arrested from Batla House in New Delhi in September 2008. This module ably supported the Hujl-B in carrying out these blasts.

Jaipur Serial Blasts: On 13 May 2008, nine blasts rocked the Pink City within a span of 20 minutes, starting at 7.25 pm. The tenth bomb was found and defused. This was the first time that the city of Jaipur was subjected to terrorist attacks. Nine bombs in seven locations exploded between 7.25 to 7.45 pm. The blasts were synchronised to inflict maximum casualties. The first two blasts occurred at Manak Chowk and as the crowd ran towards Johri Bazar, another two blasts at the National Handloom Centre blocked the exit point, pushing the panicked crowd towards Tripolia Bazaar and Chandpol area, where subsequent blasts caused severe casualties. One of the blasts occurred in the vicinity of Hawa Mahal, a popular tourist attraction, while two others occurred outside Hindu temples at Sanganeri Gate and Chandpole. The bombs were of low intensity, but by meticulously placing them in highly crowded areas, the terrorists ensured a high death toll. Most of the bombs were planted on locally purchased bicycles in tiffin boxes, containing ammonium nitrate, tightly packed with metal pellets, shrapnel and ball bearings. The

bombs were shaped to blast the pellets and shrapnel in a 60 degree arc, for maximum damage, with minimum explosives.

The Indian operational commander of HuJI-B, Mohammed Jalaluddin, arrested in Lucknow in 2007, had revealed during investigations that Jaipur was the prime target in the sights of HuJI-B. Police found credible evidence linking the Jaipur terror suspects to Bangladeshi militants. During interrogations, the bicycle sellers confirmed that the suspected terrorists who bought bicycles spoke Bengali. Two days after the blasts, the IM claimed responsibility for the attacks by sending an e-mail (containing a video) to a private TV channel. The e-mail address used was 'guru_alhindi_jaipur@yahoo.co.uk'. The video showed a bicycle (serial number 129489) containing a parcel. Police officials confirmed that the bicycle used in Choti Choupad blast had the same serial number. Through the e-mail, the IM sought to caution the nation and threatened to "demolish the faith of the infidels of India". The e-mail was later traced by the police to a Ghaziabad cyber café.

The blasts followed patterns similar to the bomb blasts in Hyderabad and Varanasi. Police and intelligence sources suspect a collaborative effort of HuJI-B, LeT, SIMI and IM. The tactics of attaching bombs onto bicycles bears a resemblance to the November 2007 bombings in Uttar Pradesh by HuJI-B. The responsibility claimed by the IM for the blasts establishes the nexus between HuJI-B and the Indian outfit. In the first week of August 2008, the police made arrests and detained seven persons for questioning. One of the shopkeepers questioned had allegedly sold nine bicycles to a single individual, two days before the blasts took place.

Bengaluru Serial Blasts: On 25 July 2008, a series of nine low intensity bombs went off between 1.20 to 2.35 pm. The bombs were believed to have been planted around Hosur and Mysore road, three days prior to the blasts. One unexploded bomb was found on 26 July 2008 and was defused by the bomb disposal squad. The bombs were rudimentary devices, composed of ammonium nitrate and urea, but for the first time, a high-tech micro chip was used that was programmed to go off at a set date and time. Mobile phones were used to trigger the bombs.

The blasts were oriented for maximum psychological impact and the motive was to target and terrorise the IT capital of India. On 29 July 2008, the

Bengaluru Police ATS arrested Sameer Sadiq, a SIMI activist from Bengaluru. On 30 July 2008, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) named Rasool Khan Parti and Mohammed Sufiya Ahmed Patangiya, both currently residing in Karachi, as the masterminds behind the terror attack.

Ahmedabad Serial Blasts: On 26 July 2008, 18 blasts shook Ahmedabad. Most of the blasts took place in commercial areas, where people had gathered for evening shopping, a few in city buses, and two bombs went off near hospitals. Three live bombs were also recovered. The effect of the blasts was sensational and created panic and fear amongst the people. These went off within an hour at 13 locations. The blasts started off at Jawahar Chowk at 7.45 pm and exploded in different areas of the city. The last two were high intensity blasts, with explosives laden in cars parked near the LG Government Hospital and Civil Hospital. One blast was averted at the LG Government Hospital, in which bombs located in a car, failed to explode.

The IM activists who planned the Ahmedabad blasts rented a nondescript house in Vatva area of Ahmedabad in the second week of May 2008. It was rented by Zahid Shaikh, a native of Ahmedabad, who was given the responsibility to set up base. The house was used as the headquarters, where Mufti Abu Bashir and Mohammad Qayamuddin, the executors of the blasts, Tauqueer, the group leader, and others stayed to plan and execute the explosions. The house was also used to conduct the necessary reconnaissance to identify potential blast sites and recruit local youth. The operatives vacated the house on 25 July 2008, one day before the blasts were executed.

Investigations revealed that about 40 Muslim boys, of whom 23 were from Gujarat, underwent training in May 2008 from Hujj operatives in Central Gujarat. This training camp is believed to be the final precursor to the Ahmedabad blasts. The clockwork precision in the execution of the serial blasts and the statements rendered by the arrested persons also highlight the involvement of the ISI. Most of the bombs were planted on bicycles in tiffin boxes containing low grade explosives, and kept in blue polythene bags similar to the ones used in the Jaipur blasts. The bombs in LG and Civil Hospitals were placed in automobiles packed with gas cylinders to cause maximum casualties. All the bombs were placed with timer devices and microprocessors and ammonium nitrate as the explosive device.

Five minutes prior to the blasts, various news channels received a 14-page terror e-mail titled “The Rise of Jihad” from the IM. The e-mail address used was ‘alarbi_gujurat@yahoo.com’. It stated that “Ahmedabad will see death in 5 minutes from now. Stop it if you can”. Among other things, the e-mail also claimed that the organisation was taking revenge for the killing of Muslims in the 2002 Gujarat riots. The e-mail was later traced to the IP address of an American national, Kenneth Haywood, residing at Sanpada, Navi Mumbai. The unsecured Wi-Fi network of the individual was believed to have been hacked to send the e-mail. Hours after the blast, Abdul Halim, Maulvi of the radical Ahl-e-Hadith Tanzeem in Ahmedabad was apprehended. Three persons, namely, Abdul Kadir, Hasil Mohammed and Hussain Ibrahim, were also arrested from Ahmedabad. The involvement of at least 50 local youths in the execution of the terror strike is suspected. The police carried out its biggest operation against terror on 16 August 2008, in which nine SIMI activists were arrested in connection with the 26 July 2008 serial blasts.

Surat (Recovery of Live Bombs): The Surat police recovered 29 bombs from various parts of the city between 28 July and 31 July 2008. The materials used in the blasts were similar to those used in Ahmedabad, except that integrated circuits were used for the preparation of the Surat bombs. Investigations revealed that faulty circuits and detonators had rendered the blasts ineffective. The Ahmedabad Police crime branch carried out the investigation of the case. About 10 suspects were apprehended for involvement in the case. The apprehended revealed the names of Tanveer Pathan, Zahir Qayamuddin Kapadia and Sajid Mansuri as the persons responsible for planting the bombs in Surat on the directions of Abdul Subhan Qureshi alias Tauqueer. All the 29 bombs were planted by Tanvir, Zahir and Sajid. These bombs were carried in stolen WagonR cars and planted on 24/25 July 2008. On 26 July 2008, Tanvir with Zahir, took two cars and parked them at Puna General Hospital and at a doctor’s residence in the Varachha area of Surat.

Delhi Serial Blasts: On 13 September 2008, the national capital was rocked by five bomb blasts in high security areas, including Barakhamba Road, near India Gate, Connaught Place, Greater Kailash and Gaffar Market (Karol Bagh). Most of the bombs were placed inside dustbins and contained ammonium nitrate. Four bombs were recovered later and diffused.

The IM claimed responsibility for the blasts in an e-mail titled “Message of Death”, which was sent to TV channels. The e-mail claimed that the attack was intended to remind Delhi of the Babri Masjid demolition, stating that it had accomplished “Op BAD”, that is, terror strikes in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Delhi. It also stated that it demonstrated the Indian Mujahideen’s capability to strike in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Delhi, and to strike at will even in high security zones. The e-mail was later traced to the Wi-Fi network of Kamran Power Control Pvt Ltd in Chembur, Mumbai.

The suspect list of the Delhi serial blasts comprised 13 people. Out of these suspects, two were killed on 19 September 2008, when the Delhi police raided L-18, Batla House, in Jamia Nagar. Two other persons were subsequently apprehended on 19 September 2008 and three more on 21 September 2008. A Delhi Police officer, Mohan Chand Sharma, was also killed in the crossfire at Batla House. The Delhi Police claims that at least some members of the Delhi module, led by Atif Ameen, were also responsible for the Hyderabad, Jaipur and Ahmedabad serial blasts. A suspect by the name of Zeeshan, in his interrogation, claimed that Atif had a good network of confederates in Mumbai and Karnataka. He had sent some members to procure explosives used in the Delhi blasts from one Sharukh in Manipal, Karnataka. Atif was also believed to have been preparing Sajid (killed in the Batla House encounter) for *fidayeen* attacks.⁵

The Uttar Pradesh ATS arrested one Hakim Abdul Karim, a resident of Azmagarh, and a student of biotechnology in Integral University, Lucknow, in January 2009. He is believed to have procured ball bearings for the Delhi blasts from Azmagarh on the direction of Atif, who wanted to avoid linkages with the Jaipur blasts, for which 20,000 ball bearings were purchased by Hakim from Chandni Chowk in Delhi.⁶

Mehrauli Blast: Three people were killed and a few others injured, when two motorcycle-borne youth accidentally dropped a tiffin box packed with crude explosives at a flower market in Mehrauli on 29 September 2008, just 10 days after the Batla House encounter and the apprehension of the Delhi blasts’ IM module. This incident showed that despite the arrests, some members of the module or another similar module were well placed in Delhi to execute attacks at short notice, hence, pointing to the deep spread of the IM or affiliated outfits. The investigation is in progress, to assess leads into

the funding and technical support behind these blasts. It is suspected that the perpetrators comprise a nexus of IM, SIMI, LeT, HuJI and ISI. The extent of the nexus and the role of the IM in other serial blasts, including the Varanasi court blasts in November 2007, are also under the scanner.

Mumbai Attacks (26 November 2008): While the involvement of the LeT in the 26/11 assault is without doubt, it is difficult to believe that an assault of this scale and magnitude could have been possible without local support. In an e-mail to local news stations, an organisation calling itself the “Deccan Mujahideen” claimed responsibility for the Mumbai strike during the initial phases of the attack. While the IM’s role in the attack is yet to be officially confirmed, at least two of the terrorists, whose conversations were intercepted during the course of the assault, indicated that they were linked to terrorists of the Islamist persuasion in India. One of the terrorists phoned a news station, demanding that *jihadis* be released from prison in exchange for the hostages. “We want all *mujahideen* held in India to be released and only after that we will release the people”, a man named Sahadullah told a media outlet. “Please release all the *mujahideen* and Muslims in India should not be troubled.”

The e-mail sent by the IM to media houses immediately after the Delhi blasts on 13 September 2008 had also threatened deadly attacks in Mumbai. “You threatened to murder them and your mischief went to such an extent that you even dared to abuse and insult Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hasan Qasmi and misbehaved with the Muslim women and children there.... If this is the degree to which your arrogance has reached, and if you think that by these stunts you can scare us, then let the Indian Mujahideen warn all the people of Mumbai that whatever deadly attacks you will face in future, the only responsible elements for it will be the Mumbai ATS and their guardians: Vilasrao Deshmukh and RR Patil.” The message warned ATS officials, “You are already on our hit-list and this time very very seriously.”⁷ This could be another indicator of some local terrorist elements or their supporters being aware of an impending attack. Ajmal Amir Kasab has also revealed during his interrogation that the strike on Mumbai was scheduled for September 2008, but called off at the last minute.

The recent arrest in the United States of David Coleman Headley a.k.a Daood Gilani and Tahaawur Hussain Rana, American and Canadian nationals respectively, both of Pakistani origin, has further brought to light the role of local sleeper cells in the assault on Mumbai on 26 November 2008. Technical

intercepts available with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have revealed that some IM members of the Delhi module had contacted Headley, in an attempt to flee the country, after the Delhi blasts in September 2008. This indicates their prior interaction with Headley, who ran an agency facilitating immigration from Tardeo, Mumbai. Their repeated visits to India and Pakistan seem to have established a pattern of carrying out reconnaissance for the LeT of prospective targets and the same is suspected in the case of the Mumbai attacks as well. Coupled with their contact with local youth in several Indian cities, this scenario further reveals their linkages and the utilisation of Indian youth in providing logistical support for LeT attacks. This support base could well have constituted IM members as well. Therefore, the Headley-Rana cell further crystallises the bonding between the LeT and IM in carrying out attacks on Indian soil. It is imperative to identify and neutralise several such 'sleeper cells' still active in India.

Thus, it is evident that Pakistani *jihadi* organisations have established in the IM, a rich source of local support modules, who can do the spade work (scouting and identifying vulnerable locations) for executing terror attacks in major Indian cities well in advance and provide logistics support (stocking and ferrying munitions, prepare hideouts) to actual executers from across the border, who would converge at the striking location only on the eve of launching an attack. A similar pattern has emerged in the aforementioned blasts, where some members of the local modules helped in arranging safe hideouts and masqueraded as street vendors at the blast sites for 15 days to more than a month ahead of carrying out the blasts. This helped them to obtain intimate knowledge about the locations and routine police deployments. The difference next time could be a collaboration with better or foreign trained terrorists and the use of different methods to carry out strikes.

Goals/Objectives

Drawing from the radical Deobandi philosophy, the leaders of the IM have adopted an external and militant posture on what they believe to be various issues of concern to the Muslim community. The stated goal of the IM is to 'liberate India' from the influence of Western materialistic culture and further its conversion into an Islamic society.

Minutes before the bombs went off in the three trial court complexes in Uttar Pradesh on 23 November 2007, the IM issued the first (of a series of) 'Manifesto' explaining its actions. It referred to "the pathetic conditions of Muslims in India that idol worshippers can kill our brothers, sisters and outrage the dignity of our sisters at any time and place." But the manifesto went on to make a far broader point, characterising the IM's bombing campaign as "a war for civilisation."⁸ Its authors stated that the organisation wanted to "empower society from injustice, corruption, etc, which is prevailing in society nowadays. Only Islam has the power to establish a civilised society and this could be only possible in Islamic rule, which could be achieved by only one path, *Jihad-Fee-Sabilillah*" (which means *jihad* in Islam).

Leadership

Dr Shahid Badar Jalah was SIMI's President and Safdar Nagori its General Secretary, till the organisation was proscribed in September 2001. The Delhi Police arrested Jalah on 28 July 2008 from his office in Zakir Nagar, Delhi, and charged him with sedition and inciting communal disharmony. However, he was acquitted on 11 November 2008. On 27 March 2008, SIMI's General Secretary Safdar Nagori was arrested, along with 12 other cadres at Indore. Following Nagori's arrest, the mantle passed into the hands of Mufti Abu Bashir, who has since been arrested. The co-founders of the IM are Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri and Abdus Subhan Qureshi alias Tauqeer.

The names of suspected leaders⁹ as also names of the Delhi groups are given below:

- Abdul Subhan Qureshi alias Tauqeer, 36 – a software engineer from Mumbai, an expert in bomb-making and an expert hacker (co-founder).
- Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri (co-founder).
- Mufti Abu Bashir, 28 – architect of the transformation from SIMI to Indian Mujahideen.
- Safdar Nagori, 38 – architect of the transformation from SIMI to Indian Mujahideen.
- Qayamuddin Kapadia, 28 – a trader from Vadodara, he started the first-ever mosque of the *Ahle Hadis Tanzeem* in Vadodara a few years ago.

- Sajid Mansuri, 25 – a graduate in psychology and formerly a marketing executive.
- Usman Agarbattiwala, 25 – a PG diploma holder in human rights from Vadodara.
- Alamzeb Afridi, 24 – an unemployed youth from Ahmedabad. He purchased bicycles and then planted them in Ahmedabad after mounting the explosives on them.
- Abdul Razik Mansuri, 27 – an embroidery unit owner.
- Mujib Shaikh, 25 – a stone polishing artisan.
- Zahid Shaikh, 27 – a mobile phone repair shop owner from Ahmedabad.
- Amil Parwaz – a native of Ujjain, believed to be involved in the court complexes bomb blasts in Uttar Pradesh in November 2007.

The local group at Delhi is thought to include the following people,¹⁰ most of them from Azamgarh:

- Mohammad Atif (24) alias Bashir – alleged planner and recruiter, killed in the Jamia Nagar encounter on 19 September 2008. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at M-block market in Greater Kailash-I (New Delhi) and the Varanasi bombs.
- Mohammad Saif – arrested from Batla House in Jamia Nagar after the 19 September encounter. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at Regal Cinema in Connaught Place (New Delhi).
- Zeeshan – arrested after the Jamia Nagar encounter. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at Barakhamba Road in Connaught Place.
- Mohammed Sajid (16) alias Pankaj – killed during the Jamia Nagar encounter. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at Barakhamba Road in Connaught Place.
- Junaid – escaped during the Jamia Nagar encounter. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at M-block market in Greater Kailash-I (New Delhi) and the Varanasi bombs.
- Mohammad Shakeel – arrested on 21 September 2008 from Jamia Nagar. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at Nehru Place in South Delhi.
- Zia-ur-Rehman – arrested on 21 September 2008 from Jamia Nagar. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at Connaught Place and on a cycle in Ahmedabad.

- Saqib Nisar – arrested on 21 September 2008 from Jamia Nagar.
- Shahzad alias Pappu – escaped during the Jamia Nagar encounter. He is alleged to have planted a bomb at Central Park, Connaught Place.
- Alihas Malik – he is alleged to have planted a bomb at Central Park, Connaught Place.
- Mohammad Khalif, Arif and Salman.

Appraisal of Key IM Cadres at Large

The IM's future strike capabilities are critically dependent on two men who are central to its plans and are still at large. One of them is Riyaz Bhatkal, who organised the quasi-industrial production, the ready-to-assemble ammonium nitrate-based 'U' shaped bombs used in the IM's bombing campaign. The second is Abdul Subhan Qureshi. Riyaz Bhatkal is a Pakistani trained operative, who on returning to India, put together the bomb manufacturing cell of the IM, consisting mostly of small-time businessmen like arrested suspects Ahmad Baba Abu Bakr, Ali Mohammad Ahmad, Javed Muhammad Ali and Syed Mehmood Naushad. Iqbal Bhatkal (Riyaz's brother) carried out another round of recruitment through clerical networks. Among them was Peerbhoy, a software engineer, who helped design and produce the terror e-mails, secured IM manifestos, and who was expected to testify against his one time associate, but later declined.

The other person recruited was Kerala's Abdul Sattar alias Saibuddin, and Nasir, who formed a key part of the circle of South Indian *ihadists* recruited by the Bhatkal brothers. Both Nasir and Sattar had fought street battles for Kerala politician Abdul Madani (now acquitted in the 1998 serial bombings in Coimbatore) against the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), on behalf of the terrorist group al-Umma. Sattar was known to have fabricated pipe bombs in the 1993 Bombay serial blasts. These two men were allegedly involved in a plot to assassinate Kerala Chief Minister EK Nayanar. Sattar and Nasir, the police claim, supplied much of the ammonium nitrate used in bombs built by Bhatkal in Gujarat. Evidence also exists that the Bhatkal brothers had sent upwards of 40 men for military training in camps in Pakistan. Incidentally, four Kerala men training with the Lashkar in North Kashmir were shot dead by the Army in Lolab Valley, while attempting to exfiltrate into Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) for arms training. One of those shot was Sattar's son-in-law.

The other key man arrested (and now acquitted) was Mohammad Sadiq Sheikh, who had recruited Atif Amin (killed in the Jamia encounter in September 2008). Mumbai police investigators believe that as yet unidentified (suspected) Pakistanis, who helped execute the July 2006 suburban train bombings, were not Pakistanis at all, but Amin and other members of the Azamgarh cell.

Like the Bhatkal brothers, Abdul Subhan Qureshi, a co-founder of the IM is still at large. The son of working class parents who had migrated to Mumbai, Qureshi, like the Bhatkal brothers, too, had received technical education. He obtained a diploma in industrial electronics in 1995 and went on to work at several private IT firms in Mumbai. At the time of joining SIMI in 2001, he was working on a Wipro project to set up an intranet in Bharat Petro Chemicals. Qureshi orchestrated the September 2008 bombings in Delhi and had the critical and complex task of helping local cells of *jihadists* knit together into a single entity. In the Ahmedabad attacks, Qureshi mated Bhatkal's bomb making assets with a group of SIMI operatives, raised by computer graphics designer Qayamuddin Kapadia, who, in turn, provided safe houses and logistical support for Atif Amin's (killed in Jamia encounter) assault team. Riyaz Bhatkal and Qureshi are credited with making IM a self-sustaining terrorist network in India. "In the wake of the Mumbai bombings of 2006, the Lashkar came under intense pressure from Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's regime to scale back operations against India. Lakhvi and other Lashkar Commanders prodded Qureshi, Bhatkal and Sheikh (arrested and acquitted) to set up a self-sustaining network in India."¹¹

Weapons, Communication Systems and Training Camps

In 2007, a number of training camps were held in various forest locations in India, where Pakistani-trained activists imparted training to the IM cadres in manufacturing IEDs from locally available materials, like ammonium nitrate (used in fertilizers) and hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) for mass casualty actions. Though not as powerful as service RDX or plastic explosives, these materials, when used in multiple strikes, could create mayhem and panic.

Some of the IM terrorists appear to possess great expertise in assembling IEDs from locally available low grade explosive materials such as ammonium

nitrate and then fabricating them with ball bearings or iron nails. Such training may have been provided to select Indian boys in Pakistan, at the behest of the ISI, and they, in turn, would have passed on their skills to other IM terrorists back home. One such facility being run could be that of Azam Cheema, a former Chemistry professor at Lahore University, who trains militants of the LeT, JeM, HM (Hizbul Mujahideen) and other splinter groups in bomb making, assembling of IEDs and in the use of ammonium nitrate, at his residential laboratory in Faisalabad. He had to leave his college job at the coercion of the Jammāt-ud-Dawā, for which he now works. The trained 'bomb experts' are then sent to different states of India, where explosives are now 'internally available' and need not be smuggled from across the border. District authorities in Pakistan do not take any action, as this activity receives the 'patronage' of high-ranking ISI officials.¹²

The interrogation of Safdar Nagori, arrested on 07 March 2008, has revealed that the IM is now experimenting with peroxide-based improvised explosives, the kind used in the London 7/7 bombings of 2005. The chemical used in manufacturing these bombs is acetone peroxide (the chemical that was used by Richard Reid, the shoe bomber) and had been found in one of the (7/7) bombers' house in Leeds, England. The frightening reality that someone can build such bombs – weapons of mass casualty attacks – sitting at home, has brought terror to an unimaginable proximity. The IM is expected to use peroxide-based bombs because they are apprehensive that the Government of India would clamp down on its access to readily available explosives and ammonium nitrate fertilizers, as also due to drying up of supplies from its sponsor (ISI). According to Riazuddin Nasir (captured in November 2007), the IM has at least 15-20 cadres who manufacture bombs at home.

According to Maj Gen GD Bakshi, "In so far as communication is concerned, this brand of terrorists does not leave behind electronic signatures, use internet or just face to face communications."¹³ Training camps of IM have been located in Vagamon, Kerala (December 2007), Pavagarh and Vadodara (January 2008).

Ideology

The IM ideology draws from the Wahhabi philosophy of the Deobandi school, which practises a rigid, puritanical version of Islam. All the arrested members

of the IM and SIMI, so far, have been students of Deobandi *madrasas* from Bharuch, Ujjain, Azamgarh and Saharanpur. Saudi Arabia has sponsored the spread of Wahhabism extensively. In the past 50 years, almost 1,500 mosques and about 10,000 *madrasas* worldwide have been funded by organisations in Saudi Arabia to promote their cause. It has sponsored the training of *imams*, domination of mass media, and the distribution of Wahhabi literature and endowments to universities in exchange for influence over the appointment of Wahhabi Islamic scholars. Also referred to as “Petro Islam”, Saudi charities funded the growth of the Wahhabi school of thought throughout the world, when oil prices tripled in the 1970s. When the erstwhile Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Saudi Arabian charities funded the Afghan Mujahideen to take on the communists. All its fighters, including the Taliban, were nurtured in *madrasas* on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, teaching Wahhabi, Sunni, and Ahl-e-Hadith Schools of thought.

In India, Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) formed the Deoband school and the Ahl-e-Hadith school of thought. The Deoband *madrasa* was founded in 1867 by Mohammad Abid Husayn in Saharanpur, UP, influenced by Shah Waliullah. In 1879, the institution assumed the additional name of Dar-ul-Ulum (Abode of Islamic Learning). The Deobandi Wahhabis advocate that a Muslim’s first loyalty is to his religion and only then to his country. Secondly, Muslims should recognise only the religious frontiers of their *ummah* (community) and not national frontiers. Thirdly, they have a sacred right and obligation to go to any country to wage *jihad* to protect the Muslims of that country. The Deobandi and Ahle-e-Hadith schools were revived in India through funding by Saudi charities, when oil prices skyrocketed in the 1970s. Significantly, a majority of terror groups like the JeM, HuJI, LeT, HuA and now the IM owe ‘allegiance’ to the Deobandi *madrasas* and the Mawdudi school of thought.

Thus, the Deobandi school of thought and Wahhabism combined to form an extremist version of radical Islam, which advocates the prominence of *jihad* for Islamisation. Their prime agenda has been the spread of radical Islam in India, South Asia and Southeast Asia, where the majority of the world’s Muslims live. The Deobandi interpretation of Islamic teachings is also widely practised in Pakistan. It shares the Taliban’s restrictive view of women and regards the minority Shias as non-Muslim. Most of the Taliban leadership is

known to have attended Deobandi-influenced seminaries in Pakistan. The Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith schools adhere to an absolutely fundamentalist view of Islam, which is influenced by Wahhabi ideology. The Deobandi school has no use for the moderate Barelvi school of thought, which pursues a moderate Sufi version of Islam.

The IM's roots are owed to the Jamaat-e-Islami, the organisation which gave birth to SIMI, from which the IM draws many of its cadres. "Jihad-Fee-Sabilillah" was the title of a 1939 essay by Maulana Abul Ala Mawdudi.¹⁴ This essay was in possession of Mohammad Sadiq Sheikh at the time of his arrest for a suspected role in the Mumbai train blasts. Sheikh had picked up this material from a Hyderabad seminary named after Mawdudi. It is believed by investigators that Sheikh was recruited into the IM by Mujahid Salim – the son of the controversial cleric, Maulana Abdul Ilahi Mawdudi. He argued that the pursuit of political power, rather than a hotchpotch of beliefs, prayers and rituals was integral to the practice of the religion. "Islam", he insisted, "is a revolutionary ideology which seeks to alter the social order of the entire world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals."¹⁵ It was imperative for Muslims to "seize the authority of state, for an evil system takes root and flourishes under the patronage of an evil government and a pious cultural order can never be established, until the authority of government is wrested from the wicked." Indeed, Mawdudi insisted that the word 'Muslims' referred not to a religious community but a politically bound "international revolutionary party." "The party of Muslims," Mawdudi concluded, "will inevitably extend the invitation to citizens of other countries to embrace the faith which holds out the promise of true salvation and genuine welfare. At the same time, if the Muslim party commands enough resources, it will eliminate un-Islamic governments and establish the power of Islamic governance in their place."¹⁶ Mawdudi's position was closely tied to questions of communal politics and its impact on identity formation, as also to questions of power in pluralistic societies and to nationalism. This world view, Nasr writes, was "informed by the acute despair that gripped the community (Muslim) in the early decades of the 20th century."¹⁷ Mawdudi saw the Arya Samaji religious revivalism as an existential threat, a proof of the inherent animosity of Hindus towards Islam. Mawdudi's ideas fired the imagination of Islamist ideologues like Sayyed Qutb

and Hassan al-Banna, the ideological progenitors of Al Qaeda. The Mawdudi essay found in possession of Sadiq Sheikh at the of his arrest for the 7/11 blasts, is a pointer to the driving ideological force behind the IM. Prior to his arrest, Sheikh enjoyed great respect from, and companionship with, the co-founders of the IM, Qureshi and Shah Bandri, as well as with several figures linked to the Mumbai train bombings, including Feroze Deshmukh and Ehtesham Siddiqui.

A SIMI statement in 1996 declared that democracy and secularism had failed to protect Muslims (post-1992 Babri Masjid demolition) and, hence, its sole option was to struggle for an Islamic Caliphate. During its last convention in September 2001 (before being banned), SIMI praised Osama as a “true *Mujahid*”. In the wake of the Godhra riots, Hafiz Saeed, the LeT founder had stated that “the Hindu is a mean enemy and the proper way to deal with him is the one adopted by our forefathers, who thrashed them by force.” Since 2003, when Lashkar-trained Hyderabad resident Asad Yazdani assassinated Haren Pandya, the new Indian *jihadists* – the IM – have been following this advice of Hafiz to the hilt.

The intelligence community believes that the serial blasts in Bengaluru and Allahabad were executed by a network of Wahhabi fundamentalists, masquerading as the Indian Mujahideen.¹⁸ “This terror network started by organising blasts at holy places of rival Bareilvi Muslims like the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti in Ajmer, Rajasthan... thousands of publications have been brought out by them to convince Muslims to follow the path of ‘true Islam’. Members of several front organisations also visit homes to convince people to abandon non-Islamic rituals....These activities have been vehemently opposed by the Barelvis, who also brought out publications countering the Wahhabi ideology, which is believed to provide a theological justification for terror... last straw was the blast at Ajmer Sharif.... It provoked widespread reaction among the Barelvis against Wahhabi fanaticism, which had backed the SIMI.” A senior intelligence official has opined, “Fearing their isolation, the Wahhabi elements are now trying to project themselves as people fighting against injustice to Muslims as a whole. The decision to organise serial blasts in Ahmedabad, including four in Narendra Modi’s constituency, was clearly aimed at getting the sympathy of the Muslim masses.” The intelligence officer added, “There is a big vacuum in the Muslim leadership and the Wahhabis are planning to fill the gap with their violent deeds.”¹⁹

International Linkages and Financial Support

Interaction with intelligence agencies has revealed the following:

- The banned SIMI, and now the IM, has been receiving generous financial assistance from the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Riyadh, and also maintains close links with the International Islamic Federation of Students' Organisation (IFSO) in Kuwait. It also has links with the Chicago-based Consultative Committee of Indian Muslims.
- Groups of SIMI sympathisers exist in several Gulf countries. Jamayatul Ansar, an organisation of SIMI activists comprising expatriate Indian Muslims, operates in Saudi Arabia.
- Several Islamic fundamentalist organisations like the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnatra Kazhagam (TMMK), Kerala-based National Democratic Front (NDF) and Islamic Youth Centre (IYC) are believed to be providing covert support.
- The outlawed organisation receives funds, training and motivation from the Pakistani ISI. "The bureau is convinced that the IM has been trained by the ISI, which was why the blasts (Bengaluru and Ahmedabad) could be executed with professional precision."²⁰

The Formalisation of the IM into a Militant Outfit: The formalisation of the IM into a militant outfit was conceived at a meeting of SIMI, LeT and Hujji in Kotli, PoK, on 03 May 2008. The terror masterminds of LeT and Hujji had a one-point agenda – an Indian feel to the concept of *jihad*. It is confirmed by intelligence sources that the Jaipur, Bengaluru and Ahmedabad blasts were planned jointly in the presence of LeT and Hujji leaders at the Kotli meeting. The decision to trigger serial blasts across India within a short span of time was also taken during this meeting.

ISI Links: Safdar Nagori denied having direct links with the ISI. He did, however, concede to having receiving support from LeT and Hujji. Nagori had also visited the Kashmir Awareness Bureau in 1996-97, where he met Maulvi Abbhas Ansari, the executive member of the Hurriyat Conference; Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). He had also attended the Iftar party given by Pakistani Ambassador Riaz Khokhar, along with Saif Nachan and Abdul Subhan Qureshi alias Tauqeer, in New Delhi. This was the beginning of direct ISI involvement with SIMI.

Jel Links: SIMI/IM members share close ties with the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) units in Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. They also have a close working relationship with the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the students wing of the Jel in Bangladesh.

Kashmir Links: According to official reports, it is believed that SIMI/IM cadres and Kashmiri terrorists were brought together by the ISI through Jel (Pak).

HuJI-B Links: SIMI/IM maintain close links with HuJI-B. There have been reports of HuJI-B recruiting Bangladeshis in India, who have managed to secure ration cards, driving licences and voter identity cards.

LeT Links: The interrogation report of Sarfraz Nawaz of IM, arrested in Bengaluru, has revealed that the Bengaluru bombings were carried out under the direct command of the LeT. The LeT recruited one IM operative named Nazeer, who was a key planner in the IM strike in Bengaluru.²¹ However, it was only after the arrest of Muscat entrepreneur Ali Abdul Aziz al-Hooti by the Oman Police in January 2009, that investigators in both countries were able to begin unravelling the complex network that existed between the IM bombings in Southern India and the LeT assault on Mumbai of 26/11, and a series of planned bombings in West Asia. Al-Hooti was a key LeT pointsman in Oman. He funnelled funds to LeT and IM operatives in India through Sarfaraz Nawaz of the IM and Mohammad Jaffen of the LeT. Significantly, Al-Hooti had visited Mumbai between 10 and 17 November 2008, as revealed by the Maharashtra Police. Earlier, in 2007, Al-Hooti had arranged to ship a LeT operative Fahim Ansari from Dubai to an LeT camp in Pakistan. Fahim Ansari, arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Police for his alleged role in the Rampur Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp attack case, is now being tried on charges of having generated a videotape of Mumbai hotels, stations and hospitals, which was used to train the LeT 26/11 assault team. Sarfaraz Nawaz of IM, who was working in Muscat, was put in touch with Al-Hooti through *jihadist* friends in a mosque. It is known that Nawaz had joined SIMI in 1996 and was elected to its central committee five years later. His close associates included Safdar Nagori, Yahya Kama Kutty and Abdul Shiby, all key architects of the IM.²²

The debate over the presence or lack of “local support” to the terrorists who attacked Mumbai on 26 November 2008 has been put to rest by the

city police's chargesheet made public in February 2009. The chargesheet is categorical that there was indeed local support from within India for the *jihadi* posse that left Karachi. "Indeed, the Pakistan and LeT-backed training facilities that some of the Indian Mujahideen-allied terrorists arrested over the past year have spoken of, do suggest the 'external' and 'internal' sources of *jihad* are not hermetically insulated. The degree of inter-operability and mutual dependence may not be absolute but is not non-existent either. Rather than living in denial, the government needs to recognise this."²³

AI Qaeda/Qaedism and IM: The common strain in ideology among the LeT, Hujj, JeM, IM and AI Qaeda has prompted many experts to ponder whether SIMI/IM was the next target of AI Qaeda/Qaedism. India's former National Security Advisor MK Narayanan has stated, "Today, the AI Qaeda mindset, even more than the AI Qaeda network, provides the most pervasive threat to Asian and international stability."²⁴

Deductions

Vague Leadership Structure: Not much is yet known about who controls the levers within the IM. Although security agencies have identified Abdul Subhan Qureshi and the Bhatkal brothers as having played crucial leadership roles in the planning and execution of the blasts in the past two years, it seems that the IM is still managed by mentors from the ISI and LeT. After all, it is these outfits, which have raised and nurtured it. Instructions to carry out blasts, the timing and target sites, are probably dictated by these mentors from across the border, leaving the execution and precise locations, strike dates, etc to the leadership, led by people like Qureshi and Bhatkal.

Proxy: The IM has emerged as another tool in the hands of subversive elements within Pakistan and their *jihadi* brotherhood to torment India. It provides a degree of 'Indianess' or a 'home-grown' terror tag and helps mask Pakistan's complicity in the attacks. Sponsors of terror could, therefore, continue to calibrate attacks against India, utilising its various tools such as Pakistani/Kashmiri terrorists and now the home-grown ones, including the IM.

Kerala Youth in Kashmir: LeT recruiters seem to have succeeded in leading a sizeable number of youth into the *jihadi* fold from South India, especially Kerala. In October 2008, four boys from Kerala were killed by the Army in Lolab Valley of North Kashmir. The subsequent interrogation of

three men from South Kashmir, who had trained along with the five Kerala boys and seven Pakistanis in the Wani-Dorusa Forest of Lolab in September 2008 confirmed their participation in the camp. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of Kerala Police obtained information that a terror brigade of 185 Keralites was selected by the LeT and provided preliminary training at camps in various centres in Kannur and Ernakulam. Yasin, Fayaz, Shakeer alias Rahim and Fayiz, who were killed in encounters with the Army in Kashmir, and Abdul Jabbar, who had escaped the scene, constituted the pilot team sent by the Kerala terror *gurus* to Kashmir. The three Kashmiri youth from Shopian revealed, “The Malayalis joined the camp in the second week of September. Shakeer alias Rahim was their leader. He could speak Urdu.” The five Keralites, who had attended the terror training, wanted to go to Pakistan and get advanced training in weaponry. “Their plan was to go back to Kerala after being trained in Pakistan and engage in terrorist and anti-national activities.” Shabbir Ahammed Tali told the police that 180 more youngsters were waiting in Kerala after the preliminary training to join *jihād*. “One *Ustad* had indoctrinated them,” said Tali. The SIT officers had cross-checked this information with Fiaz Ahmad and Reshi, who said they were also aware of it. The police deduced that the *Ustad* they were referring to was Haji Ustad alias Thadiyantavide Nazir Haji, who is currently absconding.²⁵ All these people may be IM members, acting for LeT, to coopt Indian citizens into terrorism.

Tactics: Till now, the IM members have succeeded in carrying out blasts by assembling and placing IEDs. The Delhi Police chargesheet of the serial blasts case reveals that Atif Ameen (killed during the Batla House encounter) wanted to prepare Sajid (killed along with Atif) for *fidayeen* attacks.²⁶ This, coupled with the above incident of the youth from Kerala attempting to reach PoK for *jihadi* training, akin to the instruction received by Pakistani, Kashmiri and other foreign terrorists in the various camps in Pakistan/PoK, could be an attempt to use Indian militants in future *fidayeen* attacks or fire-assaults like Mumbai. This could then provide another layer of deniability for the Pakistani mentors in major terrorist attacks.

Counter-Measures Adopted by the State

In the aftermath of the Mumbai carnage, the government came out with a slew of measures, such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment

Act, revamping police and intelligence structures, strengthening coastal security, raising new National Security Guards (NSG) hubs, creating a National Investigative Agency (NIA), among others. Decades-old schemes such as the National ID Card and Database Project are being rejuvenated. In the recent past, a number of terrorist modules have reportedly been broken up by the police and intelligence agencies all over the country. However, the IM has been successful in establishing a pan-India network with a large number of sleeper cells in the Indian heartland, waiting to be activated as per calibrated requirements.

Recommendations

The following measures may be considered, to curtail the spread of the IM:

- **Reforming Madrasa Education:** A sizeable number of IM members were well educated and held decent jobs, but were still successfully indoctrinated by hardline Deobandi and Wahhabi elements. Leading astray the aggrieved and the poor would be even easier. The Union Human Resources Development (HRD) Ministry should undertake a study of the kind of education being imparted in the large number of privately-funded (mostly from Gulf countries) *madrasas* mushrooming all over the country, especially in the border areas. The government can then revamp the education system, by implementing more job-oriented and professional education at government-run institutions and also restrict the influence of *madrasas* on Muslim society, especially the hardline ones. Muslims should be encouraged to send their children to open schools and colleges, rather than to single-religion *madrasas*, where they learn in isolation and hence, can sometimes develop a closed and rigid outlook towards society in general. Ghettoisation of the community should be prevented.
- **Employment Opportunities:** The findings of the Sachar Committee should be comprehensively studied. Equal and non-discriminatory job opportunities should be created for all. The private sector should be asked to be more affirmative in this regard, and allegations of discrimination in jobs due to religion or creed should be seriously monitored and addressed by the government. Similarly, by way of agrarian and land reforms in rural areas, the exploitation of poor land labourers should be prevented.

- **Political Leadership:** A far greater degree of responsibility and leadership should be expected from the Muslim MPs and MLAs. They should strive for the upliftment and emancipation of Muslims of their constituencies and be able to instill confidence among them against their perceived fears and vulnerabilities.
- **Unbiased Police Action:** Police investigations should not be hampered due to political or religious considerations. Similarly, the police should not be seen to be acting in a prejudicial manner against the minorities.
- **Local Surveillance:** A factor which helps the IM cover its tracks well is that many of its members do not have a past record of crime and, hence, evade police scrutiny. A watch should be kept by local police on young boys attending *madrasas* in their respective localities. Students from outside states residing in *madrasas* should be accounted for. Such issues can best be handled by local policemen belonging to the Muslim community, as also by community elders. Incentives should be given for providing information on suspected individuals and activities. More Muslims should be recruited by the intelligence agencies. Community leaders can play an important role in encouraging young men to eschew the path of violence and point out the futility of such means.
- **Technical Surveillance:** Though prone to misuse, laws which facilitate easy tapping of suspects' communication by intelligence agencies should be passed by the Parliament. The sale of new mobile connections and SIM cards should be strictly regulated and the police should ensure that vendors follow the mandatory procedures. New cell phone connections should be made operational only after a physical verification of the address provided.
- **Regulating Use of Commonly-used Explosives:** IM members have been able to wreak havoc by fabricating crude explosives with shrapnel. The easy availability of crude chemicals and mixtures such as ammonium nitrate used in fertilizers and gelatin sticks for mining (blasting), should be regulated. The government can designate certain authorised distributors for their sale.
- **Close Watch on Criminals and Underworld:** More and more interlinkages are developing between terrorist groups, the underworld and criminal elements, due to mutual activities such as drug-trafficking

and gun-running. These criminal elements can provide logistics and local support to the terrorists in facilitating their strikes in Indian cities. Therefore, criminals should be tackled seriously and a close watch kept over their activities. Linkages between politicians and the mafia tend to prevent the police, in certain states, from taking action. This could, in turn, provide safe havens to terrorists.

- **Stifling Resources:** Steps should be taken by the intelligence agencies and the Finance Ministry for identifying and blocking the funding/income channels of such groups, which are routed through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious charities, both in India and abroad. A ban, though for the most part a cosmetic step, would display the resolve of the government in tackling the IM.

Conclusion

It is beyond doubt now that terror groups have established a pan-Islamic network, with a large number of sleeper sells in the hinterland, with extreme linkages with J&K, the global terrorists, and the ISI. In the recent past, a number of terrorist modules have been broken up in all metropolitan cities, and hitherto unaffected areas in the country.

Bomb blasts in Jaipur, Bengaluru, and Ahmedabad, and a suspected involvement as the support element to the LeT attack in Mumbai on 26/11, are pointers towards the increasing focus of the global *jihadis* in league with the Indian *jihadi* arm, like the IM, on targeting economic prosperity in the Indian hinterland. The audacity with which the terrorists struck the two key Indian cities of Bengaluru and Ahmedabad on two consecutive days clearly indicates the level of preparedness and coordination of these attacks without compromising the security of the plan and risk the identification of a large number of perpetrators (minimum of 40-50 persons) in the execution of the plan. A support group of at least 40 IM members is suspected to have assisted the LeT terror attack on Mumbai.

What is of great concern is that, despite its best efforts, and incentives and monetary rewards to informers, the police has not been able to make much headway in the investigation on the Bengaluru and Ahmedabad blast cases. Indian intelligence agencies believe that the IM is a front group, created by the LeT and Hujl, to confuse investigations and cover the tracks of SIMI.

The Delhi Police, however, believes that though the IM is an offshoot of SIMI, it is actually a different group connected to the LeT. Notwithstanding the accuracy of either of the views, it is beyond doubt that the Indian Mujahideen broke away from SIMI as a hardline faction, and in any case, owes its legacy to it. What is worrisome is that despite a ban on SIMI in 2001, it continued to exist in some form or the other over the past six to seven years or so, before giving birth to the Indian Mujahideen. Another source of worry is that most of the activists recruited so far have been well educated, and quite a few of these belong to Deobandi *madrasas* and are influenced by Mawdudi's hardline views or Wahhabi fundamentalism. Intelligence agencies have been patting themselves on the back on having arrested a number of IM activists. But the greater challenge is to get them convicted – the recent acquittal of Mohammad Sadiq Sheikh is a case in point.

After Atif Amin of the IM was killed in the Jamia Nagar encounter in September 2008, the intelligence agencies were beginning to write the epitaph for the IM until Mumbai 26/11 happened. After the initial furore over the unmistakable LeT hand in the carnage had died down, experts began to realise that this mammoth operation involved colossal administrative support, which would not have been possible without a local hand. Intelligence agencies have begun to seriously investigate the IM and LeT hand in the massive 26/11 fire assault. After all, in the midst of the assault, the IM (by the name of Deccan Mujahideen) did claim a hand in the attack, asking for the release of their members. It must also not be forgotten that Qureshi, Shahbandri, Ansari, Rafiq Sheikh and Riyaz Bhatkal are still at large and these fugitive *jihadists* are working to revive the IM's campaign of terror. Indian police and intelligence agencies have an important role in preventing them from succeeding. At a political level, there is a requirement of strengthening the democratic process of the country against communal forces so that the Wahhabis and the Mawdudis wither away.

Notes

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