

# JIHADIST VIOLENCE: THE INDIAN THREAT



By Stephen Tankel





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# PREFACE

India, the world's most populous democracy, faces a multitude of challenges that, if not wisely managed, could threaten India's hopes of becoming one of the 21st century's major global actors: growing disparities between rich and poor, a decrepit education system that too often fails to prepare its students to flourish in the modern economy, food and water insecurity, corrupt or unresponsive institutions, and horrific environmental degradation, to name just a few. Less often noted, particularly by foreign observers, is the wide range of terrorist groups and violent insurgencies that, to one degree or another, plague most of the states of India.

This report examines one of those terrorist groups: a loosely organized indigenous Islamist militant network known as the Indian Mujahideen, or IM. This Indian jihadist movement, Stephen Tankel notes, is "an internal security issue with an external dimension." Most often, the author argues, analysts have focused on what he calls "expeditionary terrorism," or violence perpetrated by actors from countries outside India—typically Pakistan or Bangladesh. Quite clearly, there is also an external dimension to IM, whose leadership is currently based in Pakistan. But it would be incorrect, Tankel asserts, to explain Indian jihadism primarily by reference to Pakistan. The IM threat is a response to Indian domestic failings, including political malfeasance, economic inequality, and a widespread sense of injustice. However, it is one far more lethal as a result of external support.

The Wilson Center's Asia Program is pleased to have worked with Professor Tankel to make this scholarly study available to a wider public. As Tankel sensibly concedes, the IM may not be a threat of the first order to U.S. interests in South Asia and beyond.

Nonetheless, Washington does have a compelling incentive to understand the evolution and dynamics of Indian jihadism, and to work with Indians to ensure that their homegrown jihadist movement does not morph into one that could either directly endanger central U.S. interests or become a genuine threat to a stable, democratic India.

Robert M. Hathaway  
Director, Asia Program  
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## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Rashid **Abdullah** (aka Wali), LeT commander for the Indian Ocean rim

Sabauddin **Ahmed**, Indian LeT operative involved in 2005 attack against the IISc in Bangalore, arrested

Mohammed Atif **Ameen**, Indian militant, head of the Indian Mujahideen's Azamgarh module, deceased

Shahnawaz **Alam**, Indian militant, member of Azamgarh module

Ali Abdul Aziz **al-Hooti**, Indian militant, acted as interface for LeT and the Indian Mujahideen

Sheikh Sai'd **al-Masri**, former al-Qaeda number 3, deceased

Aftab **Ansari**, Indian gangster turned militant, briefly led Asif Raza Commando Force, arrested

Jalees **Ansari**, Indian militant, founding member of Tanzim Islahul Muslimeen, deceased

Syed Zabiuddin **Ansari** (aka Abu Jundal), Indian militant, LeT operative who fled following the Aurangabad arms haul, in LeT's control room in Karachi for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, arrested

Maulana Masood **Azhar**, founder of Jaish-e-Mohammad, former member of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen

Ahmad Siddi **Bapa** (aka Yasin Bhatkal and Shahrukh), Indian militant, became IM field commander, arrested

Muzammil **Butt**, Pakistan-based LeT commander for Indian operations

Mohsin **Choudhary**, Indian militant, member of Azamgarh module

Lalbaba **Farid** (aka Bilal), Indian militant, arrested

Muhammad Azam **Ghauri**, Indian militant, founding member of Tanzim Islahul Muslimeen, deceased

Afzal **Guru**, doctor from Kashmir, participant in December 2001 attack on Indian Parliament, executed in 2013

Abu **Hamza**, alias of Pakistani LeT commander responsible for 2005 IISc attack in Bangalore

David **Headley**, Pakistani American operative for LeT, conducted reconnaissance for 2008 Mumbai attacks, in prison in United States

Fayyiz **Kagzi**, Indian LeT operative, wanted for his role in 2006 Ahmedabad railway bombing

Abdul **Karim** (aka Tunda), Indian militant, founding member of Tanzim Islahul Muslimeen, LeT's top field operative in India during 1990s, arrested

Ilyas **Kashmiri**, leader of 313 Brigade, head of operations in Pakistan for al-Qaeda, presumed dead

Dawood Ibrahim **Kaskar**, Muslim leader of South Asia's largest crime syndicate, D-company, responsible for 1993 blasts

Sheikh Abdul **Khaja** (aka Amjad), Indian militant, arrested

Amir Raza **Khan**, Indian gangster-turned-militant, founder of Asif Raza Commando Force, LeT interface with Indian Mujahideen

Asif Raza **Khan**, Indian gangster-turned-militant, deceased

Fasih **Mahmood**, Indian LeT operative, arrested

Tiger **Memon**, mobster, associate of Dawood Ibrahim, engineered the lethal series of bomb blasts in Mumbai in March 1993

Jalaluddin **Mullah** (aka Babu Bhai) Indian militant, smuggled RDX from Bangladesh to Indian Mujahideen, arrested

Safdar **Nagori**, SIMI leader, arrested

T. **Naseer**, Indian militant from Kerala allegedly responsible for 2008 Bangalore blasts, arrested

Maulana **Nasiruddin**, Hyderabad cleric who founded Tehreek-Tahaffuz-e-Shaair-e-Islam (protection of Islamic shrines and monuments)

Sarfaraz **Nawaz**, Indian militant, former SIMI member, allegedly involved in 2008 Bangalore blasts, arrested

Haren **Pandya**, civilian, Gujarat Home Minister assassinated in 2003

Rasool Khan Yakub Khan **Pathan** (aka Rasool "Party), Indian mobster, facilitated training for Indian militants

Mohammad Mansoor Ashgar **Peerbhoy**, militant, software engineer, command of IM Media Group, arrested

Abdul Subhan **Qureshi** (aka Tauqir), took over SIMI after arrest of Nagori

Shaikh Abdur **Rahman**, Bangladeshi militant, founded the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh in 1998

Hafiz Mohammad **Saeed**, Amir of Lashkar-e-Taiba and its above ground wing Jamaat-ud-Dawa

Mohammad Abdul **Sahed** (aka Shahid Bilal), independent Indian militant who led a network in Hyderabad, deceased

**Salman** (aka Chhotu), Indian Mujahideen operative, arrested

Abdul **Sattar**, Pakistani LeT member, allegedly established a cell in Uttar Pradesh

Iqbal **Shahbandri** (aka Iqbal Bhatkal), brother of Riyaz and founding member of the Indian Mujahideen

Riyaz **Shahbandri** (aka Riyaz Bhatkal), brother of Iqbal, founding member of the Indian Mujahideen and its leader at the time of writing

Ahmed Omar Saeed **Sheikh**, British-born Pakistani member of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, helped radicalize Indian militants, engineered Daniel Pearl's kidnapping, arrested in Pakistan

Mohammad Sadique Israr **Sheikh** (Sadique Sheikh), SIMI activist, founding member of Indian Mujahideen, arrested

Rahil Abdul Rehman **Sheikh**, Indian LeT operative



# INTRODUCTION

India has been confronting jihadist violence for decades. Yet these dynamics remain underexplored and difficult to comprehend, particularly in terms of ties to either the Pakistani state or nonstate Pakistani and Bangladeshi jihadist groups. Expeditionary terrorism by Pakistani militants typically receives the most focus, but indigenous actors benefiting from external support are responsible for the majority of jihadist attacks within India. The Indian Mujahideen (IM) network that announced its presence in 2007 is only the latest and most well-known manifestation of the indigenous Islamist militant threat. A few Indian Muslims have been launching terrorist strikes—often with Pakistani support and sometimes on their own—for more than twenty years. Despite this steady drumbeat of at least partly indigenous attacks, Indian officials did not acknowledge the problem until the end of the 2010s.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the overwhelming majority of attacks were blamed on nonstate Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups. Little attention was paid to investigating the dynamics of the Indian networks involved in perpetrating them.<sup>2</sup> This contributed to a knowledge gap in understanding Indian jihadism. U.S. analysts, policymakers, and practitioners have highlighted the paucity of information regarding the nature and scale of the indigenous Indian jihad threat, the degree to which indigenous networks could threaten U.S. interests in India or across wider South Asia region, and the nebulous ties between Indian jihadist networks and Pakistan-based groups.<sup>3</sup>

This report seeks to address these and other questions. It argues that the Indian Mujahideen—the primary indigenous jihadist threat—is part of a larger universe of Islamist militant entities operating in India, many but not all of which are connected to external entities such as the Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Bangladeshi Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI-B). It also asserts that the IM should not be viewed as a formal organization, but instead is best understood as a label for a relatively amorphous network populated by jihadist elements from the fringes of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the criminal underworld. The improper use of the IM label for all indigenous jihadist violence contributes to confusion about its composition and cohesion. Today, the decentralized IM network has a loose leadership currently based in Pakistan, but moving between there and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The IM connects to and sometimes attempts to absorb smaller cells and self-organizing clusters of would-be militants. Finally, this report illustrates that the Indian jihadist movement formed organically and as a result of endogenous factors, specifically communal grievances and a desire for revenge, but is more lethal and more resilient than it otherwise would have been, thanks to external support from the Pakistani state and Pakistan- and Bangladesh-based militant groups. In other words, external support was a force multiplier for Indian militancy rather than a key driver of it. Although the IM receives support from LeT, it should not be viewed as an affiliate within the same command-and-control hierarchy. This distinguishes the IM from some of the other LeT cells or operatives active in India.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This report is based on research conducted over twenty months from January 2012 to September 2013 and draws on primary and secondary source material as well as on field interviews conducted in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Interview subjects in India included Intelligence Bureau (IB) analysts, officials from the National

Investigative Agency (NIA), senior police officials in multiple cities as well as former police officials, former senior officers from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), scholars from multiple think tanks, Muslim clerics and community activists, and journalists. Interview subjects in Pakistan included journalists, security analysts, and members of Lashkar-e-Taiba's above-ground wing, Jamaat-ud-Dawa. Interview subjects in Bangladesh included officers from National Security Intelligence, former military officers, think tank scholars, and journalists. Scoping interviews were held with U.S. analysts, policymakers, and practitioners before desk-based research and again before departing for field research. Finding and analysis based on this information was then sharpened in a series of briefings with U.S. officials and analysts who track the Indian jihadist movement.

Research benefited from a wave of arrests of Indian Mujahideen operatives in 2008, the arrest and subsequent deportation to India in the summer of 2012 of two key Indian operatives by Saudi authorities and, as this report was being finalized, the arrests of Abdul Karim, one of the progenitors of India's jihadist movement, and of Ahmed Siddi Bapa, the Indian Mujahideen's field commander. Drawing on this new information as well as on interrogation reports, government documents, arrest reports (known as charge sheets), and the numerous interviews conducted, a team of researchers and I constructed a database of attacks dating back to 2001. It includes information about the militants allegedly involved in each attack, where they came from, the identities of the alleged masterminds, the explosives used, the logistical support provided, and the documented evidence of alleged assistance from external actors in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Persian Gulf. This enables a more thoroughly detailed and rigorous assessment, especially in terms of the organizational and operational aspects of the Indian jihadist movement.

Despite these efforts, ambiguity still surrounds many of the activities of Islamist militants in India and those who support them. Indian media reporting is often unreliable and contradictory. Charge sheets

and interrogation reports must also be used cautiously, especially given the pressure on police to make a case after a bombing and their practice of using torture to elicit information that might help them do so. The questionable validity of certain primary and secondary sources creates a significant challenge to conducting research of this nature, which may help explain why analysts have shied away from exploring the evolution and dynamics of Indian jihadism.

When this is the case, I make clear that uncertainty exists. I also attempt to outline competing claims, to identify clues or trends that might point the way forward, and to suggest possible explanations as well as the alternative consequences different scenarios could create. Although this effort opens the door to possible errors of fact or analysis, the same risk accompanies any empirical work about clandestine phenomena. I am confident that the material gathered is extensive enough to chart the significant trends in the Indian jihadist movement's evolution and to identify its relevant dynamics. However, the movement and our understanding of it remains a work in progress, and new information continues to come to light. This report does not endeavor to be the final word on Indian jihadism, only to provide a baseline for further analysis.

## **EVOLUTION OF INDIAN JIHADISM**

Examining the evolution of the Indian jihadist movement necessitates briefly exploring the atmosphere in which it emerged and elements that drove its genesis.

### **Seeds of Homegrown Terrorism**

India was founded as a secular pluralist country and these values are enshrined in its constitution, which guaranteed equality and prohibited discrimination on the basis of religious, race, caste, or gender. Yet Muslims have suffered from relative deprivation, are sometimes suspected of harboring loyalty to Pakistan, and have been the victims of communal violence over the years.



Many educated Muslims left during Partition and a significant portion of those who remained were poor. Some Muslims in Uttar Pradesh and the central areas, who had been champions of Pakistan but did not migrate there, were apprehensive about how they would be treated. Concerns focused on issues such as the freedom to worship and to continue operating religious institutions.<sup>4</sup> To assuage their concerns, provisos were included in the new constitution enshrining these rights.<sup>5</sup> However, economic and educational issues were neglected. In other words, Muslims were given religious freedom, but neglected or discriminated against in other areas. This contributed to economic deprivation relative to others in India. According to the Sachar Committee, commissioned in 2005 to examine the social, economic, and educational conditions of Indian Muslims, Muslim graduates had the highest unemployment rate of any socioreligious group. Overall, Muslims were found to be underrepresented at elite educational institutions as well as in the Indian Administrative Service (3 percent), the Indian Foreign Service (1.8 percent) and the Indian Police Service (4 percent).<sup>6</sup> According to one estimate, the area where Muslims were overrepresented was in prison.<sup>7</sup> Such widespread Muslim marginalization created the space for jihadism. Direct and indirect threats to Muslim communities, especially in northern India, from a rising Hindu nationalist movement catalyzed its emergence.

Hindu nationalists promoted a definition of India as a Hindu, rather than a secular, nation. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), or National Volunteer Organization, formed in 1925 to oppose British colonialism and Muslim separatism, was the progenitor of the Hindu nationalist movement.<sup>8</sup> The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council of Hinduism, founded in 1964, is the most militant offshoot of the RSS. Hindu nationalists increased the intensity of their anti-Muslim rhetoric in the 1960s and began launching campaigns to dismantle mosques across the country.<sup>9</sup> Pogroms targeting Muslims communities sometimes accompanied these activities, and conferences organized by the RSS and VHP also often culminated in rioting against Muslims and other non-Hindus.<sup>10</sup>

Communal riots were a feature of life for many Indians since Partition and never entirely one-sided, but grew in frequency and ferocity during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Bajrang Dal, the VHP's youth wing, activated in 1981 and soon was at forefront of communal violence against Muslims. In some instances, the police, which are overwhelmingly Hindu, abetted or participated in these activities.<sup>12</sup>

The VHP launched the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in 1984 to build a Hindu temple near the site of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh (UP). Constructed by the first Mughal emperor of India in the sixteenth century on a site Hindus believe was the birthplace of the deity Lord Ram (Ramjanmabhoomi in Hindi), it had become a communal flashpoint. The mosque was closed for several decades, despite Muslims' legal efforts to reopen it, when the VHP launched its campaign.<sup>13</sup> The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or Indian People's Party, founded in 1980 as the political offspring of the RSS, leveraged the ensuing tensions and reaped electoral gains.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, the VHP made legal claims that hundreds of historical mosques were built on the sites of Hindu temples, fueling the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, a wider campaign of mosque demolition throughout the country and the communal violence that often accompanied it.<sup>15</sup>

A significant number of Indian Muslims who became involved in Islamist militancy came from the Students Islamic Movement of India. SIMI was founded in 1977 at Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh as the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), part of an effort to revitalize the Students Islamic Organization (SIO) that had been founded as the first JIH student wing in 1956. SIMI built on SIO networks in Uttar Pradesh and conducted outreach to JIH-linked Muslim student groups in other localities such as Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Bihar, and Kerala.<sup>16</sup> From the outset, SIMI was heavily influenced by Sayyed Abdul 'Ala Maududi, a journalist and Islamist ideologue, who established Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941 to be the vanguard of an Islamic revolution. He called for jihad to establish states governed by sharia (Islamic law) and declared that those who tolerated living in a secular state consigned themselves to hell in the hereafter.<sup>17</sup> Maududi chose to live in Pakistan after Partition.

Members who remained in India reorganized themselves and in 1948 their organization officially became the JIH.

JIH initially embraced Maududi's radical ideology, but over time began to embrace the secular state. This embrace occurred amid the rising Hindu nationalist movement and violence that accompanied it, and was partially informed by the belief that a secular state was a necessary alternative to a communal Hindu regime. Such a position put the JIH at odds with SIMI, whose leaders were disturbed by what they viewed to be a revisionist posture.<sup>18</sup> The two separated in 1981. Over the next ten years, many SIMI members became increasingly alienated from the mainstream political culture and more prone to extremist rhetoric.<sup>19</sup> The simultaneous democratization of Indian politics undercut establishment figures throughout the country, including Muslim leaders, whose credibility was also eroded in the eyes of some followers by their failure to stand against the rising Hindu nationalist tide. The demonopolization of Islam subverted the authority of the Ulema (Muslim scholars) and created space for radical actors, who took matters into their own hands.<sup>20</sup> However, though the Indian jihadist movement was homegrown, external actors encouraged and abetted it.

### **Nurturing an Indigenous Movement**

India and Pakistan have fought three conventional wars and engaged in a limited conflict after Pakistan's invasion of Kargil in 1999. Pakistan relied on nonstate proxies during its first war against India, fought over the disputed region of Kashmir, and has continued to use nonstate Islamist militants from its own population to achieve geopolitical objectives ever since. After the first Kashmir war concluded, Islamabad abetted indigenous separatists in Indian-administered Kashmir, effectively waging a covert campaign to foment an uprising. This effort sparked the second war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.<sup>21</sup>

Pakistani jihadist groups formed in the 1980s when the country became a staging ground for the Afghan mujahideen fighting against

the communist regime in Kabul and Soviet troops propping it up. The Pakistani military's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) took charge of coordinating this effort. In 1983, the Zia ul-Haq regime in Pakistan began considering how to replicate the Afghan experience in Indian-administered Kashmir. To this end, it not only trained extant and inchoate indigenous Kashmiri groups, but also intended to deploy the Pakistani jihadist groups that had formed to fight against the Soviets.<sup>22</sup> Despite this planning, the uprising that began in Indian-administered Kashmir in 1988 was indigenous. Islamabad moved quickly to exploit the situation, support the Kashmiri militant groups that emerged and ultimately reorient the conflict toward one dominated by groups that favored joining Pakistan over independence. By the early 1990s, Pakistani jihadist groups established during the Afghan jihad were fighting in

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**...Islamabad also historically supported Indian minorities waging ethnic and religious separatist struggles elsewhere in the country, including Sikhs in Punjab and various insurgent entities in the country's northeast.**

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greater numbers. The most notable of these included Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) or the Islamic Jihad Movement, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), and Lashkar-e-Taiba.<sup>23</sup> These proxies were qualitatively different from those Pakistan had supported in the past in terms of their intent and capabilities to wage a pan-Islamist jihad that included but was not limited to Indian-administered Kashmir. Whereas indigenous

Kashmiri groups, most notably the Pakistan-supported Islamist Hizbul Mujahideen, were prepared to offer training to Indian Muslims from elsewhere in the country, these Pakistani groups actively sought to build networks to support terrorism against the Indian hinterland.

Neither India nor Pakistan has engineered an indigenous militant movement in the other country from scratch, but both have cultivated such entities. In addition to supporting indigenous and Pakistani jihadists fighting in Indian-administered Kashmir, Islamabad also historically supported Indian minorities waging ethnic and

religious separatist struggles elsewhere in the country, including Sikhs in Punjab and various insurgent entities in the country's northeast. Notably, New Delhi did the same, providing assistance to Baloch, Pashtun, and Sindhi separatists in Pakistan at various times. Before the 1990s, however, no organized Islamist movement committed to violence existed in India outside Kashmir. Hence Pakistani support for such actors was circumscribed. As a nascent network of would-be Indian jihadists outside Kashmir began to activate in the 1990s, both the Pakistani state and its jihadist proxies promoted its growth.

## **Phase I**

In early December 1992, Indian officials granted permission for a VHP rally in front of the Babri mosque on the condition that participants not damage it. Instead, once gathered, a mob demolished the mosque, catalyzing communal riots in several Indian cities, including Gujarat and Mumbai. According to a commission of inquiry led by Justice B. N. Srikrishna (the Srikrishna Commission) and constituted by the government in Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital, Hindu rallies celebrating the mosque's destructions further aggravated Muslim sentiments and contributed to frenzied protests. Islamists fanned the flames of anti-Hindu sentiment. On the other side, the Shiv Sena and other Hindu nationalist organizations entered the fray, further polarizing the situation and escalating communal violence. The police took a heavy-handed approach, directed primarily toward Muslim protestors, which only intensified the violence, further embittered many Indian Muslims. About a thousand people were killed by the time the Bombay Riots, as they are known, ended. Approximately two-thirds of them were Muslim, according to the Srikrishna Commission, which indicted the Shiv Sena for its role in the violence.<sup>24</sup> The episode became a core grievance for the Indian jihadist movement.

### ***D-Company Draws First Blood***

No Indian jihadist movement existed at this stage. The first Muslim

actor to strike back was a criminal, not an Islamist. Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar is the Muslim leader of South Asia's largest crime syndicate, known as D-company. His criminal associate, Tiger Memon, engineered a lethal series of thirteen car, scooter, and suitcase bomb blasts in Mumbai (Bombay at the time) in March 1993. The attacks, which hit the Bombay Stock Exchange, three hotels, and a host of other targets, killed 257 people and injured more than seven hundred. This remains the largest and most deadly coordinated terrorist incident in India's history. Expatriate Indian smugglers based in the United Arab Emirates financed the attacks. Memon spearheaded the recruitment of Muslim youths to execute them. Nineteen of the youth were sent via Dubai, where D-Company has robust networks, to Pakistan for training in the use of weapons and bomb making.<sup>25</sup>

It is unlikely an attack of this magnitude could have been executed without the support of Dawood's criminal infrastructure.<sup>26</sup> Ibrahim, Tiger Memon, and others from D-Company relocated to Karachi. D-Company is still mentioned frequently in media reports as supporting militant activities in India, but little hard evidence supports its enduring importance. However, the link between organized criminality in general and Islamist militancy did remain a lasting feature of the Indian jihadist movement. The Asif Raza Commando Brigade (ARCF), formed by gangsters-cum-jihadists and discussed later in this section, constitutes one of the two major building blocks of the movement. The Tanzim Islahul Muslimeen (TIM), or Organization for the Improvement of Muslims, is the other.

### ***TIM: Wellspring of LeT's Indian Networks***

Activists from the Gorba faction of the Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadith in Mumbai formed the TIM in the Mominpora slum in summer 1985.<sup>27</sup> They were motivated by communal riots that had erupted the previous year in Bhiwandi and spread to Mumbai and Thane after a saffron flag (a symbol of Hindu nationalism) was placed atop a mosque.<sup>28</sup> The violence left almost three hundred people dead and fueled a growing belief among those who belonged to the Jamaat's

Gorba faction that India was a Hindu fundamentalist state.<sup>29</sup> They converged on the need for a Muslim self-defense militia and the possibility of taking revenge for Hindu nationalist violence.<sup>30</sup> Toward this end, an obscure West Bengal-based cleric named Abu Masood announced the creation of TIM.

Three key figures were present at the Mominpora meetings: Jalees Ansari, Azam Ghauri, and Abdul Karim (aka Tunda). Ansari was the son of a Mumbai textile mill worker. He earned a medical degree from Sion Medical College and became a practicing physician, but was deeply affected by his experiences with communalism, often complaining that his Hindu colleagues did not treat Muslim patients with the proper care.<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Azam Ghauri was from an impoverished family in Hyderabad, where he was involved in low-level criminality and belonged to a Maoist group before discovering religion.<sup>32</sup> Karim was born in Delhi, but grew up near the town of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh before moving to Mumbai, where he established a small dyeing business.<sup>33</sup>

Despite forming TIM to be an armed defense militia, its members largely confined themselves to parading around the grounds of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) where, modeling the RSS, they trained with lathis, the long heavy wooden sticks often used as weapons in India.<sup>34</sup> However, Ansari, Ghauri, and Karim were already training with explosives, the latter having earned his nickname after a bomb-making accident blew off his left hand.<sup>35</sup> As early as 1988, Ansari allegedly was executing "petty bombings" for which he used folded train tickets as the timer and detonator for small explosives.<sup>36</sup> After the demolition of the Babri mosque and riots that followed, the three men outlined a significantly grander plan for which they found help from abroad.<sup>37</sup>

Lashkar-e-Taiba was still a small Pakistani militant group and had not yet become the Pakistan military's most powerful proxy against India. Pan-Islamist and vehemently anti-Hindu, LeT was not content with waging jihad in Kashmir. In parallel to developing its military capacity there, in the early 1990s the group also began building a

network of operatives to prosecute terrorist attacks across India.<sup>38</sup> After his arrest in August 2013, Abdul Karim allegedly told Indian authorities that he first came into contact with LeT in 1991 and thereafter began helping to build its terrorist infrastructure outside of Kashmir.<sup>39</sup> The following year, LeT's leader, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, dispatched a former teaching colleague to spearhead a recruitment drive inside India in 1992.<sup>40</sup> Azam Cheema arrived shortly before the Babri mosque's demolition and quickly linked up with TIM leaders, including Ansari, Ghauri, and Karim.

A year to the day after the Babri Masjid's destruction and with LeT's assistance, on December 6, 1993, TIM executed its own series of coordinated bombings: forty-three in Mumbai and Hyderabad and seven separate explosions on intercity trains in Hyderabad, Gulbarga, Surat, and Lucknow.<sup>41</sup> Most of the explosions were small and only two people were killed.<sup>42</sup> The ability to execute such a high number of coordinated blasts, however, illustrated intensive planning and discipline. Ansari was captured in the midst of planning a second series of bombings scheduled to coincide with India's Republic Day celebrations in January 1994.<sup>43</sup>

Ghauri hid out in Andhra Pradesh in the wake of the 1993 bombings. After obtaining a fake passport, he fled to Saudi Arabia and then traveled to Pakistan, where he linked up with LeT.<sup>44</sup> With the help of contacts in the Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadis, Karim crossed from Kolkata into Dhaka, Bangladesh. He headed LeT's operations in Bangladesh during the mid-1990s, part of a wider tasking to help build the group's pan-India capabilities, for which Karim also played an important role in terms of recruitment and fundraising (especially via the smuggling of counterfeit currency).<sup>45</sup> Some of those TIM members who had not fled or been arrested began a recruitment drive, sending some of those they enlisted to Pakistan for training, often via Bangladesh. Karim acted as a conduit for Indian recruits transiting from or through Bangladesh to LeT camps in Pakistan.<sup>46</sup>

Karim also recruited locals and provided explosives training from his



base in Bangladesh.<sup>47</sup> Among those he sent to Pakistan for training was Shaikh Abdur Rahman, who founded the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) or Organization of Mujahideen in 1998. Rahman had been a member of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B), the Bangladeshi branch of the Deobandi organization by the same name in Pakistan. Rahman met Hafiz Saeed and other Lashkar leaders during his stay in Pakistan, where the group trained him on the use of small arms and explosives and on how to build a jihadi organization. Rahman wanted to wage a near enemy jihad against the government in Bangladesh, and after he returned there fell out with Karim over the latter's insistence on using available jihadi assets in Bangladesh for the struggle against India.<sup>48</sup> Unlike JMB, which focused internally, and LeT, which used Bangladesh solely as a staging point for attacks against India, HuJI-B was active on both fronts.<sup>49</sup>

Working from Bangladesh, including via the Dhaka-based Islamic Chattra Shibir (Islamic Students Organization), Karim coordinated the creation of a robust network throughout north India.<sup>50</sup> It formed the backbone of LeT's Indian operations branch, known as the Dasta Muhammad bin Qasim and commanded by Azam Cheema. Karim became its top field operative, returning to India in 1996 to begin putting his network into action.<sup>51</sup> He engineered a series of bombings in Delhi, Rohtak, and Jalandhar, each executed by a Delhi resident named Amir Hashim. He had moved to Pakistan with his family and quickly fallen in with LeT, beginning in mid-1994 to work in the group's Karachi office.<sup>52</sup> The 1996 serial bombings Hashim executed were the first significant attacks carried out under Karim's direct command.<sup>53</sup> More attacks followed over the next two years, including serial bombings in Delhi, a spate of blasts elsewhere in northern India, and bombings in Hyderabad and Mumbai.<sup>54</sup> Collectively, Karim was allegedly involved in more than forty bomb attacks across the country, twenty-one in Delhi alone, committed in 1994 and from 1996 to 1998.<sup>55</sup>

Although Karim, LeT's top field operative and an explosives expert,

was Indian, many of those executing the bombs he built between 1996 and 1998 were LeT-trained Pakistani and Bangladeshi militants.<sup>56</sup> For example, in 1998 the Delhi police arrested Abdul Sattar, a resident of Pakistan's Faisalabad district, who had established a cell in Uttar Pradesh. Indian recruits were often used to provide logistical support. In Sattar's case, Karim leveraged his network to provide the Pakistani operative with false identification papers, local guides, and a landlord who allowed him to build a bunker for housing explosives inside a pottery kiln.<sup>57</sup> In addition to using Indians for logistical support, Karim trained indigenous recruits on target selection and the preparation of explosives using locally available material such as urea, nitric acid, potassium chloride, nitrobenzene, and sugar.<sup>58</sup>

Following the arrest in Hyderabad of three LeT operatives from Pakistan, Azam Ghauri returned to India in 1998 at Karim's behest. The three had infiltrated into the city, married, fathered children, and procured identification cards. One of them had established a trucking business in Hyderabad used to transport explosives. Their arrest, and the accompanying seizure of 18 kilograms of research department explosive (RDX) and remote detonation devices, was a setback for Karim and LeT.<sup>59</sup> Ghauri returned to help aid in the recovery, and launched Indian Muslim Mohammad Mujahideen. It executed seven bomb blasts, five in Hyderabad and two in the surrounding areas of Matpalli and Nandad, targeting trains, buses, and markets.<sup>60</sup> It was just one of a number of small outfits operating in the area at the time, all of which were part of the same network despite their different names.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, SIMI was active in the city, as were activists from Indian-administered Kashmir and Pakistan. Independently and collectively, they recruited local youth for training in Pakistan.<sup>62</sup> Ghauri also turned to the criminal underworld for assistance, recruiting some gangsters and partnering with others to assassinate Hindu politicians and businessmen.<sup>63</sup>

### ***ARCF: Forerunner of Indian Mujahideen***

In 1994, two Indian gangsters, Aftab Ansari and Asif Raza Khan, who

belonged to the other major building block of the jihadist movement, were locked up alongside Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh in Tihar Jail. Sheikh was a British-born Pakistani member of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. Arrested and incarcerated for his role in kidnapping four foreign nationals as part of a plot to free other HuM members imprisoned in India, Sheikh later gained international notoriety when he engineered Daniel Pearl's kidnapping in Pakistan. In prison, Sheikh motivated Ansari and Asif Khan to wage jihad against India.<sup>64</sup>

Aftab Ansari was released from Tihar Jail in 1998. Asif Raza Khan's incarceration ended the following year in August. The two kept in contact during the interim, meeting during court appearances in New Delhi.<sup>65</sup> In December 1999, Pakistani militants belonging to HuM hijacked Indian Airlines flight 814 en route from Kathmandu to New Delhi. The plane was rerouted to Afghanistan, then governed by the Taliban, where the passengers were released in exchange for three militants incarcerated in India: Sheikh and Maulana Masood Azhar, both Pakistani members of HuM, and Mushtaq Zagar Latramin, a Kashmiri member of the same organization. Maulana Azhar promptly split from HuM to form Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).

With Sheikh back in Pakistan, Ansari jumped bail and traveled there via Dubai using a fake passport prepared for him by Asif Khan's contacts in the Bihar Regional Passport Office in Patna.<sup>66</sup> Although Sheikh had followed Maulana Azhar and joined JeM, Ansari also linked up with LeT's Dasta Mohammad bin Qasim led by Azam Cheema.<sup>67</sup> The three of them—Ansari, Cheema, and Sheikh—began plotting to free more militants imprisoned in India and to execute a series of kidnappings as a way of raising money to send recruits for training with LeT and JeM in Pakistan.<sup>68</sup> In return for recruiting foot soldiers and facilitating their travel, JeM allowed Ansari to use its assets in India for criminal operations.<sup>69</sup> To execute these plans, Ansari liaised with Asif Khan and his brother, Amir Raza Khan, who he connected with two Pakistani militants operating covertly in India.<sup>70</sup> The men began their own recruiting drive.

SIMl's rhetoric had hardened in the lead-up to the Babri mosque's

destruction. Playing on fears of Hindu chauvinism, the ongoing campaign of communal violence that accompanied it and the failure of the Indian political leadership to confront this movement or to protect Muslims during episodes of communal violence, the organization sought to position itself as a defender of the Muslim community.<sup>71</sup> The concept of self-defense was crucial, as was SIMI's provision to its members of "a sense of power and agency which they were denied in their actual lives."<sup>72</sup> Influenced by Maududi's vision and motivated by the perceived failure of the Indian secular state to protect its Muslim minority, SIMI declared that its objectives were to end India's secular state, its caste system and the polytheism of Hinduism, and to create a Muslim caliphate that would rule by sharia.<sup>73</sup> Its slogan became "Allah is our Lord, Mohammed is our commander, Quran is our constitution, Jihad is our path, and Shahadat [martyrdom] is our desire."<sup>74</sup>

As the 1990s progressed, SIMI leaders increasingly sought to link themselves—ideologically, rhetorically, and operationally—with the burgeoning transnational jihadist movement. In addition to providing the mood music to which Indian jihadists began to dance, the organization connected with Pakistani and Kashmiri militant groups that could provide military training.<sup>75</sup> The aim was to prepare for jihad, but SIMI did not initiate or execute its own terrorist attacks. Rather it became a feeder for the burgeoning Indian jihadist movement and a recruiting pool for Pakistan-based organizations like LeT looking to train would-be homegrown terrorists.<sup>76</sup> SIMI was independent and no group had a monopoly on its members. The organization worked closely with burgeoning networks belonging to Pakistan-based groups, however. For example, according to one former head of the Intelligence Bureau, beginning in the mid-1990s, some SIMI leaders recruited individuals who were then vetted by LeT-linked mosques in India before being sent to Pakistan for training.<sup>77</sup> On their return, some trainees maintained relationships with the Pakistani groups that trained them. Others became independent operators or coagulated into small, indigenous cells that acted unilaterally. Several of their number went on to lead the Indian Mujahideen.

Riyaz Shahbandri (aka Riyaz Bhatkal) led the IM at the time of writing. Riyaz grew up in the southwest Indian port town of Bhatkal, from where he takes his alias. According to a former superintendent of police in Bhatkal in the late 1990s who claims to have interrogated Riyaz during his tenure, he was involved in occasional criminality and already evinced radical leanings.<sup>78</sup> Based on Riyaz's police dossier and interviews with his relatives and friends of the family, Praveen Swami asserts that his brother-in-law's SIMI activism motivated Riyaz to become involved with the organization. Riyaz studied at the Saboo Siddiqui Engineering College in Mumbai and began spending time at SIMI offices in the city around 2001, when the organization was becoming increasingly extreme before the government ban. Riyaz's brother Iqbal, a follower of the Tablighi Jama'at, an Islamic proselytizing order, was another important influence on his drift toward radicalism.<sup>79</sup> At present, Iqbal also holds a leadership role in the Indian Mujahideen network.

Mohammad Sadique Israr Sheikh (Sadique Sheikh) was born in Azamgarh, in Uttar Pradesh, before his parents migrated to Mumbai in search of a better life. When they, along with thousands of others, were evicted from their homes to make way for the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), the family moved to the Cheeta Camp housing project. A planned slum in northeastern Mumbai, it was built explicitly for those families displaced by the BARC. Sadique Sheikh joined SIMI in 1996. Soon he, the Shahbandri brothers, and other SIMI members were engaging in heated discussions about Islam, communal violence, and the Babri mosque's destruction.<sup>80</sup> Abdul Subhan Qureshi was among the SIMI activists present for these meetings. From Rampur in Uttar Pradesh, Qureshi moved to Mumbai for high school, later earned a degree in industrial electronics, and subsequently specialized in software maintenance at the CMS Institute. A committed SIMI activist by 1998, he allegedly was one of the main organizers of its last public conference in 2001, where SIMI leaders advocated once again for jihad.<sup>81</sup> The men became acquainted not only with one another, but also with other Indian militants activating at the time.<sup>82</sup>

Despite these burgeoning connections, it was a relative of Sadique Sheikh's sister-in-law's relative, Mujahid Salim Islahi, who facilitated his path toward violence, providing the young SIMI member with Asif Khan's e-mail address. Soon after, the two met at Cheeta Camp. Through Asif Khan, Sadique Sheikh connected with Aftab Ansari. In April 2000, the two met in Kolkata and not long after Sadique Sheikh crossed the border into Bangladesh, where he remained in a safe house for several months. From there, he and several other would-be militants traveled to Pakistan, all of them carrying Pakistani passports. After training in LeT camps, Sadique Sheikh returned in July 2001 via Nepal to India, where he reconnected with Asif Khan and a Pakistani militant known as Zahid to begin plotting terrorist attacks.<sup>83</sup> Notably, Riyaz was seeking funding from Asif Khan to finance terrorist operations in India by this time as well.<sup>84</sup>

Azam Ghauri was killed during a shootout with the Gujarat police in 2000. Abdul Karim absconded to Pakistan via Bangladesh the same year. Despite being one of the founders of LeT's pan-India operations, he was a spent force in terms of his ability to operate inside India.<sup>85</sup> Instead, he became a mentor to a new generation of Indian recruits, some of who worked under his direct command, and key node in moving counterfeit currency into India to support terrorist operations.<sup>86</sup> The Delhi police arrested Asif Khan in late October 2001. His interrogation led to the arrest of additional Pakistan-trained militants from HuJI and LeT, and to the recovery of an arms cache. Asif Khan was wanted for multiple crimes in several states. After the West Bengal authorities briefly took him into custody he was remanded to the Gujarat police, who killed him in December, allegedly while he trying to escape.<sup>87</sup> Despite their exit from the battlefield, these men had helped build a movement poised for growth.

## **Phase 2**

By the end of the 1990s, it was becoming clear that the guerrilla war in Indian-administered Kashmir was not bearing fruit. At a November

1999 rally organized by LeT's parent, Markaz Dawat wal'lrshad, the group's leader Hafiz Mohammed Saeed announced the advent of a new phase in its pan-India operations.<sup>88</sup> In December 2000, two Pakistani LeT militants entered the historic Red Fort in Delhi, which at the time was being used as an army garrison, and killed two Indian soldiers and a guard before escaping. The low body count belies the large-scale significance of the attack. This was the first *fidayeen* assault conducted beyond the borders of Indian-administered Kashmir and took place in the heart of India's capital.<sup>89</sup> It was also the first attack against India outside Kashmir for which the group claimed credit. When interviewed by Pakistani journalist Zahid Hussein a month after the attack, Hafiz Saeed declared, "The action indicates that we have extended the jihad to India."<sup>90</sup>

In December 2001, JeM launched an assault on India's parliament.<sup>91</sup> Whereas LeT's attack had failed to engender any significant response from New Delhi, JeM's was significantly more brazen. Equally important, it also came after 9/11. New Delhi used America's invasion of Afghanistan to justify a more aggressive posture against Pakistan. India launched a massive military mobilization, Pakistan responded in kind, and the two countries came to the brink of war. U.S. pressure on Pakistan—which included a push to ban LeT, JeM, and other jihadist groups—helped avert a conflict. Although these bans were cosmetic, the international environment had changed such that blatantly overt support for militancy against India was untenable. As a result, the importance of Indian operatives who could launch their own attacks, and thus provide greater deniability to Pakistan and to Pakistan-based groups, grew. Empowering Indian militants to launch their own strikes also provided the potential to exacerbate already extant communal tensions in India, an objective that took on added resonance after the 2002 Gujarat riots.

Neither LeT nor JeM ceased launching *fidayeen* attacks. LeT remained more active, executing several successful assaults after 2001, including one in September 2002 intended to avenge the Gujarat riots.<sup>92</sup> However, its leaders are believed to have decided around 2003 to direct additional resources toward recruiting, training,

and supporting Indian jihadists to accelerate further the pace of plausibly deniable attacks against the hinterland.<sup>93</sup> According to a high-ranking IM commander who was arrested not long before this report went to press, Pakistani intelligence first considered increasing assistance for Indian militants the same year.<sup>94</sup>

The purpose of this endeavor, since dubbed the Karachi Project, allegedly was to help sustain a homegrown Indian network that could be more aggressive than Pakistani militants about launching attacks without incurring the negative international repercussions. David Headley, the captured LeT operative who performed reconnaissance on all of the targets hit during the 2008 Mumbai attacks, revealed the existence of the so-called Karachi Project, which he said included two set-ups dedicated to supporting operations in India using indigenous actors. He alleges that the militants in charge of these set-ups were in contact with and received assistance from ISI officers for their operations.<sup>95</sup>

Bangladesh also remained a major transit point for Indian and Pakistani militants, and ISI officers there were known to provide passports and money, and to intervene with local authorities when necessary.<sup>96</sup> Since the mid-1990s, control of the government in Dhaka has alternated between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). A military caretaker government was in place from late 2006 through early 2009. The Awami League historically was friendlier to India and less tolerant of Islamist-cum-jihadist actors than the BNP, but at different times both parties were guilty of turning a blind eye to jihadist activities aimed at India. This included domestic groups, such as HuJI-B, to some degree and more so foreign ones, such as LeT, that did not directly threaten the Bangladeshi government or state.

External support acted as a force multiplier for Indian militancy, rather than being a key driver of it. Indian jihadists remained motivated primarily by domestic grievances. By the turn of the millennium, some SIMI activists were already gravitating away from the organization out of frustration with its failure to move quickly enough



toward violently confronting the Hindu majority. Within weeks of the 9/11 attacks, India banned SIMI. This gave police the right to raid its offices, seize material without warrants, and prosecute people just for belonging to the group, which they quickly began to do in earnest.<sup>97</sup> It also drove SIMI members underground and triggered a cleavage between those who, though extreme, were not prepared to take up arms and hardliners looking to launch a terrorist campaign.<sup>98</sup>

Less than six months after the SIMI ban, in early 2002, a train carrying Hindu activists caught fire in the Godhra station in North Gujarat, killing fifty-eight people. The Hindu passengers were returning from Ayodhya, where they were campaigning for the construction of a temple honoring the Hindu god Ram on the site of a sixteenth-century mosque destroyed by Hindu militants in 1992. Allegations that a Muslim mob started the fire triggered widespread communal riots in the state of Gujarat afterward. As Human Rights Watch described it,

*Between February 28 and March 2, 2002, a three-day retaliatory killing spree by Hindus left hundreds dead and tens of thousands homeless and dispossessed, marking the country's worst religious bloodletting in a decade. The looting and burning of Muslim homes, shops, restaurants, and places of worship was also widespread.<sup>99</sup>*

The riots claimed the lives of 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus according to official statistics.<sup>100</sup> Unofficial estimates put the death toll as high as two thousand. In addition to the dead and injured, scores of Muslim girls and women were brutally raped before being mutilated and burnt to death. The police were implicated directly in some of the attacks, killing victims themselves or steering them toward murderous mobs. In other cases, they passively allowed the violence to occur. Witnesses later testified that calls for assistance were met with responses such as, "We don't have any orders to save you" and "We cannot help you, we have orders from above." In short, though undoubtedly motivated by communal sentiment, the police also

were reportedly acting on orders from their superiors. It was widely alleged that officials from the BJP-led state government, whose (then and current) chief minister Narendra Modi is the BJP's candidate for prime minister in the coming 2014 elections, encouraged and assisted Hindus involved in violence.<sup>101</sup> In 2012, a state legislator and former state education minister who was among Modi's confidants was one of thirty-two people convicted for their role in the riots.<sup>102</sup>

The involvement of state officials followed by the failure to bring them to justice also "confirmed the worst fears of the already-radicalized SIMI youth."<sup>103</sup> Not only was the violence barbarous and were the accusations of official complicity numerous, the Gujarat riots were also captured on video. The riots mobilized a section of India's Muslim population already prone to radicalization at a time when Pakistani groups and inchoate indigenous networks were increasing recruitment efforts.<sup>104</sup> According to police and intelligence officials, almost every arrested militant they interrogated mentioned the Babri mosque, Gujarat riots, or both as a major motivator. The riots are mentioned frequently in later Indian Mujahideen messages, including a fourteen-page text entitled "The Rise of Jihad, Revenge of Gujarat."<sup>105</sup>

### ***NextGen Jihad***

The inchoate networks formed during the 1990s matured, new ones were born, and, though Hyderabad and Maharashtra remained key geographical nodes, the jihadist movement became more far-flung. A few men emerged as important focal points in these disparate networks, which were often based on familial ties, criminal connections, and associations with SIMI or other Muslim organizations. Some of the militants who constituted these focal points went on to form the Indian Mujahideen. Others were or became notable LeT operatives. Still others remained independent activists with their own networks, but often with ties to Pakistani militant groups, especially LeT, the HuJI branch in Bangladesh (HuJI-B) or both. The nuances that defined, and in some cases separated, the types of networks these militant focal points formed

are explored in greater detail later in this report. Here, the purpose is to begin distinguishing among the major networks, discuss how and where they evolved, and to identify points of continuity with the previous phase. We look first at the activities of proper LeT operatives, then at a network centered around an independent operator in Hyderabad with ties to LeT and HuJI-B, and finally at the network that coalesced into the Indian Mujahideen.

Based in Uttar Pradesh, an LeT operative Salim (aka Salar) is alleged to have sent up to twenty Indian youths to Pakistan for training before police killed him in 2006.<sup>106</sup> Sabauddin Ahmed, from Bihar, is his most famous recruit. He was among those who flocked to LeT after the Gujarat riots in 2002.<sup>107</sup> That year, one of his fellow students at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), where SIMI was established, convinced him of the need to “fight against the injustice meted out to Muslims” and introduced him to Salim.<sup>108</sup> Sabauddin returned to India in 2004 via Kathmandu, Dhaka, Colombo, and the United Arab Emirates, and established residence in Bangalore.<sup>109</sup> One year later he and a Pakistani commander known as Abu Hamza (an alias) launched a *fidayeen* assault at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). Abu Hamza escaped to Pakistan and Sabauddin fled to Nepal, where he went on to become a top LeT commander and allegedly oversaw the movement of operatives transiting between India and Pakistan.<sup>110</sup> Sabauddin’s experience was relatively exceptional—most Indian militants enlisted by LeT were used to support or execute bombings, not high-profile *fidayeen* assaults.

Salar’s base in the environs around AMU was one obvious area for recruitment. Mumbai was another. India’s largest city and its financial center, it is the capital of Maharashtra, India’s wealthiest state and its second most populous. Mumbai draws millions of migrants every year, fueling fierce competition for jobs and limited state resources and, with it, the rise of communal organizations such as the Shiv Sena. Founded in 1966, the Shiv Sena demanded preferential treatment for Marathi-speaking Maharastrians over migrants—Hindu or Muslim—to the city. Within a decade, however, Shiv Sena was attempting to expand beyond its Maharashtra base. It evolved from

advocating a purely Marathi agenda to supporting the broader Hindu nationalist and, relatedly, became involved in communal violence.

Many of the Muslims living in the city were already suffering from real and relative deprivation, and had experienced or at least lived in the shadow of communal violence that plagued the city on multiple occasions. Because of the sheer size of the population, the pool of possible would-be militants was larger than in many other areas. Moreover, the city's status as a magnet for migrants ultimately enabled it to become a melting pot for those who did become involved in Islamist militancy. It also enabled foreign operatives from Pakistan or Bangladesh to blend in easily. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as the largest city in India and its financial capital, Mumbai offered a plethora of possible targets for terrorist attacks. For example, the city was hit by a string of bombings in 2003. LeT members in Dubai are believed to have recruited the three Indians responsible for the August 25 blasts at the Gateway of India and Zaveri Bazaar in South Mumbai that killed fifty-two people.<sup>111</sup> The attack was intended to avenge those Muslims killed during the Gujarat riots.<sup>112</sup>

Rahil Abdul Rehman Sheikh, a native of Beed in Maharashtra who relocated to Mumbai, became another key LeT recruiter. Within a year of the Gujarat riots, he was arranging training for dozens of freshly motivated would-be militants. Many had filled SIMI's ranks before its ban by India.<sup>113</sup> Sheikh's recruits often flew to Tehran (pretending to be Shia pilgrims) and then crossed the border into Balochistan.<sup>114</sup> In addition to recruiting and facilitating travel to Pakistan, Sheikh also coordinated the receipt of weapons and explosives coming from Pakistan for use in terrorist attacks.

Syed Zabiuddin Ansari (aka Abu Jundal), a SIMI member also from Beed and one of Sheikh's recruits, was tasked to take delivery of a shipment coming into Aurangabad.<sup>115</sup> However, in April 2005, the Maharashtra police intercepted the massive weapons cache, which included 24 kilograms of RDX, along with grenades, assault rifles and ammunition, all shipped across the Indian Ocean by LeT.<sup>116</sup> Additional

consignments were recovered in the days that followed. In total, the Aurangabad arms haul, as it is known, included 43 kilograms of RDX, sixteen AK-forty-seven assault rifles, 3,200 live cartridges, sixty-two magazines for the rifles, and fifty hand grenades, making it one of the largest ever in Maharashtra.<sup>117</sup> Incredibly, the Aurangabad arms haul was only part of a larger quantity of explosives LeT was smuggling into western India.<sup>118</sup> For example, additional shipments flowed into Gujarat.<sup>119</sup> Rahil Sheikh and Ansari absconded separately to Pakistan.<sup>120</sup> The latter rose through LeT's ranks and was in its control room during the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Later, he became a LeT interface with the Indian Mujahideen.

Many of the new Indian recruits motivated by the communal violence in Gujarat trained with LeT, but others were steered to JeM and HuJI. As Praveen Swami, a noted expert on Indian jihadist networks, observed, this was a "fluid dispersion of assets across organizational lines not seen before the 2002 [Gujarat] pogrom."<sup>121</sup> However, it is also important to note that, unlike LeT, Pakistan's Deobandi groups, including JeM and HuJI, experienced internal turmoil after the Musharraf regime supported the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to topple the Taliban. Moreover, LeT had the best Indian networks of any Pakistani jihadist group and so was best positioned to leverage the heightened interest among a subset of Indian Muslims in militancy after Gujarat. D-Company assisted with recruitment and facilitation. According to the testimony of Javed Hamidullah Siddiqui, a mafia operative arrested in 2004, it arranged passage to Pakistan for new recruits via Bangkok and Dhaka.<sup>122</sup> Rasool Khan Yakub Khan Pathan, a mobster better known by his alias Rasool "Party" with long-standing connections to the now Pakistan-based Dawood Ibrahim, coordinated the process, receiving many of the recruits on their arrival in Karachi and helping to steer them toward the different militant groups ready to offer training.<sup>123</sup> It is unclear whether Pathan was doing this on Dawood's behalf, with his blessing or whether this was an independent effort.

A significant number of those who leveraged connections to Pathan came from Hyderabad. The capital of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad

was nominally independent when India was under British rule, led by a Muslim nizam but with a majority Hindu population.<sup>124</sup> The nizam declared his intention to remain independent after Partition, but the Indian army invaded in September 1948. Once his forces were defeated, the nizam agreed to Hyderabad's accession to India. Communal tension had simmered in the decades leading up to India's independence, and the new state became a flashpoint for Hindu-Muslim violence thereafter. Communal parties—Hindu and Muslim—predominated in the city's politics and violence became institutionalized. Although communal parties often organized eruptions of violence, until the 1990s this took the form of rioting rather than terrorism attacks.

Azam Ghauri, one of TIM's most prominent members and LeT's first Indian operatives, was a Hyderabadite and his return to India in 1998

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**Familial linkages with Pakistan, where many Hyderabadites fled following Partition, also helped to make the city an important safe haven and area of activity for Pakistani militants who infiltrated into India.**

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heralded the advent of terrorism in his native city. Ghauri leveraged strong anti-Hindu sentiment and drew on the Islamist infrastructure that existed. Notably, Hyderabad was an important ideological focal point for Lashkar-e-Taiba, which, because it had been under the rule of a nizam, considers the city to be occupied Muslim land. Familial linkages with Pakistan, where many Hyderabadites fled following

Partition, also helped to make the city an important safe haven and area of activity for Pakistani militants who infiltrated into India. Hence, Hyderabadites remained active contributors to the burgeoning Indian jihadist project after Ghauri's death in 2000.

Beginning in September 2002, at least fourteen men from Hyderabad leveraged connections to Rasool "Party" to acquire training in Pakistan.<sup>125</sup> Mohammad Abdul Sahed (aka Shahid Bilal) was at the center of the network sending these men for training. Born in

Bangladesh, Sahed became a resident of Hyderabad and a follower of Maulana Nasiruddin, a prominent local cleric who founded the Tehreek-Tahaffuz-e-Shaair-e-Islam (protection of Islamic shrines and monuments). Muslim persecution at home and abroad was a central theme of Nasiruddin's sermons, which sometimes urged Hyderabad youth to rebuild the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. The Gujarat riots fueled the fire in Nasiruddin's sermons and contributed to Sahed's recruitment efforts. He leveraged connections to Rasool "Party" to facilitate travel and training there.<sup>126</sup> Arrested militants, such as Sheikh Abdul Khaja (aka Amjad), who took control of Sahed's network after Sahed was mysteriously gunned down in Pakistan years later, told interrogators they were met at Karachi airport on arrival, escorted out of the airport without going through immigration, and then taken for training, often in LeT camps.<sup>127</sup>

Sahed and a number of associates assassinated Gujarat Home Minister Haren Pandya in 2003 to avenge the communal riots that took place on his watch the previous year.<sup>128</sup> Thereafter, Sahed fled to Pakistan, where he lived under Rasool Party's protection and continued to facilitate recruitment of Hyderabadis for training in LeT camps. Sahed's brother relocated to Saudi Arabia, where he assisted with these efforts.<sup>129</sup> Despite sending recruits to LeT camps, Sahed never joined the group, instead remaining independent and also working with HuJI's Bangladeshi branch, HuJI-B.

Sahed fled via Bangladesh, and appears to have returned there on occasion to recruit and facilitate training in Pakistan for Bangladeshi militants. He also turned to HuJI-B when weapons were needed for attacks in India, in return using his Hyderabad-based network to provide HuJI-B cells assistance with logistics, including the provision of safe houses and a communications infrastructure. During the early to mid-2000s, cells connected to Sahed's network and to HuJI-B launched a number of bomb attacks. This included engineering a suicide bombing in Hyderabad. In October 2004, the Gujarat police killed a man named Salim, the son of another firebrand cleric, outside the Andhra Pradesh police's counterterrorism Special Task Force headquarters in Hyderabad when they came to arrest Nasiruddin for

his alleged role in the Haren Pandya murder case. Sahed traveled to Bangladesh in 2005 to recruit a suicide bomber. Leveraging his HuJI-B contacts, Sahed enlisted a Bangladeshi national, who blew himself up outside the Andhra Pradesh police's counterterrorism Special Task Force headquarters in October 2005.<sup>130</sup>

The Indian Mujahideen launched its first attack in early 2005, but had begun coalescing several years earlier. In December 2001, the men who ultimately came together to form the IM constituted only another small cell with ties to militant groups in Pakistan and Bangladesh. After the Gujarat police gunned down Asif Khan that month, Amir Raza Khan established the Asif Raza Commando Force (ARCF) in his honor and set out to avenge his brother. He enlisted several Indians, including Sadique Sheikh, as well as two Pakistani militants to execute an attack targeting the police. With Asif Khan's death, Aftab Ansari had become the senior member of this cohort. With his blessing, militants operating under the ARCF banner opened fire on police officers guarding the American Center in Kolkata, killing six of them and injuring fourteen other people.<sup>131</sup>

The two Pakistanis were killed in Bihar, where they planned to escape across the border into Nepal.<sup>132</sup> Aftab Ansari, Amir Raza Khan, and Sadique Sheikh all fled to Dubai, where Ansari's luck ran out.<sup>133</sup> He was arrested and became the first militant extradited to India from a Persian Gulf country.<sup>134</sup> The remaining two men connected with Riyaz Shahbandri in Dubai.<sup>135</sup> With Ansari in custody and Asif Khan dead, Amir Raza Khan assumed the leadership reins. In early 2002, he successfully relocated to Pakistan, where he became the key interface between LeT and the indigenous networks that evolved into the Indian Mujahideen.<sup>136</sup> On Amir Raza Khan's instructions, Sadique Sheikh returned to India in late 2002 to launch another recruitment drive, this time focused on his native Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh. During the next year, he transited between India, Dubai, and Pakistan, enlisting recruits who would form the sinews of the Indian Mujahideen.<sup>137</sup> At the same time, the Shahbandri brothers were recruiting in the Pune–Maharashtra region and also leveraging



their connections to Amir Raza Khan to enable recruits' travel to and from Pakistan.<sup>138</sup>

In his new role as a Pakistan-based LeT interface for Indian jihadist networks, Amir Raza Khan facilitated training and travel for recruits via the provision of fake passports and financing.<sup>139</sup> He also played a prominent role in procuring explosives, once again leveraging his late brother's recruits. Operatives from HuJI-B had introduced Asif Khan to Jalaluddin Mullah, an Indian from West Bengal better known by his alias Babu Bhai, in 1994 when Babu Bhai was still a student at a Bangladesh madrassa. Six years later, Asif Khan hired Babu Bhai to work for him at a shoe shop, and used the opportunity to radicalize his employee. In April 2001, Babu Bhai agreed to go for training in Pakistan, traveling there via Bangladesh and meeting Aftab Ansari in advance of his departure. He reportedly trained at a HuJI camp in Kotli, returning the following month. The short duration of his stay suggests Babu Bhai was not given extensive weapons or explosives training, and his ultimate role as a smuggler supports this contention. After his involvement in Asif Khan's kidnapping of Partho Roy Burman, vice chairman of Khadim Shoe Company, in which Aftab Ansari and Sadique Sheikh were also involved, Babu Bhai went underground. He resurfaced in 2003 and, on the instructions of a HuJI-B operative, traveled to Bangladesh. Amir Raza Khan, having traveled from Pakistan, met him there and instructed him to begin recruiting Indians for training in Pakistan and to help HuJI-B transit operatives and RDX into India.<sup>140</sup>

Prosecutors allege that in 2004 Riyaz Shahbandri brought various operators from the burgeoning jihadist movement together for a retreat in Bhatkal, their hometown in the state of Karnataka. His brother Iqbal, Sadique Sheikh, and others, some of who also trained with LeT, were present.<sup>141</sup> Together, these men formed the core of the Indian Mujahideen network. The same year, Babu Bhai helped to smuggle twenty packets (each weighing around 500 grams) of RDX to Varanasi. Located on the banks of the Ganges River in Uttar Pradesh, Hindus consider it to be one of the holiest seven

sacred cities. He delivered the RDX to a man investigators believe was Sadique Sheikh.<sup>142</sup> On February 23, 2005, a pressure cooker containing RDX exploded in Varanasi at the Dasashwadmedha Ghat, the holiest bathing place for Hindus on the banks of the Ganges.<sup>143</sup> It killed nine people. The Indian Mujahideen network had activated.

### **Phase 3**

India and Pakistan initiated the Composite Dialogue in 2004 to address the bilateral issues between them, and began back channel negotiations to address territorial disputes as well. The Musharraf regime in Pakistan began making a more consistent effort to curtail militant infiltration into Indian-administered Kashmir. By 2006 even the Indian defense minister acknowledged Pakistan's contribution to the reduction in violence there.<sup>144</sup> However, if Pakistan eliminated its proxy capability this would rob it of what the security establishment perceived to be strategic assets for use against India, which it still viewed as an existential threat. Simultaneously, the need for deniability had grown. The infrastructure in Pakistan that supported LeT-led or -supported attacks against India remained extant.

Domestically, the Indian establishment could not accept or admit that its citizens, acting on their own rather than on behalf of Pakistan, might be responsible for terrorist attacks. Foreign HuJI-B operatives were blamed for the IM's Varanasi bombing.<sup>145</sup> Confusingly, police also asserted that it was not an attack at all, arresting a tea stall owner whose cooking cylinder was said to have exploded due to leaking gas that caught fire.<sup>146</sup> In reality, the Azamgarh module, as it became known because its ranks drew heavily from those Sadique Sheikh recruited from that area, had placed two pressure cookers containing RDX at the site. Mohammed Atif Ameen allegedly built the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) with the help of Arif Badr, a former SIMI member who later developed into a bomb maker for the Indian Mujahideen. Ameen and Shahnawaz Alam planted the IEDs, one of which failed to detonate, receiving logistical support from several other colleagues.<sup>147</sup>

The use of RDX, and historic hands-on involvement of foreign militant groups, helps explain the authorities' initial confusion. However, additional IM attacks followed during the next three years and, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the authorities continued to blame foreign militants. Privately, intelligence officials admit that they wrongly attributed the increased number of attacks almost exclusively to HuJI-B or LeT, explaining that they often chalked this up to compensation for reduced violence in Indian-administered Kashmir. They also admit to having a blind spot regarding the possibility that Indian militants could act semi-independently and that this hampered counterterrorism efforts.<sup>148</sup>

As the Indian Mujahideen became a more potent force, its needs in terms of external support shrank, though they did not disappear. LeT, in some cases HuJI-B, and occasionally JeM, continued separate recruiting efforts and provided non-IM recruits with funding, guidance, and other logistical support for attacks. Thus, India was confronting a hybrid threat: from foreign militant organizations, primarily LeT, using Indian operatives to launch attacks or support operations, and from the Indian Mujahideen network, which executed unilateral attacks with varying degrees of external support. In addition to discrete operations, these networks also sometimes converged to carry out joint attacks, further complicating investigations for the authorities.

### ***Indian Mujahideen: Halcyon Days***

In February 2006, a bomb shook the Ahmedabad railway platform in Gujarat.

Fayyiz Kagzi, a LeT operative who had belonged to Rahil Sheikh's network, allegedly planted the device containing 900 grams of RDX.<sup>149</sup> The attack is notable because it was one of the few executed by LeT and not the IM during this period. Notwithstanding the 2006 Mumbai blasts, which may have been a joint LeT-IM attack, and the 2008 Bangalore blasts, conducted by southern Indians with LeT and

some IM support, the Indian Mujahideen is believed to have been responsible for ten bomb attacks between 2005 and 2008:<sup>150</sup>

- the bombing at the Dasashwadmedha Ghat in Varanasi on February 23, 2005;<sup>151</sup>
- the bombing of the Shramjeevi Express on July 28, 2005;
- the serial blasts in Delhi during Diwali on October 29, 2005;<sup>152</sup>
- the serial blasts in Varanasi on March 7, 2006;
- the low-intensity blasts in Gorakhpur on May 22, 2007;
- the twin bombings in Hyderabad on August 25, 2007;
- the coordinated bombings of the Varanasi, Faizabad, and Lucknow courthouses on November 23, 2007;
- the serial blasts in Jaipur on May 13, 2008;
- the serial blasts in Ahmedabad and failed attempt to bomb Surat on July 26, 2008; and
- the serial blasts in Delhi on September 13, 2008.

The Azamgarh module executed nine of these attacks and, if Sadique Sheikh and other captured IM members are to be believed, the 2006 Mumbai blasts. Its members hailed from the Sarai Mir and Sanjarpur villages of Azamgarh district in Uttar Pradesh. Led by Sadique Sheikh and Atif Ameen, these men were responsible for conducting surveillance, selecting the specific targets, planting the explosive devices and, in many instances, building them as well. With the Azamgarh module active in the north, the Shahbandri brothers increased their recruitment efforts in southern India. This included establishing a module in Pune, Maharashtra, where the two were based for part of 2007.<sup>153</sup> Mohsin Choudhary, who met Iqbal at a religious event in 2004 and became another high-ranking IM leader, is believed to have assisted with these efforts.<sup>154</sup> Under the direction of Riyaz Shahbandri, the Pune module executed the 2007 twin bombings in Hyderabad that killed forty-four people and lent

assistance for the LeT-led 2008 Bangalore blasts that left two dead.<sup>155</sup>

The IM network remained relatively decentralized and fairly compartmentalized, but portions of it became increasingly cohesive.<sup>156</sup> In an e-mail dictated by Riyaz Shahbandri (using the nom de guerre Guru-Al-Hindi) and sent to claim responsibility for the May 2008 Jaipur bombings, the IM leader claimed:

*Up to now the Indian mujahideen were not in an organized form but by the help of Allah, subhana wa taala, we have succeeded in establishing a real force to attack the polytheist. We have divided the Indian Mujahideen into three wings: 1. Shahabuddin Gouri Brigade:- to attack Southern India; 2. Mahmood Ghaznvi Brigade:- to attack Northern India; 3. Shaheed Al-Zarqawi Brigade:- to carry out suicide attack.<sup>157</sup>*

Atif Ameen led the Mohammad Gaznavi Brigade, which was built around the Azamgarh module and also known as the Northern Brigade. After the November 2007, coordinated bombings, the Indian Mujahideen added the media group responsible for claiming its attacks via missives electronic and print media. Following the Mohammad Gaznavi Brigade's successful attack on Ahmedabad in July 2008, and the Shahabuddin Brigade's failure to execute bombings in Surat on the same day, Atif Ameen was put in charge of the Shaheed-Al-Zarqawi brigade as well. He allegedly received weapons and ammunition that month and began preparing members to execute *fidayeen* attacks, but these never came to fruition.<sup>158</sup>

All of the explosive devices used up to and including the July 2006 Mumbai blasts contained RDX that investigators now believe Babu Bhai smuggled across the Bangladesh border.<sup>159</sup> While the Azamgarh module used this explosive material in its bombings, Riyaz Shahbandri worked to develop a logistical support base in southern India.<sup>160</sup> These efforts paid off after June 2006 when Babu Bhai was arrested and the explosives supply line from Bangladesh broke down. The lag between the July 2006 bombings in Mumbai and the next Indian Mujahideen attack, which occurred the following

May, is notable. In that time, Riyaz Shahbandri successfully sourced ammonium nitrate from Karnataka.<sup>161</sup> Ahmad Siddi Bapa (aka Yasin Bhatkal and Shahrukh), another early recruit who went on to become the IM commander in India, was tasked with transmitting ammonium nitrate used for all of the attacks from 2007 to 2008 as well as some of the IEDs constructed for those operations.<sup>162</sup> After Siddi Bapa's arrest in 2013, he told investigators that, to avoid leaving an even bigger trail, the Indian Mujahideen sourced all of its explosive material from one place in Karnataka rather than from different parts of the country.<sup>163</sup> Tapping into locally sourced explosive material enabled the Indian Mujahideen to become increasingly self-reliant. External actors in Pakistan may have provided supplementary financing and limited logistical assistance, but during its heyday from 2007 to 2008, the Indian Mujahideen was for all intents and purposes operating as an indigenous terrorist movement.

In 2007, to distinguish itself from LeT and HuJI-B, which were still being blamed for its terrorist campaign, the Indian Mujahideen began claiming credit via e-mail for its attacks. This was also likely intended to emphasize the IM's homegrown qualities and highlight the domestic grievances that fueled its rise, which were obscured when foreign militants were blamed for attacks. Finally, IM leaders likely believed that acknowledging any association with external actors would taint their cause domestically. Thus, the IM's first manifesto, released immediately prior to the November 2007 bombings, stated explicitly, "we are not any foreign mujahidin nor even we have any attachment with neighboring countries agency like ISI, LET, HUJI etc. ... we are purely Indian."<sup>164</sup> The reality was more complicated. IM members were not foreign and many did not have an attachment with Pakistani or Bangladeshi militant groups or the ISI. But their leaders had benefited from external support and maintained ties to these various foreign entities.

As part of their larger effort to ensure the motivation for their attacks was understood, IM leaders used these manifestos to obtain other objectives as well. First, whether or not they were involved in other nefarious actions, many of those arrested for these attacks were

innocent of them. The Indian Mujahideen sought to make that clear and demanded their release. Second, in addition to claiming attacks they had executed, IM leaders rejected accusations of involvement in strikes erroneously ascribed to them. Specifically, Hindu extremists upset at the state's failure to curb Islamist terrorism bombed a Muslim cemetery adjacent to a mosque in Malegaon, Maharashtra, in 2006 and, separately, the Samjhauta Express and Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad in 2007.<sup>165</sup> Although Muslims were killed in each instance, the Indian authorities wrongly attributed the attacks to jihadist attempts at sowing communal tension. The Indian Mujahideen began its first manifesto by stating the attacks it had engineered:

- Indian Mujahidin: Our Big Successful Attacks In India
- Delhi 29/10
- Varanasi March
- 7/11 Mumbai Local Train Blast
- Hyderabad Gokul Chat & Park
- Blast not Executed by Us nor by any Muslim
- Malegaon
- Samjhauta Exp
- Mecca Masjid Hyderabad<sup>166</sup>

Early manifestos were short, crude in presentation and language. The final two, sent in 2008, were significantly longer and more clearly written and contained several paragraphs of Islamic blessings (in Arabic and English) at the beginning. Mohammad Mansoor Ashgar Peerbhoy told investigators that Iqbal Shahbandri, considered more of an ideologue than his brother, dictated the language in Urdu, another member translated that language into English, and he (Peerbhoy) corrected grammatical errors.<sup>167</sup> A fourth member created an Indian Mujahideen logo and additional graphics. These final missives also included video.<sup>168</sup>

Initially, e-mails to the media were sent from cyber cafes. According to Peerbhoy, a software engineer, who took command of the IM's

Media Group after these first claims of credit were made, Riyaz wanted him to design a website so that the Indian Mujahideen could proclaim its mission. Peerbhoy warned that the Internet protocol (IP) address would be easily traced. The plan was discarded and the IM continued to rely on e-mail. However, at Peerbhoy's recommendation, the IM abandoned the use of cyber cafes in favor of driving around in search of publicly available Wi-Fi systems. Reconnaissance was done in advance to locate an area where Wi-Fi was available. Timers were used for the bombings, which enabled those sending e-mails—whether from cyber cafes or a car via a Wi-Fi hotspot—to time their media operations accordingly.<sup>169</sup>

In addition to indigenizing and developing more sophisticated propaganda, in 2008 the IM reached its operational apogee. Its attacks that year involved larger numbers of militants and, on average, killed more people. Although it continued to become more cohesive, even at this point all the entities acting under the IM label were not in touch with each other.<sup>170</sup> Yet the Ameen-led Azamgarh module had become a relatively high-functioning militant entity. Thus, destroying it would cause a crippling blow to the entire IM network.

During an investigation into the September 2008 serial blasts in Delhi, the police collected a mobile phone number connected to Atif Ameen. Officers went to his last known address at Batla House, Delhi. According to one interrogation report, at least thirteen Indian Mujahideen members were based there at the time.<sup>171</sup> Five of them were present when the police arrived. A shootout ensued. Ameen and another militant, Mohammad Sajid, were killed, two others were arrested, and one suspect escaped.<sup>172</sup> The information gleaned from the Batla House encounter dealt a serious blow to the IM networks, scattering members and assets, and leading to a wave of arrests that included Mohammed Sadique Israr Sheikh.<sup>173</sup> It also forced Riyaz Shahbandri to flee to Pakistan along with his brother Iqbal.<sup>174</sup> This brought the bloodiest chapter in India's indigenous jihadist movement to a close. It did not, however, spell the end of the Indian Mujahideen or the threat from indigenous jihadism.



## Phase 4

The information gleaned from the Batla House encounter dealt a serious blow to IM networks, scattering members and assets, and leading to a wave of arrests that included Mohammed Sadique Israr Sheikh.<sup>189</sup> Key IM leaders, including the Shahbandri brothers, fled to Pakistan. Some traveled there through Bangladesh, others by way of Nepal.<sup>190</sup> The wave of arrests and forced migrations threw the IM into disarray and contributed to an almost two-year pause in attacks. According to Siddi Bapa, who became the IM's on-the-ground commander after the Shahbandri brothers fled and Sadique Sheikh was arrested, this made regenerating the network difficult.<sup>191</sup>

In November 2008, two months after the Batla House encounter, ten Pakistani LeT gunmen rampaged through Mumbai, striking two luxury hotels, a café popular with foreign tourists, one of the country's busiest railway stations, and a Jewish community center. One hundred and sixty-six people were killed in what was one of the most successful terrorist spectacles since 9/11.<sup>192</sup> The attacks garnered worldwide media attention and derailed a fragile peace process between India and Pakistan. LeT came under heavy pressure from the Pakistan Army and ISI to lie low following the Mumbai attacks.<sup>193</sup> According to David Headley, it was not until almost a year later that the group was cleared to execute another attack.<sup>194</sup>

In the meantime, Bangladesh, historically a major staging and transit point for Indian and Pakistani militants, became an increasingly difficult operating area.<sup>195</sup> Bangladeshi authorities began cracking down on domestic jihadists, including HuJI-B, after 2005 when some of them launched a series of bomb blasts across the country.<sup>196</sup> In 2008, the Awami League won a landslide election in which it campaigned on closer ties with India and the promise of a more thorough crackdown on Islamist militancy. Meanwhile, New Delhi was reaching out to improve relations with Dhaka, and ratcheted up the pressure on its weaker neighbor after Mumbai. The United

## CASE STUDIES IN CONFUSION: 2006 AND 2008 SERIAL BLASTS

The 2006 Mumbai and 2008 Bangalore serial blasts capture the complex and sometimes confounding nature of the jihadist scene in India. On July 7, 2006, militants bombed seven commuter trains running on Mumbai's suburban railway. The explosions occurred over the course of approximately ten minutes and killed more than two hundred people, making it the second deadliest terrorist attack in India's history after the 1993 blasts executed by Dawood Ibrahim. Charge sheets, official dossiers, and media and investigative reports differ widely from one another, naming a raft of different planners, coordinators, triggermen, and supporters from IM, LeT, and SIMI.<sup>175</sup>

It remains unclear at the time of writing precisely who engineered the 2006 Mumbai blasts and what role the IM and LeT each played. After his arrest, Indian Mujahideen commander Sadique Sheikh told investigators the Atif Ameen-led Azamgarh module was responsible for the Mumbai blasts.<sup>176</sup> Shahzad Ahmed, an IM operative who escaped during the Batla House encounter but was later arrested, corroborated Sadique Sheikh's confession.<sup>177</sup> An official dossier about the IM concurs, adding that Riyaz Shabandri is alleged to have delivered the RDX. Yet it also suggests the bombing may have been carried out at the direction of Pakistan-based actors.<sup>178</sup> Two LeT operatives who have since been arrested confessed separately to the U.S. authorities and the Indian authorities that the group worked with the Indian militants responsible for the blasts.<sup>179</sup> Acknowledging the opacity of the attacks, it might be best to think of them as conceived and possibly supported by LeT, but executed by indigenous militants on which the group chose (or felt compelled) to rely.

Confusion has also surrounded the Indian Mujahideen's role in the 2008 serial blasts in Bangalore. Some analysts attribute them to the IM's southern brigade, but evidence suggests that the bombings were carried out by a quasi-independent LeT supported-cum-instructed outfit called Jamiat-ul-Ansarul Muslimeen (JIAM) that also benefited from ad hoc IM assistance. T. Naseer, a would-be militant from Kerala, inspired by Abdul Nasser Mahdani, a cleric who led the Kerala-based Peoples Democratic Party, led JIAM and allegedly devised the plot. Sarfaraz Nawaz, a former SIMI member also from Kerala who immigrated to Oman, claims he was inspired to become involved in militancy by Naseer during a visit home in 2006. Once back in Oman, he linked up with LeT.<sup>180</sup>

In 2008, Naseer approached Nawaz about securing funding for simultaneous bombings in Chennai and Bangalore. Nawaz connected him with LeT's commander for the Indian Ocean rim, Rashid Abdullah (aka Wali), who was interested in using Naseer to recruit for training in Kashmir. Abdullah agreed to provide money and guidance for an attack first, but suggested limiting the operation to Bangalore because a simultaneous operation required extensive planning, logistical support, and a larger cell.<sup>181</sup> He appears to have viewed this as a low-cost enterprise with a potentially high return, but sought to limit the damage in the event something went wrong.<sup>182</sup> Abdullah provided advice for Naseer, via Nawaz, including that he not participate directly, that he leave Bangalore before the operation, and that he use as few men as possible.<sup>183</sup> However, the guidance proffered did not include comprehensive instruction on how to build a bomb. Nor did anyone in JIAM actually receive explosive material. Instead, Naseer and several others broke into a store and stole 250 kilograms of ammonium nitrate, forty detonators, and gelatine sticks.<sup>184</sup>

JIAM was not part of the Indian Mujahideen network, but several of its members had ties to those who were. Naseer admits to meeting Riyaz, who, he claims, "asked me if I could spare some boys for jihadi work but I refused to send anyone, as my boys were busy."<sup>185</sup> The IM leader allegedly enlisted Abdul Sattar, an experienced bomb-maker previously associated with LeT to prepare forty improvised explosive devices, fifteen of which were used for the Bangalore blasts.<sup>186</sup> When considering this assistance, however, it is important to note that Sattar was an independent operator whose son was part of Naseer's cell. Thus it is questionable whether this really amounts to IM assistance.

Of the fifteen IED's made, most failed to detonate due to poor fabrication and faulty timers.<sup>187</sup> Only one person was killed. T. Naseer escaped to Bangladesh, where LeT and HuJI-B members helped him hide out, but the authorities ultimately caught up with him.<sup>188</sup> Nawaz was arrested too. The information gleaned from these and other arrests provided important insights into the intricate networks at the heart of the Indian jihadist movement as well as the way in which larger entities can leverage and empower smaller ones like JIAM.

States joined India and put significant pressure on Bangladesh to take action against LeT, while also offering it valuable military and counterterrorism assistance to do so. In short, Mumbai catalyzed a crackdown and, with HuJI-B members arrested or deep underground, Bangladesh counterterrorism efforts expanded to include LeT. According to multiple Indian, U.S., and Bangladeshi officials, those not arrested, pushed across the border into India or forced underground fled the country. These gains remain reversible, but in the short-term made Bangladesh less hospitable terrain for militancy.

As Bangladesh became a more difficult operating environment, concerns grew that Nepal's importance as a transit point for militants executing terrorist attacks in India would increase.<sup>197</sup> A serious lack of governance exists in Nepal, which shares a border with India that can be crossed with little trouble for the right price. It historically had been a transit and logistical base and continues to be. However, little evidence suggests that it has elevated to the degree feared after Bangladesh became less hospitable to LeT. On the other hand, the Gulf remains an important and sometimes underappreciated support base and transit point for Pakistani and Indian militants looking to launch attacks against India.<sup>198</sup> Several captured operatives confirmed ISI facilitation for Indian militants based in or transiting through Gulf countries.<sup>199</sup> This included the Shahbandri brothers, who allegedly shuttled back and forth from Pakistan to Sharjah in the UAE before ultimately settling in Karachi.<sup>200</sup>

### ***Beyond Batla House***

Pakistan's provision of safe haven to Indian operatives on the run has been a key component of its support. The ability to find safe haven in Pakistan and to travel from there to the Gulf, specifically Saudi Arabia and the UAE, enabled IM leaders to regroup and rebuild their networks. With Atif Ameen dead and Mohammad Sadique Israr Sheikh in prison, Ahmad Siddi Bapa emerged as the on-the-ground commander in India. He took control of the Pune module and built another, alternatively called the Bihar or Darbhanga module.<sup>201</sup> One

captured operative told his interrogators the Shahbandri brothers were training recruits from south India in Pakistan, though it is unclear whether this information is accurate and, if so, whether they fed into the Pune module on returning.<sup>202</sup> Scattered reports indicate the Bihar module included youth previously uninvolved in militancy or at least not wanted by the authorities for such activities and drew heavily from the district of Darbhanga (in Bihar) near the Nepalese border.<sup>203</sup> The Pune and Bihar modules are believed to be the two IM entities responsible for attacks since the network resumed its terrorist campaign.

The first attack during this phase took place on February 13, 2010, when a battery-operated bomb consisting of RDX, ammonium nitrate, and petroleum hydrocarbon oil with ball bearings detonated inside Pune's German Bakery, killing seventeen and injuring scores more.<sup>204</sup> Siddi Bapa was captured on closed-circuit television, walking into the German Bakery, a popular destination with foreigners, carrying a backpack containing the bomb.<sup>205</sup> Both the Delhi Police Special Cell and Bangalore Police alleged an Indian militant named Qateel Siddiqui collaborated with Siddi Bapa.<sup>206</sup> Siddi Bapa reportedly confirmed this to NIA investigators, telling them that Siddiqui was intended to have executed a simultaneous bombing at the Dagdusheth Ganesh temple, also in Pune, but failed in his attempt.<sup>207</sup> Siddiqui was killed in prison under suspicious circumstances in June 2012.<sup>208</sup>

Siddi Bapa's arrest and alleged statements to interrogators have called into question previous understandings of who executed the attack. Himayat Baig was arrested in October 2010 along with Lalbaba Farid (aka Bilal). Farid, who is on trial in India, allegedly trained in Pakistan and performed reconnaissance for LeT. He may have reported to Syed Zabiuddin Ansari (aka Abu Jundal), the Indian LeT operative who fled following the Aurangabad arms haul and was in the control room in Karachi for the 2008 Mumbai attacks.<sup>209</sup> The Maharashtra antiterrorism squad alleged that Siddi Bapa and Baig executed the Pune bombing for which LeT's commander Rashid Abdullah was suspected of supplying the military-grade RDX.<sup>210</sup> Baig

was convicted for his role in the 2010 Pune blast and sentenced to death. He continues to proclaim his innocence and was appealing his conviction at the time of writing. Siddi Bapa's confession may have strengthened his case.

The questions over complicity for the German Bakery bombing are notable for several reasons.

First, they highlight the ongoing tendency in India to make hasty arrests and then claim an investigation is complete, only to have new information surface and additional arrests follow. The introduction of potentially extraneous pieces can make putting together an already difficult puzzle all the more challenging.

Second, some of the confusion may stem from the fact that multiple plots were being developed against targets in Pune and the surrounding areas at the time. Following his deportation from Saudi Arabia, Ansari told the Delhi police that LeT was planning an attack against a police academy in Nashik, near Pune.<sup>211</sup>

Third, recent reports indicate the possibility of al-Qaeda involvement in the plot. David Headley, who remained a LeT operative but began freelancing after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, told investigators that he performed reconnaissance on other targets in Pune for Ilyas Kashmiri who lead the 313 Brigade and became al-Qaeda's chief of operations in Pakistan.<sup>212</sup> Kashmiri sent an e-mail to a Pakistani journalist in which he did not directly claim credit for the attack, but implied the 313 Brigade's involvement.<sup>213</sup> Al-Qaeda's number three at the time, Sheikh Sai'd al-Masri, went further and claimed credit in an audio statement for the bombing on Kashmiri's behalf.<sup>214</sup> According to a U.S. indictment, the Federal Bureau of Investigation asserted that Kashmiri "was in regular contact with al-Qaeda and in particular with Mustafa Abu al Yazid, a.k.a. 'Sheik Said al Masri'."<sup>215</sup> Little hard evidence in the open source supports al-Qaeda's claim. However, based on Siddi Bapa's interrogation, two of India's most well-respected journalists reported that the German Bakery blast was "partial fallout of an earlier order to bomb and attack places frequented by foreigners, including Israelis."<sup>216</sup> Notably, the German

Bakery was close to a local Chabad house, which was among the targets David Headley surveyed.<sup>217</sup>

However, whereas the Pune attack was almost guaranteed to kill foreigners, the attacks that followed fit the IM's traditional target profile. In April 2010, low-intensity IEDs were detonated at entrance gates of the Chinnaswamy Cricket Stadium in Bangalore. Fifteen people were injured, but none died. Once again, Indian Mujahideen members, including Siddi Bapa and Mohamed Qateel Siddiqui, are believed to have collaborated with a LeT operative (Fasih Mahmood, now in custody).<sup>218</sup> The network attempted another attack in September on the two-year anniversary of the Batla House encounter. Two gunmen opened fire on a tourist bus near the Jama Masjid in Delhi. No one was killed and the ammonium nitrate bomb intended to explode nearby failed to detonate.<sup>219</sup> Several of them are alleged to have been involved in the Chinnaswamy Stadium blasts as well.<sup>220</sup>

Mansoor Peerbhoy, who led the Media Group, was arrested before the IM resumed its bombing campaign and no claim of credit was issued for the German Bakery or Chinnaswamy Stadium blasts. On December 7, 2010, a bomb exploded at the Sheetla Ghat in Varanasi. It is adjacent to the main Dashashwamedh Ghat, where the IM launched its first attack. An e-mail purportedly sent to several media houses after the blast with the subject line of "Let's feel the pain together," claimed, "Indian Mujahideen attribute this attack to December 6 . . . the loss of their beloved Babri Masjid."<sup>221</sup> It was signed Al-Arbi, the signature used on previous IM e-mails.<sup>222</sup> The content indicates the attack was intended to take place a day earlier, which would have coincided with the anniversary of the mosque's demolition. The delay might owe to heightened security, which could have made executing the blast difficult on December 6. An IM member is believed to have hacked into an unsecured Wi-Fi connection registered to an innocent individual.<sup>223</sup>

Although most interlocutors with whom the author spoke concurred that this was an IM attack, several also noted the unsophisticated

nature of the e-mail's content when compared with the glossy manifestos coming out in 2008. This might owe to Peerbhoy's arrest and an increasingly difficult operating environment. However, they also speculated that it is not difficult for anyone with rudimentary computer knowledge to send a claim signed Al-Arbi, Riyaz Shahbandri's nom de guerre, after a bombing. This makes assigning blame for attacks more difficult and can create additional uncertainty for investigators.<sup>224</sup>

In May 2011, the IM perpetrated a low-intensity bombing outside the Delhi High Court that yielded minimal casualties and no fatalities.<sup>225</sup> Seven months later, a briefcase bomb exploded near the same site, killing fifteen people. The September 2011 Delhi High Court blast illustrates the continued variegation of the Indian jihadist movement and the manner in which e-mail claims of responsibility can promote confusion over culpability. After the bombing, several media organizations received an e-mail allegedly from HuJI that read:

*We owe the responsibility of todays blasts at high court delhi..... our demand is that Afzal Guru's death sentence should be repealed immediately else we would target major high courts & THE SUPREME COURT OF [sic passim]*<sup>226</sup>

A second claim of responsibility followed, this one from the Indian Mujahideen.<sup>227</sup>

Yet India's National Investigative Agency believes that neither HuJI nor the IM was responsible. Instead, its investigators alleged that two teenagers sent the initial e-mail attributed to HuJI on behalf of their associate Wasim Ahmed Malik.<sup>228</sup>

A medical student in Bangladesh who grew up in Indian-administered Kashmir, Malik reportedly idolized Afzal Guru, a doctor also from Kashmir who was on death row for his role in the December 2001 Indian Parliament attack (Guru was executed in 2013). Malik was briefly tangled up with JeM militants at the age of fifteen but never prosecuted, and his parents sent him to Bangladesh to keep him out



of trouble. Instead, India's National Investigative Agency claims an Islamist student activist on campus, coupled with access to jihadist material on the Internet, further radicalized Malik. He allegedly decided to bomb the Delhi High Court as a way of protesting Guru's conviction and enlisted the help of his brother who had joined a Hizb-ul-Mujahideen unit in Kashmir, but quickly grew disillusioned at its inactivity. For assistance, they turned to Ghulam Sarwar, a Pakistani LeT operative who was living under a false identity there.<sup>229</sup> The NIA has alleged Sarwar built the bomb that killed fifteen people and may have helped plant it. According to one journalist who covered the story closely, Sarwar's name is not on any flight manifest.<sup>230</sup> Thus, unless he was traveling under another assumed identity, he would have traveled to Delhi via rail or road and likely required a safe house in which to overnight.

Greater certainty exists regarding the IM's responsibility for three simultaneous bombings in Mumbai on July 13, 2011, but again questions persist about the involvement of foreign militants. Within ten minutes of one another, a bomb-laden motorcycle at the Opera House, a meter box at Zaveri Bazaar, and a car bomb by the bus stop at Dadar West exploded.<sup>231</sup> The three bombs contained ammonium nitrate amounts varying between 200 grams and 1 kilogram per bomb.<sup>232</sup> This was the most calculated and organized attack to occur since the Batla House encounter. Twenty-six people were killed and approximately 130 others were injured.<sup>233</sup> The head of the Maharashtra antiterrorism squad claims to have evidence that Riyaz Shahbandri planned the attacks from Saudi Arabia, where he met with others involved.<sup>234</sup> He and Siddi Bapa are named in the 4,700-page charge sheet filed as having planned, funded, and provided explosives.<sup>235</sup> According to the NIA, which was questioning Siddi Bapa at the time of writing, the IM field commander told them that a Pakistani national called Waqas with bomb-making expertise planned one of the three explosive devices. The field commander alleges that he was roped in specifically for the operation, is currently in hiding, and reported directly to handlers in Pakistan.<sup>236</sup>

More than a year passed before another attack attributed to the

Indian Mujahideen occurred. The serial blasts in Pune on August 1, 2012, were a failure. One person was injured, none were killed, and several suspected IM members were arrested.<sup>237</sup> Seven months later saw more success: two bicycle bombs in downtown Hyderabad killed seventeen and injured more than a hundred.<sup>238</sup> As with the 2011 Mumbai blasts and the 2012 Pune bombing, no claim of credit was forthcoming. An IM operative already in Delhi police custody allegedly admitted to having conducted reconnaissance, in the previous year, of the area where the blasts occurred.<sup>239</sup>

Siddi Bapa's arrest raises questions about the future of the IM network and especially the Bihar module. The authorities claim to have successfully degraded the Pune module in 2012 and 2013. It activated around 2007 but remained quiescent relative to the Azamgarh module and only increased its operational tempo after the authorities eviscerated the module. As this report was being finalized, some media suggested that Siddi Bapa was working on building another module in Kolkata.<sup>240</sup> Siddi Bapa also allegedly told NIA interrogators that he and some of his men were working on a plot to take "foreign Jews" hostage at the time of his arrest. He claims to have received orders to take Jewish hostages sometime after executing the 2013 Hyderabad bombings. Although unclear at the time of writing, the speculation is that this was part of a plot to negotiate the release of imprisoned militants.<sup>241</sup> Siddi Bapa's arrest will undoubtedly throw sand into the gears. It is unlikely to spell the end of the Indian jihadist movement, which will continue to evolve in possibly unpredictable ways.

As this report was going to press, multiple media reports were also speculating about factionalism among Pakistan-based IM leaders and the possibility that some of them were seeking to build a relationship with al-Qaeda. Two journalist accounts informed by statements Siddi Bapa allegedly made to interrogators assert that in March 2013 a senior Pakistan-based IM member, Mirza Shadab Beg, wanted to "join hands with the al Qaeda for 'joint operations' in India." He, possibly along with Riyaz Shahbandri, allegedly held talks with one of al-Qaeda's senior members.<sup>242</sup> Reporting about a potential association

between the IM and al-Qaeda should be treated with significant caution.

## **DYNAMICS OF INDIAN JIHADISM**

Comprehending the dynamics of the Indian Mujahideen network and the wider Indian jihadist movement may help inform assessments about potential future trajectories. The following briefly explores the organization of the Indian jihadist movement, its ideology, drivers and recruitment, and external support.

### **Scale and Composition**

The Indian Mujahideen is part of a larger universe of jihadist entities operating in India. Many are connected to one another and to external jihadist entities like LeT or HuJI-B, each of which recruits and runs its own Indian operatives in addition to supporting independent networks. The IB estimates the entire number of people who are part of the IM network—including foot soldiers within modules, but excluding individual cells tangentially connected to it—to be in the hundreds.<sup>243</sup> Outside Kashmir, Indian militants independent of the IM and connected to LeT, HuJI-B, or other foreign militant organizations are believed to number no more than ten to twenty at most, allowing for the possibility of unknown individuals.<sup>244</sup> Security officials estimate approximately 150 full-time militants maximum, mostly from LeT and Hizbul Mujahideen, in Indian-administered Kashmir.<sup>245</sup> The overwhelming majority of them are not connected to the IM network, which has never operated in Kashmir.

The Indian Mujahideen is not a hierarchical organization. Rather, it is best understood as a label for a network of modules that connect to, and sometimes support or absorb, smaller cells and self-organizing “bunches of guys,” to borrow a phrase from terrorism expert Marc Sageman.<sup>246</sup> It is also a label that may sometimes be used to describe entities that have only tangential connection to the actual network. The IM reached peak cohesion in 2008 when some modules became more organized. Its attacks were also the most lethal and indigenous that year. This sometimes gave the

impression of greater overall organization. In reality, even when it was most cohesive, all the entities acting under the Indian Mujahideen label were not aware of the network's breadth or even its leaders' existence. At a briefing provided by the Intelligence Bureau, one analyst explained that some of the men arrested in September 2008 had not even known they were part of the IM until public announcements claiming credit for attacks they had executed began appearing. Another recalled, "these boys [from the Azamgarh module] had joined Atif Ameen to do jihad and that's all they knew."<sup>247</sup> According to Intelligence Bureau analysts who track the IM network, the situation on the ground is fluid and leaders within the wider Indian jihadist movement are best thought of as focal points for action and resources:

*It's not like Pakistan where you have JeM turf and LeT turf, JeM leaders and LeT leaders. Here it's about focal points. If you have one or two people connect with the Bhatkals or LeT in a certain area here in India then they become a focal point and can recruit others mainly from that area. So people join Person X who might go to someone like Riyaz Bhatkal for help and if he's successful than he will get more support and recruit more people. Riyaz is still a big focal point, even if he's not in India. But Person X is a focal point too.<sup>248</sup>*

Familial ties play an important role in connecting people to existing individual focal points and enabling new players to emerge. They reinforce and are reinforced by geographic colocation. Although it is incorrect to speak of IM turf, the network is concentrated in and recruits from certain states (and specific cities in those states), especially Bihar (Darbunga), Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh (Azamgarh) in the north, and Karnataka (Bhatkal and Bangalore), Kerala, and Maharashtra (Mumbai and Pune) in the south.<sup>249</sup> Similar, LeT is stronger in some areas than others, including Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in the north, and Hyderabad, Kerala, and Maharashtra (Mumbai and Beed) in the south.<sup>250</sup> If reports regarding Ahmed Siddi Bapa's statements to investigators are to be believed, then Kolkata

may play an increasingly important role as a base for IM activity. Its geographic proximity to Bangladesh also raises questions about whether that country will experience resurgence as a base for anti-Indian militancy. Finally, being located in or recruited from one area does not imply being active there. Militants from different areas come together in myriad locations to launch attacks.<sup>251</sup>

The Shahbandri brothers exercise a loose leadership over the IM network from abroad. Initially, they were “extremely mobile,” shuttling from Pakistan to the UAE, where they “freely frequent[ed] locations such as Dubai and Shargah.”<sup>252</sup> However, Siddi Bapa allegedly told investigators that the two moved out of the UAE at some point during 2012 in favor of spending the majority of their time in Pakistan, where they sought to remain, perhaps to avoid arrest and deportation.<sup>253</sup> Amir Raza Khan, currently based in Pakistan, also allegedly visits IM safe houses in the Gulf on occasion, though his precise role at this stage is unclear.<sup>254</sup> IB analysts speculated in 2012 about tension between Khan and Riyaz after the latter’s arrival in Pakistan, suggesting the former may have been displaced.<sup>255</sup> The secondary literature and recent media reporting supports this contention, but it is difficult to know whether this amounts to a dual confirmation or circular reporting.<sup>256</sup> The same media report also alluded to additional factionalism within Pakistan-based IM commanders and included the assessment that one faction had approached al-Qaeda.<sup>257</sup>

Until his arrest in Saudi Arabia in May 2011, Zabiuddin Ansari, the Indian militant involved in the Aurangabad arms haul who was in the control room for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, was acting as an interface between LeT and the Indian Mujahideen.<sup>258</sup> Fayyiz Kagzi, another Aurangabad conspirator also wanted for his role in the 2006 Ahmedabad railway bombing, is alleged to have replaced Ansari.<sup>259</sup> However, he is believed to have fled to Pakistan after Saudi authorities deported Ansari and another Indian militant (Fasih Mahmood).<sup>260</sup> In addition to liaising with Indian Mujahideen militants, Ansari had traveled to Saudi Arabia to launch a recruitment campaign for future attacks against India.

## Ideology

As noted, the IM is part of a larger jihadist project, which also includes operatives from various foreign militant groups. LeT is the most notable of these and has been the primary training provider for the majority of Indian Islamist militants who sought training outside India. These men would have gone through LeT's Daura-e-Suffa and Daura-e-Amma, both of which focus primarily on religious indoctrination and are generally considered necessary prerequisites for military training. However, it is unclear to what degree these Indian trainees absorbed LeT's ideology or whether the group invested much energy in their doing so. Several scholars have written extensively about LeT's ideology. Thus, the focus here is primarily on the Indian Mujahideen's ideology, to the degree one exists. However, it is useful to first describe briefly the broad contours of LeT's as it relates to operations in India.

Jihadism is a neologism that has gained currency since 9/11 to connote a movement whose members regard jihad primarily as waging war—as opposed to spiritual striving—and see doing so as the only road to self-fulfillment. For these actors, waging jihad is obligatory and second only to professing the oneness of God.<sup>261</sup> This differentiates jihadists from the majority of Muslims, who typically do not view waging war as an individual obligation. Most jihadists also aver participation in politics, believing that democracy is haram (forbidden). Generally speaking, their long-term goals are so utopian and vague as to make them of limited analytical utility. Thus it is more useful to focus on an actor's rationale for activism, especially as it relates to defining and prioritizing enemies to be fought.<sup>262</sup> In this regard, ideology establishes targets that are off-limits, those deserving of attack, and offers a paradigm for prioritizing the latter. Strategic calculation also factors. Any terrorist entity will, or should, assess costs and benefits before launching an attack. Meanwhile, capabilities determine whether the actor is actually able to strike a target.<sup>263</sup>

Ideologically, LeT is, on the one hand, a missionary organization committed to promoting its interpretation of Ahl-e-Hadith (Salafi)

Islam and reformism in Pakistan, and, on the other, a pan-Islamist militant group dedicated to waging jihad against all enemies of Islam. It is also a proxy deployed by the Pakistan army and ISI to further national interests, primarily against India. LeT is considered one of the more theologically doctrinaire jihadist groups and has developed a relatively sophisticated ideology over its almost thirty-year history. The group outlines eight reasons for waging violent jihad, some more utopian than others, and asserts that all Muslims are required to wage or support jihad until these objectives are met: achieving the dominance of Islam as a way of life throughout the entire world; forcing disbelievers to pay *jizya* [tax on non-Muslims]; fighting those who oppress the weak and feeble; eliminating Muslim persecution; exacting revenge for the killing of any Muslim; punishing enemies for violating their oaths or treaties; defending Muslim states anywhere in the world; and recapturing occupied Muslim territory, which LeT considers to be any state that ever experienced Muslim rule.<sup>264</sup>

Any one of these is reason enough, from LeT's perspective, to wage and support jihad against India. Several are particularly notable. Eliminating Muslim persecution and exacting revenge for the killing of any Muslim both have informed direct attacks in India—the Akshardham Temple attack in 2002, for example. They also provide an ideological rationale for supporting the Indian Mujahideen and other indigenous jihadists seeking to avenge Muslim victims of communal violence. Because LeT considers much of India to be Muslim land, and views Indian-administered Kashmir as part of Pakistan, its anti-India activities are also heavily motivated by the desire to recapture “occupied” Muslim territory.

In addition to these specific rationales (and the benefits of ongoing state support), LeT's pan-Islamism is blended with a vicious anti-Hinduism. The group believes a Hindu-Muslim struggle has existed ever since the time of the Prophet Muhammad and will continue until Muslim rule is restored to the Indian subcontinent.<sup>265</sup> Thus, India has been its primary enemy since the early 1990s and remains so today. Yet it is also worth noting that the United States is clearly on LeT's enemies list, and 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, deployed a small number of fighters to Iraq, has killed Americans and other Westerners in terrorist attacks in India, and has contributed to other plots targeting them as well.

The Indian Mujahideen is more of a terrorist network than a jihadist organization. Its division of responsibilities is almost entirely operational, save for a Media Group, and the network has never boasted a religious committee of any sort. Nor does the Indian Mujahideen have any clerics among its ranks. At its essence, the IM's ideology boils down to exacting revenge for communal injustices. Riyaz Shahbandri asserts in the first IM manifesto explaining the "causes behind jihad (holy war) in India":

*When our Muslim brothers were fleeing from India to Pakistan at the time of partition, Abdul Kalam Azad asked them not to go & promised them on behalf of congress party (Gandhi, Nehru&Patel) that all of you can stay here and they (Gandhi, Nehru&Patel) had promised to give us full rights and amenities for rehabilitation. Everybody knows what had happened to that promise and how our brothers and children were brutally killed and our sisters were raped. I am not going to take you too back; I would like to take your attention towards 1992 massacre, the year when I realized the fact regarding their promises. the wounds given by the idol worshipers to the indian muslims; They demolished our Babri Masjid and killed our brothers, children and raped our sisters, especially in Maharastra this all happened with the support of congress party which was ruling at that time both in Centre and in Maharastra. Indian police which always play key role in such massacre has provided arms and full protection to the son of bitches like Shiv Sena, RSS, VHP etc men. This injustice does not stop here; the police officers who were pointed out by the Shri*



*Krishna Commission for their negative role in 1992 massacre were given promotions and felicitated by the Indian government for their graveyard sin. [sic passim]*<sup>266</sup>

Before exploring the desire for revenge in depth, it is helpful to highlight infrequent attempts at locating this rationale in a broader ideological paradigm. In keeping with the utopian goals most jihadist entities pursue, and the belief that jihad is the only path to achieving them, the network's introductory manifesto asserts

*This is not the war between two communities [Hindu and Muslim], but this is war for civilization. We want to empower the society from injustice, corruption etc. which is prevailing in the society now a days. Only Islam has the power to establish a civilized society and this could be only possible in Islamic rule, which could be achieved by only one path Jihad-Fee-Sabilillah.*<sup>267</sup>

However, whereas most jihadist entities eschew democracy for religious reasons, the IM's antipathy toward it appears reactive and informed by communal sentiment. For example, in "The Rise of Jihad: Revenge of Gujarat," the Shahbandri brothers assert that "democracy, secularism, equality, integrity, peace, freedom, voting, elections are yet another fraud" used by the Hindu majority to oppress the Muslim minority.<sup>268</sup> IM statements also make only infrequent attempts at calling non-Muslims to Islam and this is done in the guise of referencing the historical Muslim subjugation of the Hindu majority (presumably during the Mughal Empire) and threatening its repetition.<sup>269</sup> Finally, IM leaders attempt to situate their domestic struggle in the context of a wider pan-Islamist jihad, for example, by referring to India's capital not only as the "most strategic hindutva hub," but also the country's "green zone," a likely reference to the protected U.S. enclave in Iraq.<sup>270</sup>

Yet while the Indian Mujahideen leadership clearly seeks to locate itself within the global jihadist movement, its pretense of a grander ideological paradigm masks what still remains an overwhelmingly

locally focused terrorist campaign fueled by communal grievance and bent on revenge. The Shahbandri brothers repeatedly proclaim their bombing campaign as Muslims' *qisaas*, or revenge. In the "Declaration of Open War Against India," sent after the May 2008 Jaipur bombings, IM leader Riyaz Shahbandri warns the "Kuffar-e-hind [unbelievers of India]" that, "if Islam and Muslim in this country are not safe then the light of your safety will also go off very soon."<sup>271</sup> Continuing in this vein, the Shahbandri brothers declared in "The Rise of Jihad: Revenge of Gujarat" that

*Here we begin the answer to your tyranny and oppression, raising the illustrious banner of Jihad against the Hindus and all those who fight and resist us, and here we begin our revenge with the Help and Permission of Allah, - A terrifying revenge of our blood, our lives, and our honor that will Insha-Allah terminate your survival on this land.*<sup>272</sup>

Although IM leaders repeatedly single out Hindu nationalist organizations, the police, and various politicians and state institutions as the culpable parties, they do not ideologically circumscribe their violence accordingly:

*Let us make it clear to all the enemies of Muslims, especially the Hindus of India, that the BJP backed RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and the entire Sangh Parivar would be the only responsible factors for whatever horrifying tragedies you are to face in the nearest future. The cause will be these wicked bastards and the effect will be on the entire nation [emphasis added].*<sup>273</sup>

Echoing al-Qaeda's assertion that all Americans are fair targets for terrorist violence because they voted in elections for and paid taxes to the U.S. government, the Indian Mujahideen makes the theologically unsophisticated, but strategically important, claim that

*There is no difference in the shari'ah between a soldier*

*and civilian. Rather, the shari'ah divides people into combatant and non-combatant. And combatant is anyone who help in the fight with his body, wealth or opinion.<sup>274</sup> According to this criterion, the people of this country are combatant because they have willingly elected their leaders and representatives in the parliaments who draw up the policies which murder our children, Dishonors our women, occupy our houses and plunder our wealth. And they are the one who fund the terrorist organizations like R.S.S, V.H.P and Shiv sena, which provide armed men to attack our women and children [sic passim].<sup>275</sup>*

Unlike LeT, which officially abjures attacks against fellow Muslims, the Indian Mujahideen urges it:

*Come, O Muslim Youth! Make your preparations with whatever you have. Join our ranks and help us—the ranks of Indian Mujahideen to strengthen the Jihad against the Hindus. Get ready with all the weapons you have. Plan and organize your moves. Select your targets. Target these evil politicians and leaders of BJP, RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal, who provoke the masses against you. Target and kill the wicked police force who were watching the “fun” of your bloodshed and who handed you to the rioting sinful culprits. Target their hired informers and spies **even if they are the disloyal and betraying munafiqeen [hypocrites] of our Ummah** (emphasis added).<sup>276</sup>*

The concept of anti-*munafiqeen* violence is associated with Deobandi jihadist groups in Pakistan, which use the claim of hypocrisy to target Barelvis, Sufis, and Shiites in the country. LeT argues that they are not munafiqeen and that focusing on them as targets distracts from waging jihad against non-Muslims outside Pakistan who are at war with Muslims and should be attacked.<sup>277</sup> In reality, LeT has not shied away from killing Muslims outside Pakistan in terrorist attacks or

from eliminating spies and informers at home.<sup>278</sup> Nevertheless, the IM's public encouragement of such activity stands in contrast to LeT's avowed ideology.

Although the Indian Mujahideen leaders establish broad parameters for acceptable targets, they do delineate priorities and exhibit a degree of discretion in terms of where to focus violence. First, they assert that all state governments "must know that the trouble faced by us will be definitely repaid and if the Muslims are terrorized, the Hindus can never breathe in peace."<sup>279</sup> However, IM leaders single out states where communalism and alleged police abuses are the highest:

*We hereby declare an ultimatum to all the state governments of India, especially to those of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra to stop harassing the Muslims and keep a check on their killing, expulsion, and encounters.*<sup>280</sup>

To reinforce this point, in their next missive they assert that

*it is not at all difficult for us to attack you in states like Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc. And by The Grace of Allah there is no shortage of explosives or lack of manpower and we are extremely capable to shed your blood anywhere anytime. The only reason here is that your wrongs against us in other states have crossed the limits of cruelty.*<sup>281</sup>

A review of IM attack locations reveals that the network's rhetoric matched its operational planning. In addition to focusing its violence geographically, the Indian Mujahideen also discriminated in terms of specific targets. Its pronouncements make numerous references to communal organizations and its operations include multiple attacks against specifically Hindu targets. The leadership also singles out the police and judicial system for arresting and prosecuting Muslims not

involved in IM terrorism as well as for targeting SIMI members. In its first communiqué, which preceded an attack against three courts in Uttar Pradesh, the network stated,

*Now the Islamic raids which is going to take place against lawyer within few minutes Insha-Allah is because police nabbed two innocent groups and frame them in fake [terrorism] charges.<sup>282</sup>*

It warned the next target would be the Indian police. Perhaps because this proved too difficult to execute, the IM instead bombed markets in Jaipur. The missive sent after that attack again threatened retribution against the police for arresting innocent Muslims, but justified bombing markets in Jaipur as a way of imposing economic costs.<sup>283</sup> In the missive sent before the September 2008 Delhi blasts, the Shahbandri brothers again threatened the Indian police force and especially the Anti-Terrorism Service in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.<sup>284</sup> Once again, it struck soft targets, a practice that continued once the Indian Mujahideen regenerated after the Batla House encounter.

When explaining the Jaipur attack, Riyaz Shahbandri also asserted that it was intended to kill tourists in order to “warn the entire crusaders of the world, U.S. and Britain in particular, we Muslims are one across the globe and you won’t find it easy in India as well [sic].” Punishing the Indian state, as described, was more likely the primary motivation. Indeed, after going on to warn India to stop supporting the United States in the international arena, the communiqué quickly pivots back to a revenge-oriented rationale, “You people have tortured us for the past 60 years, now its our turn to feel the heat and we promise you that we will get back to you very soon.”<sup>285</sup>

The inclusion of a warning to the United States and United Kingdom suggests a secondary motivation or, at least, the desire to position the Indian Mujahideen as more than merely a local, communal phenomenon. This is notable in light of the Pune German Bakery attack, recent reports that some IM leaders were interested in

aligning with al-Qaeda. According to one of those accounts, some IM leaders were interested in adopting a more pan-Islamic agenda, but feared the impact on recruitment.<sup>286</sup> IM violence is likely to continue to prioritize communal targets, but indications of an ambition to expand should not be ignored.

### **Drivers and Recruitment**

Indians who associate with LeT, the IM, or other indigenous outfits have made antisocial decisions that can force them to live life on the run, and that cast suspicion and often shame on the families they leave behind.<sup>287</sup> Such a description could apply to those who have joined many other antiestablishment terrorist organizations around the world and throughout history. However, it notably contrasts with the experiences of many Pakistani recruits to LeT, who live in the open, enjoy a level of societal acceptance, and sometimes even receive permission from their families to wage jihad. So why do Indian men become involved in jihadist violence? Anecdotal evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of them are motivated primarily by a sense of grievance and a desire to seek revenge, a rationale that again echoes the experiences of aggrieved young men who have joined other terrorist groups around the world and throughout history.

Individual Indian recruits may believe that violent jihad is obligatory, but collectively, the ambition to impose sharia or otherwise Islamize society is secondary, if it exists at all, to the desire for revenge against real and perceived injustices.<sup>288</sup> As noted, the IM rhetorically embraced a pan-Islamist agenda, though not in place of a locally focused one. According to one report, IM leaders backed off of expanding the aperture too much after finding this alienated potential recruits motivated mainly by communal grievances, especially related to the Gujarat riots and Babri Masjid demolition, and a desire for retribution.<sup>289</sup>

According to police and intelligence officials, almost every arrested militant they interrogated mentioned the Babri mosque's demolition,

the Gujarat riots, or both as a major motivator. Frequently, they explained how established militants exploited these incidents to radicalize and recruit them. Indian experts such as Praveen Swami and Shishir Gupta have written about the role that economic hardships, especially frustration and a sense of institutionalized discrimination among educated Muslims who believe employment opportunities are closed off to them, are believed to play in terms of contributing to a sense of injustice.<sup>290</sup> According to security officials and Muslim community leaders, an over-response by the security forces to Islamist terrorism reinforces the narrative of a communal Hindu war against Indian Muslims.<sup>291</sup> As one Muslim leader complained,

*The police are communal. Whenever a blast takes place the police arrest Muslims whether or not they were involved. Hundreds have been arrested and acquitted, but even though they're released these peoples' careers are ruined.*<sup>292</sup>

Official statistics are unavailable, but Muslims are believed to be very poorly represented in state police forces across the country, and especially in the Indian Police Service (IPS).<sup>293</sup> The *Times of India* filed a right to information request seeking hard numbers from each state police service about the communal breakdown among their forces. Eleven states and one union territory never responded, despite some of them having Muslim populations of more than 10 percent.<sup>294</sup> Using the responses it received and extrapolating using data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB),<sup>295</sup> the *Times of India* estimated Muslim representation in the Indian police force hovers around 6 percent, whereas Muslims make up roughly 14 percent of the population.<sup>296</sup> Coupled with poor investigative techniques and a generally lax attitude, this demographic imbalance often leads the police to respond to any attack simply by “rounding up a bunch of Muslim boys.”<sup>297</sup>

The local level policing challenges have national repercussions. High-ranking security officials in New Delhi are aware of the

problem. When asked what the state could do better in terms of counterterrorism, one senior official zeroed in on policing and said, “We need to be careful and aware of the prejudices in our own security forces.”<sup>298</sup> This underrepresentation and sense of systematic scapegoating fosters a sense of group victimization among Muslim communities. As a result, lamented the head of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, Indian Muslims often see themselves facing an external threat from communal (Hindu) organizations and the security forces, while internally a small segment of clerics and militants exploit the situation to incite violence.<sup>299</sup>

As in other countries where Muslims are a minority and a small segment of their community has been susceptible to radicalization, recruiters and jihadist ideologues frame political, economic, and social exploitation as evidence of a war against Islam. All Muslims everywhere are depicted as the victims of oppression, and violence is presented as the only alternative to “the system” and a necessary means of defending the faith. The heightened international profile of the faith as a result of the U.S.-led war against al-Qaeda and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan reinforces this perception. Moreover, although many Indian militants belonged to SIMI or other Islamic organizations, a significant number of them have relatively limited knowledge of their faith. Even some of the more educated militants are susceptible. For example, Mansoor Peerbhoy became interested in Islam later in life and began associating with the Quran Foundation in 2004. A colleague visited him at the Jama Masjid in Pune during the holy Muslim holiday of Ramadan in 2006 and explained that, “the meaning of Jihad is to fight in the cause of Allah.” Immediately, Peerbhoy told investigators, “when viewed through the Jihad angle, I was aware of the immediate threat posed to the very existence and honour of Indian Muslims, which exist under the banners of BJP, RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena, and others.”<sup>300</sup>

A pattern is clear of Indian militants moving back and forth between jihadism and for-profit crime, and some officials claim that financial motivation now plays a larger role in recruiting noncriminal elements



as well.<sup>301</sup> According to one Indian police officer, “So many boys we arrest mention the money factor in term of their recruitment process.”<sup>302</sup> In some instances, recruiters may spot men—potentially disaffected and definitely in need of money—and use the provision of financial support to begin building rapport. However, if recent reports regarding Siddi Bapa’s interrogation are to be believed, compensation for newer recruits is paltry. One report cites Intelligence Bureau officials who assert that he was using illegal immigrants as foot soldiers and paying them only Rs1000 (approximately US\$15) per operation.<sup>303</sup> Finally, as with many militant movements, the IM also attracted its share of attention seekers. One member reportedly told an interrogator he simply wanted to see his face on India’s Most Wanted.<sup>304</sup>

How are those looking to engage in violence or at least open to it recruited into the jihadist movement? Most interlocutors agree that Indians, not outsiders, have been doing the recruiting for some time. In some instances, a person is exposed to the proper “mood music,” decides he wants to do jihad and looks for assistance where he can find it. Recently, in addition to the use of jihadi chat rooms, recruitment has been taking place via Facebook and Twitter.<sup>305</sup> In other cases, talent-spotters work top-down, but even in this instance the connections are often organic. For example, Atif Ameen enrolled in Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi using fake graduation documents to cultivate new recruits.<sup>306</sup>

In a pattern that would be familiar to those who study terrorist recruitment, especially in nonconflict zones, LeT and IM operatives, including the Shahbandri brothers, typically exercised a patient approach, grooming potential recruits over a period of weeks or months. As Peerbhoy explained to investigators,

*[Initially,] Iqbal never discussed practical ways of Jihad with us. He only used to talk about theoretical Jihad, and used to motivate us with talks about struggle. He never spoke of any Jihad that he might or might not have done, and he certainly never discussed any of his*

*plans or his whereabouts or his contacts with us. He was very secretive, and urged us also to be so. He only gave us as much information as we were required to know, and urged us not to ask too many questions, or to expect too many answers. He never told us his real name or his origin (we found those out later in Police Custody).*<sup>307</sup>

As in other countries, the grooming process includes jihadist propaganda, such as videos of militants training, the Gujarat riots, World Trade Center attacks, and other events related to jihad.<sup>308</sup>

SIMI may no longer be the feeder it was in the past when a core mass in the hundreds radicalized and motivated to fight against Hindu domination moved along a conveyer belt into jihad. But SIMI

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**All Muslims everywhere are depicted as the victims of oppression, and violence is presented as the only alternative to “the system” and a necessary means of defending the faith.**

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connections still matter, as do familial and friendship ties.<sup>309</sup> After its ban by India, SIMI split into two groups, one that eschewed militancy and another, led by Safdar Nagori, that was prepared to use violence. After Nagori’s arrest, Abdul Subhan Qureshi (aka Tauqir) took command of this second faction. He linked up with Riyaz Shahbandri and through him Atif

Ameen, thereafter traveling throughout India and using his SIMI connections to recruit foot soldiers for the IM.<sup>310</sup> Some of those who did not engage in militancy, contributed to the cause by providing safe haven for IM, LeT, or HuJI-B operatives.<sup>311</sup>

Recruitment also takes place in the Gulf where many Indian Muslims have sought employment opportunities. The Gulf employment boom for Indian Muslims led it to become a place for recruiting and indoctrinating them first by LeT and now by the IM.<sup>312</sup> Connections to the Gulf are historically stronger for Muslims in southern Indian states who, with the exception of those in Andhra Pradesh,

experienced significantly less trauma in terms of communal violence. As a result, their exposure to Salafism and its import into India may be a more important factor in terms of recruitment. In short, Muslims in north versus south India have had distinct experiences. Ascertaining a causal connection between these experiences and recruitment is difficult. It would require significantly focused research and access to a sizeable sample of confirmed militants from north and south India. In addition to recruitment in the Gulf, some Indians recruited or groomed at home are directed to travel there for indoctrination and instruction.<sup>313</sup> Whether or not this is more common than actual recruitment in the Gulf is difficult to ascertain based on the open source. Fayyiz Kagzai, Fasih Mahmood, and Syed Zabiuddin Ansari (aka Abu Jundal) were the three most well-known Indian recruiters based in Saudi Arabia. As noted earlier, Mahmood and Ansari have since been deported to India. Moreover, all three are considered LeT members who recruit for and interface with the Indian Mujahideen, suggesting considerable overlap between the two.<sup>314</sup> It is to the question of external support that we now turn.

### **External Support and Influence**

The Indian jihadist movement received significant support from abroad; most notably from Pakistan, but its members also operated in Bangladesh, Nepal, and several Persian Gulf countries.

Over time, Pakistan and Pakistan-based groups transitioned from needing locals to help execute attacks to supporting them as a way to increase plausible deniability. Recall that the Pakistani ISI allegedly launched an enterprise dubbed the Karachi Project to help sustain the homegrown jihadist network in India without the same negative international repercussions that came from attacks by Pakistani actors. Although the ISI is alleged to have initiated this effort in roughly 2003, would-be Indian militants (outside of those from Kashmir) began training in Pakistan in the early to mid-1990s. LeT emerged as, and has remained, the primary, though not the only, group responsible for instructing Indian recruits. It's questionable whether as many of those recruited—either in the Gulf or locally—go

to Pakistan for training as in the past. Over time, Indians learned how to build explosives using locally sourced materials. Once a well-trained cohort of operators who could pass along their skills returned, the need lessened for either deploying Pakistanis to India or bringing new recruits to Pakistan for training. This helped indigenize the Indian jihadist movement and decreased the need for travel to Pakistan.<sup>315</sup> Some new recruits are instead now trained on the use of small arms or the basics of bomb making in places like Hubli jungle in Karnataka.<sup>316</sup> Other recruits are simply used as foot soldiers or for logistical support and need no serious instruction.

Numerous Indian security officials point to interrogations and intercepts corroborating that Pakistan continues to provide safe haven for wanted Indian militants including Amir Raza Khan and the Shahbandri brothers. For example, the Indian operative Salman (aka Chhotu) who traveled on a Nepali passport to Dubai and then to Pakistan was arrested in 2010 after returning to India. In his confession to the Indian authorities, he allegedly described having seen Riyaz Shahbandri and Amir Raza Khan living in Karachi.<sup>317</sup> Sheikh Abdul Khaja (aka Amjad) told a similar tale, alleging that he met Amir Raza Khan, the Shahbandri brothers, and Ahmed Siddi Bapa in Karachi in late 2009. He also claims to have connected with LeT Indian operatives Syed Zabiuddin Ansari and Fayyaz Kagzi in Pakistan.<sup>318</sup> After his deportation from Saudi Arabia, where he had traveled on a recruiting mission, in summer 2012, Syed Zabiuddin Ansari reportedly told Indian authorities that the Shahbandri brothers were in Pakistan and met semi-regularly with LeT.<sup>319</sup> As this report went to press, Indian authorities had recently arrested Abdul Karim, LeT's first Indian field commander, who had been living in Pakistan since roughly 2000. He was nabbed in Nepal.<sup>320</sup>

Until recently, Bangladesh was a major staging and transit point for Indian and Pakistani militants, with Bangladesh-based HuJI-B and LeT operatives often facilitating travel, providing safe haven, and smuggling money and material as well. Their ability to do so stemmed primarily from the lack of effort made by a succession of governments in Dhaka to crack down on these and other militant

activities. However, the ISI is alleged to have provided passports and money to many of these operatives and, in some cases, to intervene with local Bangladeshi authorities when necessary.<sup>321</sup> Such activity has reduced significantly since the current administration in Dhaka came into office. Nepal remains an area of concern, but as already discussed little evidence in the open source suggests that its role as a transit point or logistical base has grown considerably in recent years. Moreover, the serious lack of governance in Nepal raises questions about whether the ISI needs to play a role in facilitating jihadist activities there. Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, remain more important transit points and logistical bases. Salman, the operative who told Indian authorities he saw Riyaz and Amir Raza Khan in Karachi, also claims to have met them previously, along with Iqbal Shahbandri, in the UAE.<sup>322</sup> Indian militants who transit through or base themselves out of the UAE and Saudi Arabia are known to travel on Pakistani passports. At least until recently, if arrested in either country carrying a Pakistani passport, militants would be sent back to Pakistan.<sup>323</sup>

In addition to indirect assistance in the form of training, safe haven, and logistical support, foreign actors, most notably LeT and HuJI-B, also have provided money, weapons, and explosive material. Recent historical examples of LeT funding its own Indian operatives are numerous. For example, Abdul Khwaja told investigators that LeT commander Muzammil Butt paid him a salary for recruiting and motivating Indian youth, and Rashid Abdullah provided money for the 2008 Bangalore serial blasts via a conduit (Sarfraz Nawaz) in Oman.<sup>324</sup> Another Oman-based operative, Ali Abdul Aziz al-Hooti, who allegedly trained twice with LeT, became one of its top organizers in the Gulf responsible for transiting money and weapons into India.<sup>325</sup>

LeT funding its operatives is hardly surprising and easier to validate than ongoing financing of the Indian Mujahideen. Its reasonably clear that foreign funding helped the network during its earlier years. For example, in addition to smuggling RDX, Jalaluddin Mullah, better known as Babu Bhai, helped transit real and counterfeit currency to IM leaders from Bangladesh.<sup>326</sup> It is an article of faith

among the Indian authorities that LeT continues to finance the IM through Hawala networks and cash couriers (some of who transport counterfeit currency).<sup>327</sup> Both are notoriously challenging to trace. Thus, although investigators allege that Abdul Karim confessed to playing a significant role in circulating counterfeit currency, it is unclear where this money was flowing.<sup>328</sup> In short, though the evidence strongly supports the contention that IM leaders and operatives receive safe haven from Pakistan, it is difficult to assert with the same degree of confidence that money still flows to the Indian Mujahideen. This is especially true in terms of money used for recruitment or travel, which can be more difficult to trace than financial infusions for specific attacks.

Moreover, reporting suggests that the IM also continues to raise money through criminal activity and, more recently, began soliciting donations from Gulf donors via dummy organizations under the pretense of using it for charity, a tactic LeT and other militants groups have engaged in for many years.<sup>329</sup> Siddi Bapa allegedly coordinated with Gulf-based Indian operatives, including Fasih Mahmood, to “rope in the funds through which the Indian Mujahideen survived” after Batla House.<sup>330</sup> This raises questions about whether the IM successfully built independent financing operations to support recruitment, travel, logistics, and attacks. If so, this could be a sign of strength and ambition or an indication the IM was no longer receiving financial support from external actors.

This report highlights several instances in which LeT provided, or attempted to provide, weapons and explosives to its Indian operatives, including the Aurangabad arms haul and the RDX used for the 2006 Ahmedabad railway bombing. The IM also used RDX provided by HuJI-B for its first several attacks. Babu Bhai smuggled his first shipment of RDX in early 2004. Additional shipments followed, including more RDX and Rs15,000 in June–July 2004, 20 kilograms of RDX in August–September 2005 and 16 kilograms in January 2006. The semi-regular smuggling schedule indicates a sophisticated support operation rather than an ad hoc provision of explosives. The IM ultimately shifted toward using locally sourced

ammonium nitrate, which increased its indigenous capabilities. However, the February 2010 Pune bombings used ammonium nitrate as the core charge and RDX as the booster charge.<sup>331</sup> Networks associated with LeT commander Rashid Abdullah were suspected of supplying the RDX.<sup>332</sup> Seven months later, Syed Zabiuddin Ansari allegedly provided a shooter for the Jamia Masjid attack, which also included a failed attempt to explode an ammonium nitrate bomb.<sup>333</sup> Although the July 2011 serial blasts in Mumbai used ammonium nitrate, subsequent bombs contained PETN (pentaerythritol tetranitrate) to trigger ammonium nitrate mixed with fuel.<sup>334</sup> This indicates that foreign militants groups, most notably LeT, may step in to provide assistance in those instances when the indigenous Indian Mujahideen struggles, such as after Batla House.

IM attacks have been typically below the threshold of what might trigger an Indian response vis-a-vis Pakistan and ascribing culpability for them has generally proved difficult. Hence the immediate risks for Pakistani intelligence in terms of providing limited safe haven and support are relatively low. Does this support equate to control?

A spectrum of possibilities exists with significant control on one end of the continuum and an ISI-LeT-supported “wind-up toy” on the other. Without exculpating Pakistan, it is important to note that safe haven and ad hoc support most likely do not translate into strict command and control over the entire IM network, which is significantly decentralized. Different Indian operatives are alleged to act as an interface with the LeT, the ISI, or both.<sup>335</sup> The ISI and LeT may have influence over individuals and modules within the IM, even to the point of promoting specific attacks, but that is different than command and control over the entire network. As one of India’s most respected analysts, the late B Raman, observed,

*We don't know if there is instruction for every attack or if [there is instruction, if] it's coming from the ISI or just LeT. And [if there is direction from the ISI] a lot of retired officers in Pakistan are running around giving instructions to jihadists too. So it is very difficult to*

*know what is and is not official. The authorities here presume every attack is directed and [that] any retired officer is acting with sanction, but we don't actually know that for a fact either.*<sup>336</sup>

It may be that the ISI (or LeT) engages IM leaders on ad hoc basis to undertake discrete attacks. To quote another Indian analyst, “You do what I ask you to do, but I don’t tell you to do everything you do.” However, this does not preclude broad guidance about the tempo of attacks. Siddi Bapa allegedly told investigators that “Sometimes the ISI would tell us to immediately plan an operation and on other occasion, it would ask us to lie low.” This reportedly contributed to the supposed decision by some IM leaders to approach al-Qaeda.<sup>337</sup>

As noted, reporting about al-Qaeda should be treated with significant caution, but, if true, would have three significant implications. First, it would be another example of Pakistan-supported militants growing frustrated with ISI constraints and migrating toward al-Qaeda, a path other LeT members—including David Headley—have traveled. A prized ISI and LeT asset, Headley grew frustrated and connected with Ilyas Kashmiri, who by then was working with al-Qaeda.<sup>338</sup> Second, were an IM leader or leaders based in Pakistan able to forge such an association, it would suggest a distinct lack of situational awareness by the ISI, an inability to dedicate the resources necessary to scupper such a relationship, or the assignment of ISI liaison officers with jihadist sympathies. Third, it would correlate with the increasing Pakistanization of al-Qaeda as Arab members are killed or migrate to Arab countries. It would also signal an attendant elevation of the al-Qaeda threat to India, and specifically to U.S. and Western interests there.

## **CONCLUSION: QUALIFYING THE THREAT**

The Indian jihadist movement constitutes an internal security issue with an external dimension. The two dimensions are historically intertwined and in the last few decades the boundaries between



them have become increasingly blurred. Pakistan-based groups, most notably LeT, have significantly greater capacity, more robust capabilities, and considerably more resiliency, thanks in no small part to a more hospitable environment. However, they are also easier to detect than their Indian counterparts and typically lack the topographical and cultural knowledge these indigenous operatives enjoy. Ultimately, trying to quantify the threats from each set of actors—internal and external—overlooks the degree to which the two are connected.

Indian jihadists are far more lethal as a result of external support, but no longer entirely depend on it. Even in those instances where a purely indigenous attack occurs, the perpetrators often will have benefited from earlier assistance. Pakistan-based actors may remain able to launch unilateral strikes absent Indian assistance. But they are unlikely to be able to equal the frequency of attacks achieved by the Indian Mujahideen. Moreover, although pure expeditionary terrorism with no indigenous assistance can still occur, a catalogue of attacks—attempted and successful—suggests foreign militants often benefit from some form of Indian assistance such as safe haven or reconnaissance.<sup>339</sup> In short, most attacks involve some admixture of foreign and indigenous elements.

Any loss of life is tragic, but as with most terrorist attacks the greater danger lies in the wider responses they can trigger.

New Delhi is unlikely to mobilize for war in the event its citizens were responsible for a terrorist spectacular. Given India's strategic culture of restraint, that likely would remain the case even if it could be proven quickly that Pakistan had provided support or direction. It is even less likely if the culprits cannot be easily identified or traced to Pakistan. However, although an attack by homegrown militants with foreign support is highly unlikely to spark a war, it has become yet another hurdle to overcome as the two countries seek to navigate a peace process. Indeed, the issue of Pakistani support for the IM now merits discussion at some Track 2 events.<sup>340</sup>

The greater threat, and one acknowledged by numerous Indian

interlocutors, is the prospect that another sustained terrorism campaign or major attack could trigger a spate of communal violence. As one senior Indian security official admitted, "Islamist terrorism is a manageable problem, but we do worry seriously about the backlash effect from the Hindu community."<sup>341</sup> Such concerns are understandable. Hindu extremists launched several terrorist attacks in recent years—Malegaon, the Samjauta Express, and the Mecca Masjid—in response to Islamist terrorism and what they viewed as the state's failure to combat it. Notably, they do not appear to have differentiated between attacks by indigenous and Pakistan-based actors, both of which are equally motivated to avenge Hindu violence (as this report illustrates). Indeed, these fed the terrorism cycle, triggering reprisal bombings by the Indian Mujahideen, which was already partly a by-product of past episodes of communal violence.

Relatively speaking, the police response has improved. It is no longer a given that Muslims will be arrested en masse immediately after an attack. But these improvements do not go far enough and some Muslims still see themselves facing a threat from communal (Hindu) organizations and the security forces. This can be exploited to incite Islamist violence.<sup>342</sup>

Lashkar-e-Taiba has become a higher priority for the United States since the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which killed six Americans. Washington has designated the IM a foreign terrorist organization, but it remains a significantly lower priority than other South Asian Islamist militant entities.<sup>343</sup> This is sensible given that it poses less of a threat, the United States has limited resources, and there is only so much Washington can do given the indigenous nature of the problem and limitations of counterterrorism cooperation with India. However, it does not mean that the Indian Mujahideen poses no threats. The network focuses primarily on communal, touristic, economic, and other soft targets, but these have included those at which Westerners are present. If recent reporting about a meeting between IM and al-Qaeda leaders is accurate (and again this should be treated with caution), then it may be that as the Indian Mujahideen evolves it will pursue with greater zeal attacks like the

Pune German Bakery bombing that kill foreigners in India. In short, it is far from certain that the IM constitutes a horizon threat for the United States in South Asia, but it is one that should be monitored for signs of an internationalist shift.

Beyond the direct threat, Washington has an interest in reducing Pakistan's strategic reliance on militant proxies, but doing so entails raising the costs of this policy and reducing its utility. The low-cost and relatively low-risk option of covertly supporting Indian jihadists further reduces the disincentives for the Pakistani ISI of breaking with this practice. Finally, the United States is invested in India's rise and stability in South Asia. Hence any challenge to either is problematic, but one that must be kept in perspective.

Ultimately, the issue of Indian jihadism is not a major threat to regional stability or India's rise. Rather, it is a symptom of certain factors: a bilateral relationship with Pakistan that remains defined by zero-sum competition, and poor internal governance, political malfeasance, economic inequality, and widespread sense of injustice. As one former official acknowledged, "These problems would still be here even if we had no terrorism."<sup>344</sup> Another, a former police officer concurred, adding, "Pakistan may be taking advantage of the situation to radicalize Muslim boys. They may even be controlling the IM. But even if they are then so what? We still must look within as to why Indians are susceptible. And it's up to us to solve this problem here."<sup>345</sup>

# NOTES

- 1 According to many interlocutors, including members of the Indian Muslim community, some politicians depend on Indian Muslims for vote banks, which also leads them to play down the issue.
- 2 Christine Fair, "Students Islamic Movement of India and the Indian Mujahideen: An Assessment," *Asia Policy* 9 (January 2010): 102.
- 3 Scoping discussions for the research contributing to this paper were held in mid-2012 with analysts at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and the Defense Intelligence Agency, officials at National Defense University with insights into evolving Department of Defense and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) concerns about security in South Asia, and congressional staff members.
- 4 Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.
- 5 Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, New Delhi, December 1, 2011, <http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/coi-indexenglish.htm>.
- 6 Rajindar Sachar, Saiyid Hamid, T. K. Oomen, M. A. Basith, Rakesh Basant, Akhtar Majeed, and Abusaleh Shariff, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India* (New Delhi: Prime Minister's High Level Committee, November 2006).
- 7 Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, 234.
- 8 Nathuram Godse, who assassinated Mohanda Ghandi, was a former RSS member, which led to a temporary ban on the group. When the authorities found no proof that the RSS was involved in the conspiracy, the ban was lifted.
- 9 Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Politics of Processions and Hindu-Muslim Riots," in *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, edited by Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73–75.
- 10 Jaffrelot, "The Politics of Processions," 75–76.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 73–75.
- 12 For example, Amnesty International reported that police participated in the killing of Muslims during an episode of communal violence in Meerut, a town near Delhi, in 1987 (Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, 167).

- 13 Dilip Hiro, *Apocalyptic Realm: Jihadists in South Asia* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 179.
- 14 In 1984, before the Ramjanmabhoomi movement activated, the BJP won two seats in Parliament. In 1989, it won eighty-four.
- 15 Hiro, *Apocalyptic Realm*, 180–81; Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, 167.
- 16 Sayyed Abdul Bari, *Azad Hindustan Mai Muslim Tanzimey* (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 2001), 291.
- 17 Fair, “Students Islamic Movement,” 5; Sikand, “Islamist Assertion in Contemporary India,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2003): 181.
- 18 SIMI was also at odds with the older, more moderate Students Islamic Organization (SIO), which was attached to the JIH as well.
- 19 Farhat Aysas, professor at Jamia Millia Islamia, interview by author, New Delhi, June 27, 2012.
- 20 Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, 23, 237.
- 21 Operations Gibraltar entailed infiltrating companies consisting of irregulars, particularly from Pakistan-administered Kashmir, into which soldiers from paramilitary units were integrated. Army officers at the major rank commanded units consisting of four to six companies, which infiltrated across the LoC. Approximately thirty thousand men were involved in the invasion, code-named Operation Gibraltar. The plan was predicated on the belief that local forces would rise up and join a rebellion against Indian rule, but little local help was forthcoming. Rather than retreat, Pakistan launched Operation Grand Slam, which entailed deploying conventional troops. For a detailed account of Pakistan’s covert activities in Indian-administered Kashmir before 1965 and the war, see Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Covert War in Kashmir, 1947–2005* (London: Routledge, 2007), chapters 2–3. See also Gul Hassan Khan, *The Memiors of Lt. Gen. Hassan Khan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 22 Afghanistan was an ideal place to train militants for this purpose, since it would be easy to hide the purpose of any camps established there and to divert weapons and money to them. A training complex, known as Badr I and Badr II, was constructed in southeast Afghanistan four kilometers from the border with Pakistan. Arif Jamal, *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2009), 140; Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013), 69–70.
- 23 HuM was a HuJI splinter. The two briefly reunited to form Harakat-ul-Ansar (HuA), before separating once again.

- 24 *Damning Verdict: Report of the Srikrishna Commission* (Mumbai: Sabrang Communications, 1998), <http://www.sabrang.com/srikrish/sri%20main.htm>.
- 25 Hasan Zaidi, *Black Friday: The True Story of the Bombay Bomb Blasts* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2002).
- 26 S. Hussain Zaidi, *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2012), 226–27.
- 27 Praveen Swami, “Harnessing Hate,” *Frontline* 23, no. 15 (2006), <http://www.hindu.com/fline/fl2315/stories/20060811003912800.htm>.
- 28 Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (Andhra Pradesh, India: Universities Press, 1992), 33; Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 70.
- 29 Swami, “Harnessing Hate.”
- 30 Praveen Swami, “The Well-Tempered Jihad: The Politics and Practice of Post-2002 Islamist Terrorism in India,” *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 3 (September 2008).
- 31 Swami, “Harnessing Hate”; “Why LeT terrorist Abdul Karim Tunda is a big catch for India,” *FirstPost.India*, August 19, 2013, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/why-let-terrorist-abdul-karim-tunda-is-a-big-catch-for-india-1040373.html>.
- 32 Swami, “Harnessing Hate”; “Why LeT terrorist Abdul Karim Tunda.”
- 33 Swami, “Why LeT terrorist Abdul Karim Tunda”; Jatin Anand, “Who Is Syed Abdul Karim alias Tunda,” *Hindustan Times*, August 17, 2013, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/Who-is-Abdul-Karim-Tunda/Article1-1108934.aspx>.
- 34 Praveen Swami, “The ‘Liberation’ of Hyderabad,” *Frontline*, May 13–26, 2000, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1710/17100390.htm>; Swami, *India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 196.
- 35 Swami, “Harnessing Hate.”
- 36 Ansari would allow potassium to burn through the paper ticket. Once complete, it would detonate a small explosive. Rakesh Maria, chief of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad, interview by author, Mumbai, June 11, 2012. See also Shishir Gupta, *Indian Mujahideen: The Enemy Within* (Guurgaon, India: Hachette Book Publishing, 2011), 26.
- 37 Swami, “Well-Tempered Jihad”; “A Road to Perdition: India and Its Invisible Jihad,” unpublished manuscript, April 2008; see also “The Spreading Tentacles of Terror,” *The Hindu*, August 31, 2003.
- 38 Praveen Swami, journalist with *The Hindu*, interview with the author, January

- 8, 2009; Rahul Bedi, journalist with *Jane's Intelligence Review*, interview with the author, January 7, 2009.
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Stephen Tankel** is an assistant professor at American University, non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and adjunct staff member at the RAND Corporation. He specializes in international security with a focus on political and military affairs in South Asia; transnational threats, especially insurgency and terrorism; and U.S. foreign and defense policies related to these issues. Professor Tankel has published widely on these issues and has conducted field research on conflicts and militancy in Algeria, Bangladesh, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, and the Balkans. Columbia University Press published his book, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba*, in 2011. His forthcoming book examines jihadist-state relations pre- and post-9/11. Professor Tankel is on the editorial board of *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* and is a senior editor of the web magazine War on the Rocks. He is frequently asked to advise U.S. policymakers and practitioners on security challenges in South Asia and threats from Islamist militancy around the world. Dr. Tankel received his PhD in War Studies from King's College London, and holds an MSc from the London School of Economics and a BS from Cornell University. Some of the research for this report and for his forthcoming book was conducted during summer 2012 when Professor Tankel was a Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.



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