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The Saudi Connection to the Mumbai Massacres: Strategic Implications for Israel

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- The Mumbai attacks have been linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba and radical Islamic groups in Kashmir generally. Yet it would be a mistake to see Lashkar only as a local organization with only a local agenda.
- Saudi Arabia has contributed very much to what Lashkar-e-Taiba looks like, how it thinks, its motivation, ideology, and funding. Saudi Arabia presents itself as the protector and the spearhead of the defense of Muslims around the world against what they define as the Western cultural attack.
- The Saudis are very committed to recruiting, funding, and funneling ideology to embattled Muslim minorities, and use Muslim charities as their tool to implement this policy. The Saudi methodology is to take advantage of a humanitarian crisis to get a foot in the door. Who could be against assisting widows and orphans and setting up schools and clinics? Some of the money is indeed funneled to support terrorism – families of suicide bombers.
- The notion of global Islam has also penetrated to Gaza and exists under the umbrella of Hamas, which is enabling a revival of global *jihadi* organizations there such as Jaish al-Islam and others. This phenomenon is radicalizing the already radicalized society in Gaza.
- Hamas could agree to a *hudna* (calm) for fifty years, but there will be no recognition of Israel or a cessation of the struggle against it. If Hamas was ready to act pragmatically, it would no longer be Hamas. And then the frustrated factions within Hamas would break off and join up with the radical global *jihadi* organizations in Gaza.

The similarity of the November 2008 attack in Mumbai to the attack on the Savoy Hotel in Tel Aviv in 1975 was striking. At that time, a Palestinian organization based outside the borders of Israel, in a safe haven in Lebanon, had undergone months of specialized training. With a high level of prior intelligence, several very dedicated assault groups attacked a high-value target.

The Mumbai attacks were not a conventional suicide attack. Since 1998, al-Qaeda's hallmark has been suicide attacks, based upon the whole rationale of *jihad*, sacrifice and martyrdom. But the attacks in Mumbai did not resemble 7/7 in London or the attacks in Madrid or any other al-Qaeda-style attacks.

What Is Lashkar-e-Taiba?

The Mumbai attacks have been linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba and radical Islamic groups in Kashmir generally. Yet it would be a mistake to see Lashkar only as a local organization with only a local agenda.

The creation and flourishing of Lashkar-e-Taiba would not have been possible unless they were supported by three major elements. The first is the ideology of global *jihad*. The second is funding and support from external sources. And the third is a territorial base which enables them to conduct activities and maintain training camps.

What is Lashkar-e-Taiba and why is it relevant to the Middle East? Lashkar collects funds from Pakistanis and Kashmiris, as well as the Pakistani community in the Persian Gulf, in the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. Its website appears under the name of Jamaat ud Dawa and the group maintains ties to religious and militant groups around the world. The Jamaat ud Dawa website links directly to the Hamas website.

The Saudi Connection

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Saudi Arabia has contributed very much to what Lashkar-e-Taiba looks like, how it thinks, its motivation, ideology, and funding. Saudi newspapers at the time published calls for *jihad* to support all Muslim struggles around the world. Kashmir was seen as a place where *jihad* was taking place, so donations were solicited for the Muslims living there. Allah was said to bless the warriors of this financial *jihad*.

In August 1999, the Saudi newspaper *Al Jazeera* reported on a press conference conducted by the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), a Saudi-based charity supervised by the government. The group's secretary-general, Maneh al-Johani, praised the role played by Saudi Arabia in providing assistance to Muslims around the world, especially in Kashmir. Johani equated the Kashmir issue with the situation in Kosovo and Palestine, and called on Muslims to help the Kashmiri people.

Radical Wahhabi, Salafi, Saudi Islam sees the world in confrontation, with zones of *jihād* where Muslim minorities are struggling politically and religiously against other forces. The struggle can be with Israel, Serbia, India, or the Philippines. Saudi Arabia presents itself as the protector and the spearhead of the defense of Muslims around the world against what the former Supreme Religious Authority of Saudi Arabia, the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz (Ben Baz), defined as the Western cultural attack.

This is the ideology behind Saudi politics. The Saudis are very committed to recruiting, funding, and funneling ideology to those Muslim minorities, and use Muslim charities as their tool to implement this policy. In September 2000, the Saudi newspaper *Al Jazeera* reported on an additional press conference by WAMY Secretary-General Johani, who discussed Saudi Arabia's role in providing aid to Kashmir and asked the Islamic countries to play an effective part in saving Kashmir's Muslims. Johani described the Kashmiri people's *jihād* and noted that they had suffered thousands of casualties. "The Kashmiri people want to protect their Islamic entity and we must help them," he concluded.

Since the end of the war in Afghanistan in 1989, the Saudi contribution to entrenching the phenomenon of global *jihād* around the world has mushroomed, whether in Chechnya, the Philippines, Kosovo, or the Palestinian territories. Yet for all this, Saudi Arabia is not held accountable.

The Saudi methodology is to take advantage of a humanitarian crisis to get a foot in the door. Who could be against assisting widows and orphans and setting up schools and clinics? It is a methodology that has been duplicated all around the world. Since direct assistance to armed groups is problematic for Saudi Arabia, they use "charities," which are actually organizations that use the social network called the *dawa* to propagate their ideology through mosques, health clinics, and *madrassas*, to influence minds and recruit supporters to Wahhabi-style ideology and commitment. Some of the money is indeed funneled to support terrorism – families of suicide bombers.

It is now evident that the so-called Saudi non-governmental charities are closely monitored by the Saudi government. The Saudis have understood that they were under pressure from the West and so they were very willing to sacrifice the Al-Haramain charity. It was banned and dismantled, but other charities were not, like the Islamic Relief Organization (IRO). The Saudi charities just change names and, unfortunately, nothing concrete is being done. There is no all-out campaign to dismantle all those charities.

Training Camps in Pakistan

Lashkar-e-Taiba has created an infrastructure inside Pakistan which is relevant to struggles beyond the boundaries of Kashmir or India. It has created an operational capability in its training camps through the use of highly skilled instructors, veterans of the Afghan war. Some well-known terrorists have passed through those training camps before launching their attacks. The shoe bomber, Richard Reid, was trained in a Lashkar training camp, as was Dhiren Barot, a British subject and a Hindu who converted to Islam, who was the mastermind of a failed gas

cylinder bombing plot in London and who also prepared detailed blueprints for al-Qaeda of the buildings in New York's financial district.

Lashkar-e-Taiba is headed by Muhammad Saeed, who plays a key role in the group's operational activities, terrorist training camps, ideology, and in its worldwide activities. Saeed was reportedly arrested in Pakistan in February 2009. Saeed determines where the graduates of the Lashkar camps in Pakistan are sent to fight and in 2005 he personally organized the infiltration of Lashkar militants into Iraq. He was in Saudi Arabia at the time, with the knowledge of the Saudi government (you cannot enter Saudi Arabia without permission). He also arranged for Lashkar operatives to be sent to Europe as fundraising coordinators. So Saudi Arabia again was a launching pad for sending highly-trained *mujahidin* to the war against the Americans in Iraq. This shows the global nature of Lashkar-e-Taiba. It is not just a provincial organization but one that has a global reach.

Haji Mohammad Ashraf has been Lashkar's chief financier since 2003, expanding the organization and increasing its fundraising activities. Mahmoud Mohammed Ahmad Ba'aziq, a Saudi national, served as the Lashkar leader in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s and 1990s, before Ashraf, and coordinated fundraising activity with non-governmental charities and businessmen in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi regime is aware of the money going to Lashkar in Saudi Arabia for its activities around the world.

Lashkar operations chief Zakir Rehman Lakvi was also reportedly arrested in a Pakistani raid on a Lashkar training camp. He was one of the masterminds of the Mumbai attack and was in constant cellular phone contact with the attackers. Lakvi has been very much involved in military operations in Chechnya, Bosnia, and Iraq.

Lashkar-e-Taiba would not have evolved to the scale they have reached without Saudi assistance. One key Saudi who helped build Lashkar into such an efficient and highly-trained organization is Abdul Aziz Barbaros. Barbaros, whose real name is Abdul Ahman el-Dosfari, fought with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. He was one of the founding members of Lashkar in Kashmir after the end of the Afghan war. He also traveled to Bosnia to assist the al-Qaeda-oriented *mujahidin* brigades there. During the 1980s and 1990s Barbaros served as a critical link between Lashkar, wealthy and pious Saudi financiers, and Pakistani and Muslim fanatics around the world.

Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin in Gaza routinely delivered speeches addressed to Lashkar-e-Taiba militant rallies in Kashmir and Pakistan. This is an example of the general mindset of radical Islamic solidarity. The Hamas leader in Gaza showed that he cared about what was happening with other Muslim minorities around the world, as they should care about what is happening in Gaza or the West Bank. This is not necessarily directly connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Iraq, this is seen as a struggle against the American "Crusade occupation." This reflects Bin Laden's 1998 declaration of *jihad*, when he spoke of the Islamic front against the Crusaders and the Jews. So everything is linked and what happened in Mumbai has a wider perspective.

Global Islam Penetrates Gaza

The notion of global Islam has also penetrated to Gaza and to some extent in the West Bank. This phenomenon exists under the umbrella of Hamas, which enables a revival of global *jihadi* organizations in Gaza such as Jaish al-Islam and others. The emergence of these groups is worrying because they are very much inspired by the global *jihadi*, Saudi Wahhabi ideology – a strict interpretation of Islam which is being interpreted into political and terrorist activity. What is important in this phenomenon is the radicalization of the already radicalized society in Gaza.

The bottom line is that we are seeing the same pattern of global *jihad*-oriented groups starting to be active in Gaza. They have carried out some attacks, mostly directed against foreign, Western institutions like the YMCA and the American School. Yet they have played only a marginal role in attacks against Israeli targets.

Hamas in Gaza

I think the situation of Hamas control in Gaza is irreversible. From my reading of Hamas publications in Arabic, it is clear that there is no way back, only ahead, to take control in the West Bank if they become strong enough. Hamas could agree to a *hudna* (calm) for fifty years, but there will be no recognition of Israel or a cessation of the struggle against it.

If Hamas was ready to act pragmatically, it would no longer be Hamas. It would be something else. And then the frustrated factions within Hamas would break off and join up with the radical global *jihadi* organizations in Gaza. Those organizations hope to provide a refuge for Hamas radicals who believe that any normalization or pragmatism would be harmful to the Hamas cause.

This is not just my hypothesis. The declarations of Hamas leaders Zahar and Siam have hinted that if Hamas were to lose its real identity, people would shift their loyalties and activities to a more genuine Islamic organization, not a pragmatic, opportunistic, *hudna*-style one.

Should we talk with Hamas? Is the international community ready to sit down with al-Qaeda? There is no difference. It is a total misrepresentation to say Hamas is like the IRA. There is no political wing of Hamas disconnected from the operational wing. There are no pragmatists to speak to. At the end of the day, those who believe that trying to talk to Hamas is the right way to conduct business here in the Middle East will be in for a big disappointment.

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phenomenon. This *Jerusalem Issue Brief* is based on his presentation at the Institute for Contemporary Affairs in Jerusalem on December 9, 2008.

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