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Mumbai attacks: foreign governments criticise India's response

India has been accused of bungling its response to the terror attack on prominent hotels and tourist haunts in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) by foreign governments whose citizens have been killed.

By Damien McElroy in Mumbai

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A senior British official said he was "surprised" by the Indian failure to regain control of the commercial capital almost two days after the attacks began. Israeli officials told the *Jerusalem Post* that India's refusal of its offer to send commandos had put the lives of a rabbi and his family in danger.

Israeli officials believe six of its citizens have been held at Nariman House, the single story office block that was assaulted by helicopter-borne commandos just after dawn.

But nine hours later there was still incoming and outgoing fire and grenade explosions at the building.

While the security forces rescued six hostages in the nearby Taj Mahal Palace hotel the siege of that building has dragged on despite a series of officials claims that the Islamic fundamentalist terrorists had been wiped-out.

A second British official criticised the Indian response to the crisis. Although the country's Black Cat commandos have a fearsome reputation for efficient antiterrorist operations, their deployment was botched.

"They are supposed to set-up a command centre in complete control as their first priority," the official said. "Instead they arrived and went in guns blazing.

"It was blind. They didn't have maps of the hotels, yet there terrorists had done enough reconnaissance to use the service facilities to manoeuvre."

There was also criticism of a midnight announcement on the first day of the crisis by a cabinet minister that 200 commandos were deployed in the area within two hours.

"The terrorist were forewarned by the government itself," the official said.

Even in the midst of the fighting, the security operation is riddled with holes. *The Telegraph* was able to gain access to the shattered lobby of the Oberoi hotel in the final throes of the fighting.

At least a dozen checkpoints made no security checks and the only official who did ask a question redirected the reporter to another part of the complex.

When the building was cleared police found 24 bodies. Another official claimed there were more than 50 bodies in the Taj Mahal hotel.

A masked marine commando said clearance efforts were severely hampered by numbers of people still inside hotels when they moved in to flush out the militants.

"We could have got those terrorists but for so many hotel guests," he said.

"The bodies were lying strewn here and there. There was blood all over and in trying to avoid the casualty of those civilians, we had to be that much more careful."

The commander said his men had had to literally feel their way through the hotel corridors and rooms in complete darkness.

The black-clad commando said it had been impossible to differentiate between dead bodies, the injured and people simply pressing themselves to the floor in terror.

"When an exchange of fire takes place in darkness and there are bodies strewn all over and blood all over, you're actually not looking who is injured or killed," he said. "You're just looking for someone with lots of weapons on him."

Security officials said the men – described by witnesses as "just like boys" dressed in cargo pants and T-shirts with rucksacks across their shoulders – were a highly motivated and determined group.

Split into small groups, they created panic on Wednesday night by attacking locations across Mumbai before focusing their assault on the two five-star hotels and a separate office-residential building housing a Jewish centre.

"They were the kind of people with no remorse," the masked commando said. "Anybody and whomsoever came in front of them they fired."

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