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The Kashmir Connection: A Puzzle

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TARGET At the Taj Mahal Hotel and other Mumbai sites, 163 victims died.

By **TIM WEINER**

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All of the nightmares of the 21st century come together in [Pakistan](#),” in the words of the former [C.I.A.](#) officer Bruce Riedel. Among them is [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#), the Army of the Pure, the group being blamed for the deadly attacks in Mumbai.

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American intelligence on Lashkar falls into three categories. The biggest is the unknown. What little is known is bad enough. The what-ifs are worse: in particular, a possible strategic

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partnership between Lashkar and [Al Qaeda](#)'s forces in Pakistan. Then there is the unknown.

If there were operational links between Lashkar and Al Qaeda in the multiple attacks that terrorized Mumbai for three days last week, American counterterrorism officials are still looking for the evidence. Beyond informed speculation, no proof in the public domain shows those two groups have a working alliance. But they have had some common goals and common ground.

Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#), visiting [India](#), said she would not "jump to any conclusions," given the absence of proof. But she also said: "Whether there is a direct Al Qaeda hand or not, this is clearly the kind of terrorism in which Al Qaeda participates."

Still, there are clues half-buried in the recent past. Here is some of what is known:

First, American intelligence officials are all but certain that Lashkar led the attacks, which left 163 people — including 18 members of India's security forces — dead along with 9 suspected terrorists. "The same group that we believe is responsible for Mumbai had a similar attack in 2006 on a train and killed a similar number of people," the director of national intelligence, [Mike McConnell](#), said last week in a speech at Harvard. "Go back to 2001 and it was an attack on the Parliament." The Mumbai commuter train bombings killed at least 186. A dozen died in the assault on Parliament, which led to talk of war.

Second, Pakistan's intelligence services have used Lashkar as a guerrilla force to fight India over their disputed border in Kashmir. That fight has raged since the British partitioned India and Pakistan in 1947. The rival nations went to war that year over Kashmir, and again in 1965 and 1971. Tens of thousands have been killed in political warfare since then.

Third, and most significantly, Lashkar's roots, like Al Qaeda's, lie in another war — the battle between Soviet forces occupying Afghanistan and Islamic rebels who fought them in the 1980's. The rebels were backed by billions of dollars from the United States and Saudi Arabia. Their money and guns flowed through Pakistani intelligence.

In 1989, the Red Army left Afghanistan. The international Islamic holy warriors did not; many thousands of radicals from some 40 nations came to learn the lessons of jihad in Afghanistan, and Lashkar's first foot soldiers were among them.

Lashkar was founded in 1989, supported by Saudi money and protected by Pakistani spies, according to Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan's current ambassador to the United States, a former journalist who opposed Gen. [Pervez Musharraf](#) when the general was Pakistan's ruler. Pakistan's role as quartermaster and state sponsor of Afghan jihad forces created "a nexus between Pakistan's military and secret services, which was heightened by the state sponsorship of jihad against India," he has written.

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After the attacks of September 2001, it was clearer that Al Qaeda had formed alliances with Lashkar: the first high-level Qaeda prisoner taken after 9/11, Abu Zubayda, was captured in a Lashkar safe house in Pakistan, as Mr. Riedel, now affiliated with the [Brookings Institution](#), pointed out in an article posted online last Wednesday. Other Qaeda operatives who fled after American forces arrived in Afghanistan also holed up with Lashkar, he noted.

In December 2001, after the Lashkar attack on India's Parliament, President Bush added the group to the official United States list of international terrorist organizations. He asked General Musharraf to jail Lashkar's leaders and break up the group.

Some members were arrested. Others went to fight Americans alongside the [Taliban](#) in Afghanistan rather than continue their battles against India's Hindus in Kashmir, as the State Department and India's Defense Ministry have reported; by 2006, attacks by Lashkar and its allies in Kashmir were half what they were a few years before.

But on April 23, 2006, [Osama bin Laden](#) seemed to signal an open alliance with groups like Lashkar, and their goals. He issued a proclamation denouncing "a Crusader-Zionist-Hindu war against Muslims." He referred to the United States, Israel and India in the statement, as it was broadcast and translated by [Al Jazeera](#). "A [U.N.](#) resolution passed more than half a century ago gave Muslim Kashmir the liberty of choosing independence from India," it said. "George Bush, the leader of the crusaders' campaign, announced a few days ago that he will order his converted agent Musharraf to shut down the Kashmir mujahedeen camps, thus affirming that it is a Zionist-Hindu war against Muslims."

Mr. bin Laden called for Islamic holy warriors to continue jihad against India over Kashmir. They did. Lashkar and other Kashmiri groups "continued regional attack planning" in 2007, and "continued to support attacks in Afghanistan," the State Department reported six months ago. The groups also continued to feature prominently in Al Qaeda's "transnational attack planning," the report said.

Then, in an August audio tape, Al Qaeda's second-in-command, [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#), proclaimed that "the American, Zionist and Indian flags were raised high" over the bodies of dead Islamic fighters in Pakistan. Jarret Brachman, who was director of research at [West Point](#)'s Center for Combating Terrorism from 2004 to 2008, points to that statement as potentially significant.

"He starts redirecting Pakistani jihadi attention to the evils of India and linking it more visibly to the U.S. and Israel," he said. "The Mumbai attacks should really come as no surprise to anybody who's been listening carefully to Al Qaeda's rhetoric. Even if Al Qaeda had nothing to do with it operationally, their peddling of this anti-Indian sentiment undoubtedly inspires more parochial groups, like Lashkar, to operationalize those ideas."

Intelligence work is about secrets and mysteries, as Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who

used to run the C.I.A., often says. The Mumbai massacres remain something of a mystery. Of late, "Al Qaeda has seemed strategically schizophrenic," Mr. Brachman said. "How do they turn their hate list into a target list?" He said that no one knows if this attack was the start of something new.

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