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WORLD NEWS

Pakistan's Probe Finds Local Links To Attacks On Mumbai

By **ZAHID HUSSAIN, MATTHEW ROSENBERG** and **PETER WONACOTT**

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ISLAMABAD -- Pakistan's own investigation of terror attacks in Mumbai has begun to show substantive links between the 10 gunmen and an Islamic militant group that its powerful spy agency spent years supporting, say people with knowledge of the probe.

At least one top leader of militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, or "Army of the Pure," captured in a raid earlier this month in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, has confessed the group's involvement in the attack as India and the U.S. have alleged, according to a senior Pakistani security official.

The disclosure could add new international pressure on Pakistan to accept that the attacks, which left 171 dead in India, originated within its borders and to prosecute or extradite the suspects. That raises difficult and potentially destabilizing issues for the country's new civilian government, its military and the spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence -- which is conducting interrogations of militants it once cultivated as partners.

Pakistani security officials say a top Lashkar commander, Zarar Shah, has admitted a role in the Mumbai attack during interrogation, according to the security official, who declined to be identified discussing the investigation. "He is singing," the security official said of Mr. Shah. The admission, the official said, is backed up by U.S. intercepts of a phone call between Mr. Shah and one of the attackers at the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, the site of a 60-hour confrontation with Indian security forces.

A second person familiar with the investigation said Mr. Shah told Pakistani interrogators that he was one of the key planners of the operation, and that he



Pakistani protesters burn an Indian flag during a rally in Karachi, Pakistan, on Friday. A probe could add new international pressure on Pakistan to accept that the attacks originated within its borders. *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

spoke with the attackers during the rampage to give them advice and keep them focused.

The person said Mr. Shah had implicated other Lashkar members, and had broadly confirmed the story told by the sole captured gunman to Indian investigators -- that the 10 assailants trained in Pakistan's part of Kashmir and then went by boat from Karachi to Mumbai. Mr. Shah said the attackers also spent at least a few weeks in Karachi, a crowded Arabian Sea port, training in urban combat to hone skills they would use in their assault.

Mr. Shah was picked up along with fellow Lashkar commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi during the military camp raids in Kashmir.

The Mumbai attacks have stoked tensions in India and Pakistan, producing allegations and counterallegations that have both countries headed toward conflict. Pakistan recently redeployed some troops from the fight against Islamic militants toward the Indian border, and India warned its citizens not to travel to Pakistan. India and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed, have fought three wars since their independence in 1947.

The probe also is stress-testing an uncomfortable shift under way at Pakistan's spy agency -- and the government -- since the election of civilian leadership replacing the military-led regime earlier this year. Military and intelligence officials acknowledge they have long seen India as their primary enemy and Islamist extremists such as Lashkar as allies. But now the ISI is in the midst of being revamped, and its ranks purged of those seen as too soft on Islamic militants.

That revamp and the Mumbai attacks are in turn putting pressure on the civilian leadership, which risks a backlash among the population -- and among elements of ISI and the military -- if it is too accommodating to India. "The ISI can make or break any regime in Pakistan," said retired Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg, a former army chief. "Don't fight the ISI."

The delicate politics of the Mumbai investigation have given the spy agency renewed sway just when the government was trying to limit its influence. A Western diplomat said the question now is what Pakistan will do with the evidence it is developing.

The big fear in the West and India is a repeat of what happened after a 2001 attack on India's parliament, which led to the ban on Lashkar. Top militant leaders were arrested only to be released months later. Lashkar and other groups continued to operate openly, even though formal ISI connections were scaled back or closed, the diplomat said.

"They've got the guys. They have the confessions. What do they do now?" the diplomat said. "We need to see that this is more than a show. We want to see the entire infrastructure of terror dismantled. There needs to be real prosecutions this time."

A spokesman for new president Asif Ali Zardari, Farhatullah Babar, said Tuesday that he wasn't aware of the Pakistani investigation yet producing any links between Lashkar militants and the Mumbai attacks. "The Interior Ministry has already stated that the government of Pakistan has not been furnished with any evidence," he said.

The Pakistani security official cautioned that the investigation is still in early stages and a more full picture could emerge once India decides to share more information. Pakistani authorities didn't have evidence that Lashkar was involved in the attacks before the militants' arrest in Kashmir, the security official said; they were captured based only on initial guidance from U.S and British authorities.

Vishnu Prakash, a spokesman for India's Foreign Ministry, said in a telephone interview that all India's evidence will be shared with Pakistan soon, when the investigation is complete. But Mr. Prakash expressed doubt Pakistan would act, based on what he said was its investigative track record: "Whenever actionable intelligence is given, our friends make sure it is neutralized, and then it cannot be acted upon," he said.

In the nearly four months since Mr. Zardari was elected, civilian and military

leaders have been working to remake the role the ISI plays in the country's affairs, and take aim at an intelligence apparatus that diplomats and analysts suspect still hasn't fully severed links to extremist groups such as Lashkar.

New agency chief Lt. General Ahmed Shuja Pasha and army chief Gen. Ashfaq Kayani have flushed out top and mid-level hard-liners associated with the agency's murky past dealings with terrorist organizations. Two deputies under Gen. Pasha's predecessor were removed and dozens of other lower-level officials sacked. The agency's political cell, which monitored the country's own politicians and parties and helped make it a political kingmaker, has been closed, its operatives dispersed through the agency.

In a televised remarks Tuesday, Pakistan's foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, said Pakistan offered to send a high-level delegation to New Delhi to help investigate the Mumbai attacks.

"Traditionally there has been a sort of disconnect between the political leadership and the leadership of the security establishment," said Mr. Babar, the spokesman for Mr. Zardari. Under the new regime, he said, "There is harmony."

There also have been increasing tensions. Mr. Zardari -- who replaced his wife, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, as their party's candidate to lead the country after her assassination last year -- has faced frequent reminders that the military's step back from political control has its limits, and could be reversed.

Mr. Zardari initially offered to send Gen. Pasha himself to aid India's investigation into the Mumbai attacks, then had to rescind it when the military objected. He surprised the military this month by announcing Pakistan would never hit India with a first-strike nuclear attack.

Two months before his election, Mr. Zardari as party chief mounted an attempt to wrest the control of the ISI from the military and place it under a close political adviser. Word spread through a wedding attended by Pakistan's top army brass. "I was certainly not consulted," a grim-faced Gen. Kayani told another guest. Top army officials started working the phones. The next day, July 27, the government announced that its original notice had been "misinterpreted." It later withdrew the notice entirely.

ISI's headquarters, surrounded by manicured lawns and fountains, sits behind unmarked walls and armed checkpoints in the heart of Islamabad. Founded in 1948, the ISI moved into politics during Pakistan's military governments of the 1960s. It formally established its political cell under a civilian prime minister -- Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, father of Mr. Zardari's murdered wife. But over the years the

spy chiefs -- the agency leadership is all active military officers -- often proved more loyal to the military than the government.

During the Soviet Union's occupation of neighboring Afghanistan in the 1980s, Pakistan's spies became partners with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, which cultivated the same insurgent groups at the time. In the 1990s, the ISI helped fashion Lashkar into one of the most potent Islamic militant forces battling Indian troops in Kashmir.

The Indian government blamed the ISI for helping plot the 1993 Mumbai bombings, which killed hundreds of people. The agency and Pakistan government still deny ISI involvement. The ISI purged scores of extremist officers from its ranks. But Pakistan continued to support anti-India militants in Kashmir and the ISI maintained extensive links to the Taliban, according to Western and Indian security officials. Current and former ISI officials acknowledge the ISI maintained extensive links to the Taliban.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the U.S., Pakistan's military-led government signed on as an ally in the global battle against Islamic terrorism, and the ISI helped coalition forces rout the Taliban. According to a former ISI officer, hundreds of ISI operatives involved with the Afghan cell were removed from ISI.

In recent years, Lashkar and other groups have turned to waging global violence against largely civilian targets, putting Pakistan under rising pressure from its allies and complicating peace negotiations with India. The groups also are striking targets within Pakistan. They have become, said the ISI official, "a monster we've created that we can't put back in the box."

Pakistan banned Lashkar under pressure from the U.S. and India in 2002 but did little to curtail its activities until earlier this month, when it enforced a new United Nations resolution banning its charitable front, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, and arrested senior leaders of both organizations.

The current revamp of the ISI began in September when President Zardari and Gen. Kayani replaced the agency's chief, Lt. General Nadeem Taj, who was seen as not aggressive enough toward militants. The new chief, Gen. Pasha, has overseen major offensives against al Qaeda-supported militants in Pakistan's tribal regions.

Write to Matthew Rosenberg at matthew.rosenberg@wsj.com and Peter Wonacott at peter.wonacott@wsj.com

A Covert History

- 1948: Pakistan establishes Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, to protect country against foreign and domestic security threats
- 1975: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, (right) prime minister of Pakistan, creates a political cell within the ISI through an executive order. The cell monitors Pakistani politics and politicians.
- 1981-88: ISI and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency carry out massive covert operations against Soviet forces in Afghanistan
- 1989: Several ISI officials dismissed for plotting against the democratically elected government of Benazir Bhutto
- 1993: U.S. threatens to declare Pakistan a terrorist state for ISI's alleged support for cross-border terrorist activities. Hundreds of ISI personnel sacked in a purge.
- 2001: Pakistan becomes an ally in the U.S. war on terror
- 2002: Several officers with suspected links to Islamic militants removed from ISI
- 2007: General Ashfaq Kayani (above) becomes first ISI head to be appointed chief of army staff
- 2008: The new civilian government closes down ISI's political cell as part of revamp. Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha is appointed new ISI chief.



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Afghan guerilla, 1988

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