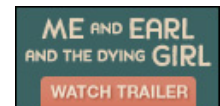


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**September 30, 2009**

Militant Network Is Intact Long After Mumbai Siege

By [LYDIA POLGREEN](#) and [SOUAD MEKHENNET](#)

KARACHI, [Pakistan](#) — Ten months after the devastating attacks in Mumbai by Pakistan-based militants, the group behind the assault remains largely intact and determined to strike India again, according to current and former members of the group, [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#), and intelligence officials.

Despite pledges from Pakistan to dismantle militant groups operating on its soil, and the arrest of a handful of operatives, Lashkar has persisted, even flourished, since 10 recruits killed 163 people in a rampage through Mumbai, India's financial capital, last November.

Indian and Pakistani dossiers on the Mumbai investigations, copies of which were obtained by The New York Times, offer a detailed picture of the operations of a Lashkar network that spans Pakistan. It included four houses and two training camps here in this sprawling southern port city that were used to prepare the attacks.

Among the organizers, the Pakistani document says, was Hammad Amin Sadiq, a homeopathic pharmacist, who arranged bank accounts and secured supplies. He and six others begin their formal trial on Saturday in Pakistan, though Indian authorities say the prosecution stops well short of top Lashkar leaders.

Indeed, Lashkar's broader network endures, and can be mobilized quickly for elaborate attacks with relatively few resources, according to a dozen current and former Lashkar militants and intelligence officials from the United States, Europe, India and Pakistan.

In interviews with The Times, they presented a troubling portrait of Lashkar's capabilities, its popularity in Pakistan and the support it has received from former officials of Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment.

Pakistan's chief spy agency, the [Inter-Services Intelligence](#) directorate, or ISI, helped create Lashkar two decades ago to challenge Indian control in Kashmir, the disputed territory that lies at the heart of the conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

Pakistani officials say that after Sept. 11, 2001, they broke their contacts with the group. No credible evidence has emerged of Pakistani government involvement in the Mumbai attacks, according to an American law enforcement official.

But a senior American intelligence official said the ISI was believed to maintain ties with Lashkar. Four Lashkar members, interviewed individually, said only a thin distance separated Lashkar and the ISI, bridged by former ISI and military officials.

One highly placed Lashkar militant said the Mumbai attackers were part of groups trained by former Pakistani military and intelligence officials at Lashkar camps. Others had direct

knowledge that retired army and ISI officials trained Lashkar recruits as late as last year.

“Some people of the ISI knew about the plan and closed their eyes,” said one senior Lashkar operative in Karachi who said he had met some of the gunmen before they left for the Mumbai assault, though he did not know what their mission would be.

The intelligence officials interviewed insisted on anonymity while discussing classified information. The current and former Lashkar militants did not want their names used for fear of antagonizing others in the group or Pakistani authorities.

But by all accounts Lashkar’s network, though dormant, remains alive, and the possibility that it could strike India again makes Lashkar a wild card in one of the most volatile regions of the world.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since they were created by the bloody partition of British India in 1947. Whether they begin again the long journey toward peace or find themselves eyeball to eyeball, nuclear arms at the ready, depends in no small measure on the actions of this shadowy group.

A new attack could reverberate widely through the region and revive nagging questions about Pakistan’s commitment to stamp out the militant groups that use its territory.

It could also dangerously complicate the Obama administration’s efforts in Afghanistan. Success there depends in part on avoiding open conflict between India and Pakistan, so that Pakistan’s military can focus on battling the [Taliban](#) insurgents who base themselves in Pakistan.

Even so, American diplomatic efforts to improve India-Pakistan relations have been stillborn. So delicate is the Kashmir issue that Indian officials bridle at any hint of American mediation.

Meeting on the sidelines of the [United Nations General Assembly](#), the two sides [failed to restart talks](#) last weekend, with India demanding greater steps by Pakistan to prosecute those responsible for the Mumbai attacks.

The dossiers show that at the level of the police, the two countries can cooperate, and have exchanged [DNA evidence](#), photographs and items found with the attackers to piece together a detailed portrait of the Mumbai plot.

But the files are laced with barbs and recriminations, reflecting the increasingly acid tenor of their relations. Despite pledges to work together to fight terrorism, the Pakistani and Indian intelligence services are not on speaking terms, according to officials in both countries and the United States.

The gaps heighten the risks of a new attack substantially, American officials fear.

“The only cooperation we have with the Pakistanis is that they send us their terrorists, who kill our people, and we kill their terrorists,” a senior Indian intelligence official said in an interview.

Asked how much his agency communicated with its Indian counterpart, a senior Pakistani intelligence official made an O with his thumb and forefinger.

“Zero,” he replied.

Brazen Planning

The Pakistani investigation concludes “beyond any reasonable doubt” that it was Lashkar militants who carried out the Mumbai attacks, preying on their victims in a train station, two five-star hotels, a cafe and a Jewish center over three days starting last Nov. 26.

According to [testimony](#) by the only surviving attacker, [Ajmal Kasab](#), 22, Lashkar recruits were vetted and trained around the country, including at well-established camps in Muzaffarabad, in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, as well as in Mansehra, in North-West Frontier Province.

A core group, the 10 chosen for the Mumbai assault, was eventually moved to Karachi and its suburbs, where the real drilling began and where Pakistani investigators later retraced the plotters' steps.

Beginning as early as May 2008, the group trained and planned brazenly while living in various neighborhoods in and around Karachi. They made scores of calls using cellphones, some with stolen numbers, starting in August. They set up voice lines over the Internet.

At one water sports shop, they bought inflatable boats, air pumps, life jackets and engines. One of their training camps, with five thatched rooms and a three-room house, was located near a creek, where they conducted water drills in the open.

The police later recovered an abundance of evidence: militant literature, pocket diaries, spent and live ammunition, empty gun magazines, life vests and receipts for supplies, including distributed weapons and explosives, the Pakistani dossier says.

At the other camp, which they named Azizabad, the group and their trainers set up a classroom.

Using handwritten manuals, the recruits were trained how to use cellphones to keep in contact with their handlers during the attack. They pored over detailed maps of the Indian coastline, plotting the course they would take to Mumbai. They learned how to use global positioning devices.

Working from Millat Town, a dusty, middle-class Karachi suburb on the eastern edge of the city, Mr. Sadiq organized the cadre. Neighbors described him as quiet and pious, riding around the streets with his two young sons perched on his motorbike. The Pakistani dossier says he was a committed Lashkar militant.

In an interview, his uncle, Lala Yasin, said the same thing, adding proudly that Mr. Sadiq was willing to do anything to liberate Kashmir from India's grip.

“Lashkar-e-Taiba does not kill people without reason,” Mr. Yasin said at his home in Karachi, a few blocks from where his nephew planned the Mumbai attacks.

“It is the champion of jihad,” he explained. “Muslims are like a body and if one part of your body is aching, the entire body may be jeopardized.”

A Limited Crackdown

Pakistani authorities have [arrested seven men](#) linked to the Mumbai attack, including Mr. Sadiq and Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi, a man well known as the chief of operations for Lashkar. They are searching for at least 13 other suspects.

But their investigation has come up short of the founder of Lashkar, Hafiz Saeed, the man Indian and Western officials accuse of masterminding the attacks.

In June, a Pakistani court freed Mr. Saeed from detention, declaring that it did not have enough evidence to hold him.

Under continuing pressure, Pakistani authorities this month confined his movements once again. But they say they have no new evidence against him.

Rehman Malik, Pakistan's interior minister, said that there was simply not enough evidence to charge Mr. Saeed with a crime, and that all the evidence pointed to Mr. Lakhvi as the mastermind.

"Lakhvi was the head, and that is why he has been taken into custody," Mr. Malik said in an interview. "He has been charged and now they are all under trial."

Indian officials say they have sent Pakistan a six-page summary of evidence of Mr. Saeed's complicity in the Mumbai attacks, a copy of which was given to The Times. The document, based on India's own intelligence and testimony from Mr. Kasab, quotes Mr. Saeed giving detailed instructions to the group that carried out the attack.

"One Hindustani boat has to be hijacked for going to Bombay from Karachi," the document says, using Mumbai's former name. Mr. Saeed also told the group that it should aim to begin the assault around 7:30 p.m.

"At this hour there is considerable crowd at the places of our target," the document quotes him as saying.

Pakistani officials and legal experts say the evidence is not as clear-cut as India says. The case against Mr. Saeed rests almost entirely on the testimony of Mr. Kasab, the surviving attacker, and serious questions remain about the way the Indian police obtained his statements, they say.

Jamaat-ud-Dawa, the organization Mr. Saeed now leads, bills itself as a charity and denies any links with Lashkar. Abdur Rahman Makki, Mr. Saeed's deputy and brother-in-law, called any accusations against Mr. Saeed baseless.

"I do not think that there is anything left to talk about after the High Court's decision that Hafez Saeed has no link to the Mumbai incident," he said in an interview.

Yet he was not shy about admitting that Mr. Saeed, a fiery preacher, regularly exhorted young people to fight in Kashmir. "Hafiz Saeed always speaks and discusses about the jihad that is mentioned in the Holy Koran," Mr. Makki said. "Not only Pakistanis, any Muslim has the duty to support the oppressed Kashmiris."

All parts of India where Muslims are a majority must be freed, he said.

Meanwhile, despite promises to crack down on terrorists, Pakistan's government has taken few concrete steps.

The former director of Pakistan's elite national investigative force was appointed to lead the country's new counterterrorism body in January. But it took seven months to get any money to get the agency moving, and only now is it beginning to hire staff members and flesh out its

mission, law enforcement officials said.

Cracking down on Lashkar and other groups linked to the Kashmir struggle, and who do not explicitly seek to overthrow Pakistan's government, was not urgent, they said.

"I have many other things that are higher priority now," said one senior police official in Punjab, the province where DNA tests pinpointed the families of the Mumbai attackers, according to the dossier. "Why would a case in Mumbai be so important when Pakistan is the front line of the war on terror?"

Links to Intelligence Agencies

For Pakistani authorities, the political problems posed by arresting Mr. Saeed, or undertaking a broader crackdown on Lashkar, may outstrip the legal ones.

The organization and its cause — to "free" Kashmir — remain close to the hearts of the Pakistani public as well as the military and intelligence establishment.

Since the Mumbai attacks, "our funds increased and more people wanted to join us," a senior Lashkar operative in Karachi said in an interview. A midlevel ISI officer told The Times this year that Lashkar's membership extended to 150,000 people.

Despite official denials, Pakistan's spy agency, the ISI, maintains links to Lashkar, though the current level of support remains murky, according to the senior American intelligence official interviewed by The Times, as well as Pakistani analysts, retired military officials and former Lashkar members.

"Hafiz Saeed is the army's man," said Najam Sethi, an analyst and newspaper editor in Lahore, Pakistan. He and other analysts said the ISI was in no hurry to discard a group it helped create for a covert war against India.

"They have not abandoned it altogether," said Hasan Askari Rizvi, a military analyst in Lahore. "It is not a total reversal; it is a realization that this is not advisable at this time."

Senior ISI officials disputed the view. While acknowledging that the ISI had worked closely with Lashkar-e-Taiba in the past, they said things were different now.

"Prior to 9/11, we had a very strong contact with L.E.T., even on the leadership level," one senior Pakistani intelligence official said in an interview. "But after 9/11, we broke our contacts with not only L.E.T. but also the Taliban."

"Today we think that it would have been better if we had not cut our ties with them the way we did," the official added, "so that we could control them more."

A senior Lashkar militant said the group was divided — with the operational wing, led by Mr. Lakhvi, chafing for more attacks on India, and the spiritual wing, led by Mr. Saeed, advocating a more cautious approach.

The senior Pakistani intelligence official said that some within Lashkar might aspire to a more ambitious agenda, and suggested that parts of the group might have acted on their own.

"Lashkar went rogue," the Pakistani intelligence official said. "Perhaps L.E.T. or dissident

factions wanted to emerge as a global player,” like [Al Qaeda](#).

New Attacks Expected

Even as new details emerge about the Mumbai attacks, senior American military, intelligence and counterterrorism officials express grim certainty that Lashkar is plotting new attacks.

The United States warned Indian officials this year about a Mumbai-style attack by Lashkar against multiple sites in India, according to a senior Defense Department official and a senior American counterterrorism official.

The counterterrorism official said the information, gleaned from electronic intercepts and other sources, was not specific and apparently did not result in any arrests. But it was significant enough for American officials to alert their Indian counterparts.

“There were indications of possible terrorist activity in the run-up to the Indian elections,” in May, “and that information was shared promptly with Indian officials,” said the counterterrorism official.

Pakistani officials, however, say they have been kept in the dark. “We heard that the Americans have warned the Indians that something in Mumbai might happen, but no one informed us,” a senior Pakistani intelligence official said.

If there is one thing on which intelligence agencies on both sides of the border agree, it is that the consequences of a new attack by Lashkar could be devastating.

“We do fear that if something like Mumbai happens in India again, there might be a military reaction from the Indian side and it could trigger into a war,” said a senior intelligence official in Pakistan.

“Right now we cannot guarantee that it will not happen again, because we do not have any control over it.”

Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker contributed reporting from Washington.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: October 3, 2009

An article on Wednesday about the Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which has flourished despite Pakistan’s pledges to dismantle it, misstated the action taken by Interpol after a Pakistani court in June freed Lashkar’s founder, Hafiz Saeed, who has been accused by India of masterminding the deadly Mumbai attacks last November. Interpol issued a Red Notice, an advisory that an arrest warrant has been issued by one of Interpol’s member countries. Interpol did not issue an international warrant for Mr. Saeed’s arrest.

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