

Nature and impact of Mumbai attacks

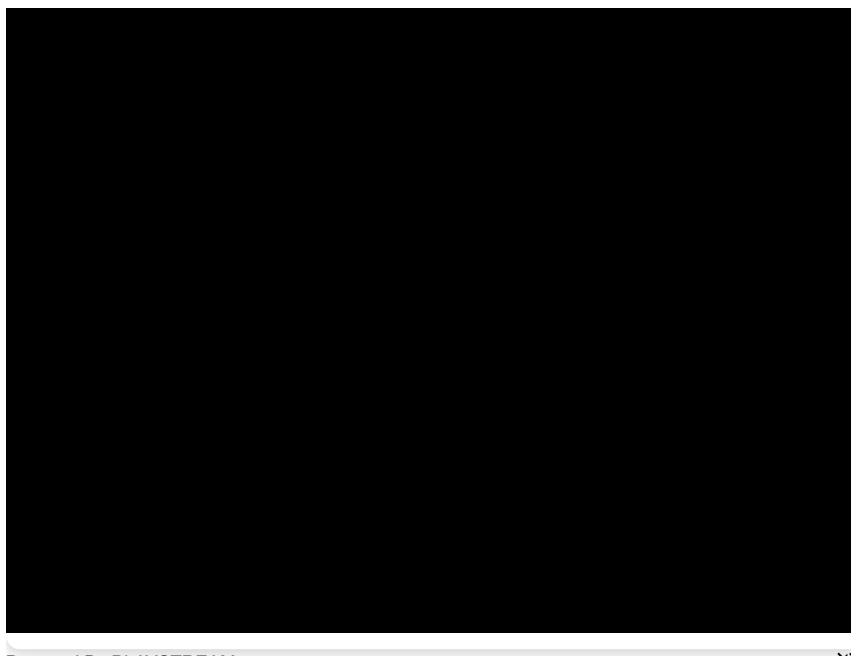




Police personnel pay homage at Martyrs' Memorial, at Police Gymkhana at Marine Lines on the 11th anniversary of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, in Mumbai on 26 November 2019. ANI

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LONDON: India is approaching the twelfth anniversary of the Mumbai terror attacks of 26-29 November 2008, an outrage which saw the death of 166 people at locations across the city, plus those of nine Pakistani attackers. Members of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT, Army of the Pure), their attack had been facilitated and directed by Pakistani intelligence operatives. This article focuses on what the events demonstrate about jihadist violence, and some examples of the subsequent impact of Mumbai.



### INDIA AS THE ENEMY

Jihadists have a long, broad list of enemies. Sectarian opponents with Sunni Islam. Those who may be condemned as apostate such as the Shia, or Ahmadis. Those who have rejected Islam for secularism. There are also the many governments in the Muslim majority world that fail to match the jihadists' exacting standards, particularly in either introducing or upholding sharia. Such governments comprise the "near enemy". The innovation of Al-Qaeda was to target the "far enemy" of the United States.

India occupies a place somewhere in between the near and the far enemy. Its success as a multi-religious secular nation, with some 200 million Muslims, is a permanent source of irritation. Additionally, Pakistan, its more troubled and less successful neighbour, seeks to take Jammu and Kashmir from India, and will not hesitate to support armed groups dedicated to this cause. In 2017, the former head of the Pakistani military, and ex-President, Pervez Musharraf, declared he had always been in favour of using such groups against India, and that he was a "fan" of the LeT and its founder, Hafiz Saeed.

The Mumbai attacks showed the jihadists, and Pakistan, lashing out an opponent they are unlikely to beat militarily, but who they can wound by other means. Attacks of this nature serve as a learning tool for future operations, and a method of keeping pressure on the enemy. They satiate the rage and hate common to jihadist violence, be it in South Asia, Europe or the Middle East. Someone, or other, has to be punished for the world being as it is.

Pakistan utilising jihadist groups in this manner is however a high-risk strategy. In diplomatic circles, Mumbai was quickly presented by India as an example of Pakistani state sponsored terrorism, an image further cemented by the subsequent discovery of Osama bin Laden in the Pakistani garrison town of Abbottabad. The reduced wriggle-room thus afforded to Pakistan has assured some changes—Hafiz Saeed has since been tried and jailed for financing terrorism. Secondly, whilst India is the eternal enemy for Pakistan's military industrial complex, the jihadists have their own ambitions, and their own enemies, at the local, national, and international levels. Not for the first time, Pakistan found that having breathed life into the jihadist Frankenstein, it is not a creature readily controlled. The following year, 2009, saw over 3,000 deaths in the Islamic Republic from terrorist attacks, an increase of 48%, and a death toll higher even than that of Afghanistan.

### TERROR TACTICS

The targeting of areas where large numbers congregate—hotels, transport hubs, bars and restaurants—by rampaging attackers presented an enormous challenge to the Indian authorities. The tactic of deploying roving gunmen who enter the country from abroad is one we have seen subsequently, most prominently the Islamic State attacks in Paris in November 2015 featured operatives who came into France either from Belgium or via Europe's mass migration routes to the south. The authorities—often focused on examining intelligence data on threats posed by permanent residents—may be caught off guard by such actions.

There was also a familiar element to the target selection. Internationally, few even knew Mumbai has a small Jewish community. The 26/11 attackers went out of their way to research and find the Mumbai Chabad House, where four civilians were killed, including Rabbi Holtzberg and his pregnant wife. Bodies at this location reportedly displayed signs of torture. For all the rhetoric from both Islamist organisations and jihadist groups about Israel, the lashing out at ordinary Jews going about their business speaks volumes as to their mindset.

In the United Kingdom, the authorities took notice of the multiple locations hit by different groups of terrorists and worked to conceptualise how similar attacks could potentially be responded to in a major British city. 26/11 also made headline news, not all of it accurate. When the Daily Telegraph reported that some of the gunmen may be British, the primarily Muslim Respect Party, leapt into action. Leader Salma Yaqoob denounced the coverage as "reckless, inaccurate and inflammatory". The massacre in Mumbai became, not a moment to reflect on a poison inside Pakistan or the extremism of a minority within contemporary Islam, but another story of "injustice" and "discrimination" against British Muslims. That response to terrorist outrages—to focus on media coverage more forensically than the attack itself—was not new but is now firmly established.

In 2013, the United States was to convict David Headley (originally Daood Sayed Gilani) an American LeT member of Pakistani heritage, with conducting surveillance operations on the venues chosen by the 26/11 attackers. Headley—a long term informant for the American Drug Enforcement Agency—has been a source of friction between the United States and India. As well as preparing the ground for the Mumbai attackers, Headley carried out similar analysis of targets in Denmark, at the Jyllands-Posten newspaper. Here, the British connection was to emerge—Headley had visited LeT supporters in Derby in an attempt to find partners and finance his operations. By the time this was being reported in the British media, however, Salma Yaqoob and the Respect Party had moved on, and were airing different grievances.

The Mumbai attacks were a hideous crime. But they, and the responses to them, serve as a snapshot, an illustration of the world as it is. And that world can be very ugly.

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