



The Jihadist War Against India

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Colaboraciones n° 1102

July 20, 2006

Is this the beginning of the Jihadi war on India? Yes and no. Yes it is a *jihadist* war on India, but no, the trains' bombings weren't the beginning of that war. Unlike the U.S., Spain, and the UK, the Indians have been subjected to small explosions of the holy war for years. Yesterday's bombings of Mumbai's trains (previously Bombay) are not the first strikes on Indian mainland. In October 2005, terror bombings killed more than 60 people in the Indian capital of Delhi. Mumbai itself was the target of terror attacks that massacred 55 persons and injured 180 in August 2003. And in December 2001, *jihadist* groups launched raids on India's parliament killed a number of people, as well. The targeting of the most populous democracy on earth has been taking place for years, even before 9/11 at the hands of followers of a Salafi-Tablighi ideology, with common roots with al-

Qaeda's terrorist doctrine. The July 11 blasts in Mumbai aiming at innocent civilians are the last in a string of crimes directed against the Indian population by militants following orders and engaged in an irreversible path of violence. But who did it and why?

Indian experts and security sources believe that an Indian *jihadist*, Daoud Ibrahim, is probably behind the organization of the terror attacks in Mumbai, as he is accused of having a history of similar actions. Ibrahim is an Indian Muslim who followed Islamist ideology and committed himself to waging *jihad* against the Hindus and the state of India. He is believed to have declared *Bay'a* (commitment) to Osama Bin Laden in the past. Ibrahim has *jihadist* networks inside India and is connected with the Kashmir Islamist organizations on

both sides of the border with Pakistan.

The main "movement" that starts in Pakistan and stretches into the Indian province of Kashmir is Laskar-e-Taiba, which was founded in the late 1980s by Hafiz Mohammad Saeed. Laskar-e-Taiba is said to mean "The soldiers of the Pure." It could also mean linguistically "the Good soldiers" or the "best soldiers," in reference to them as the vanguards of the Mujahideen in the region. In reality, the "Laskars" are another form of Kashmiri Taliban whose aim is to establish an Emirate in the Indian province of Kashmir before joining forces with the Islamists of Pakistan and the Taliban of Afghanistan to create a massive and powerful "Jihadi Principality" in south Asia stretching from Iran to China.

The Laskar Taiba is under the ideological auspices of a Wahhabi-style foundation in Pakistan, the Markaz Dawa ul-Irshad, also created in the late 1980s. Some reports conclude that the "Dawa" is the mother ship, while the "Laskar" is the army, or one of its armed branches. In the jungle of south Asia's Islamic fundamentalism, networks are intertwined but well connected. The Salafi-Tablighi *jihadists* of Pakistan and their counterparts in India have two enemies: one strategic and the other an interim enemy. The Indian state is seen as the foe obstructing the separation of Kashmir and the establishment of an Emirate. As in the case of Chechnya, the Islamists hijacked the "ethnic cause" and transformed it into a *jihadist* on-

slaught. The "Laskar" and their supporters inside Kashmir and the rest of India have in reality moved the center of their struggle from classical separation from India to the establishment of a Taliban regime in northern India, whose real objective would be to radicalize India's 100-million-strong Muslim community. Reports indicate that this penetration is now embodied by the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), accused by Indian sources of being an associate of the Laskar. Hence, the "Talibanization" of Kashmir's issue has become the dominant threat to India and by ripple effect also to President Musharraf Pakistan. For the second internal enemy to the aggregation of all *jihadists* from Waziristan to Kashmir is none other but the president of Pakistan. They believe he is "not helping them enough against India," as they claim on their websites and, obviously, on al-Jazeera.

But above the clouds of the Pakistani-Indian magma, Osama Bin Laden has issued his mortal *fatwas* against the south Asian "infidel." In at least their last four messages – audio or video – aired on al-Jazeera or posted on al-Sahhab website, Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri blasted the Hindus as an abhorred enemy. Lashing out against one billion Hindus in the subcontinent, not distinguishing between governments and individuals, the chief *Jihadists* ordered their henchmen to shed the blood of the Indian masses on ideological grounds.

Here again, after the U.S., Spain, Britain, Russia, and other target na-

tions of terrorism, India will have to declare the identity of the criminals, not only in term of their names and the names of their organizations, but *the name of their ideology and its content*. The more *jihadists* widen their bloody fault lines against the international community, the more they will isolate themselves among “infidels” and Muslims alike.

But what can and should India do to counter the *jihadist* war on its cities? Any observer can predict that the Mumbai trains won't be the last ones to be attacked in the future. The penetration of the second largest country in the world is deep and wide, and above all backed from across the border by Pakistan's powerful fundamentalists. According to reports, almost every shop in the main bazaar of every town – large or small – in Pakistan had a Lashkar collection box to raise funds for the “struggle in Kashmir.” The group was indeed banned by the government in 2002; nevertheless, it still operates across the country, inside Kashmir, and has now spread its tentacles deep inside India. The latter can deal with the branches within India's many provinces, but the roots of that tree are deeply planted and fertilized inside Pakistan.

Hence, Pakistani President Musharref has to push from the West and the Indian government from the East to contain and isolate the Jihadi terror network. But can the Pakistani president rise to the mission?

Immediately after the attacks, General Musharref and his Foreign Min-

ister denounced the “heinous act.” This was the right thing to do to cool Indian-Pakistani relations. But would the commander-in-chief of the Pakistani Army cross the line and move against the Laskar-e-Taiba inside his own country? It is a very tall order in view of the solid entrenchment of the *jihadists* in the second largest Muslim country in the world. To the east, on the border of Afghanistan, Taliban-Pashtuns tribes control Waziristan, where Osama bin Laden is believed to hide. To the West, along the border with India, stretch the Laskar. In the center and within the big cities, roam the Islamist parties of the country, intimidating the once influential secular parties. In the middle, stands Musharref with his army. The question is about the Islamist influence inside the Army and the intelligence service. A few months ago, a former higher-up in the armed forces advised on a website, “Musharref better withdraw the troops from Waziristan if he doesn't want to see the intifada exploding.

Al-Qaeda, the Dawa leadership, the Laskar, and their allies inside India understand this deadly geography. They are playing chicken with both Pakistan and India, manipulating both against the other. The strike inside India was a strategic order coming from the top *jihadist* command in the hopes of putting pressure on Delhi to retaliate against Pakistan itself, and on Islamabad to strike back against India's retaliation. It is clear bin Laden wants a greater war between these two nuclear powers on the Asian subconti-

ment. And he believes he can provoke that war by striking in India's cities.

This is why I believe more strikes will come.

And finally, to bring it home, where is the American connection? Is there one? American diplomats, of course, must monitor tensions between the nuclear powers of India and Pakistan, as they already are. But U.S. Homeland Security must be aware of these strikes on Mumbai, for Laskar Taibe is not alien to our shores. Just three years ago, a *ji-had* group known as the "Virginia Paintball cell" was training to "extend sup-

port to Laskar e Taiba." Indeed, 60 miles from downtown Washington, a number of American-born believers in *ji-had* and followers of al-Qaeda's ideology were training in urban combat. Among them was one Ismael Royer of CAIR, now sitting in jail as part of a *ji-hadist* conspiracy against the infidels.

If a cell of Laskar-e-Taiba was preparing for terror a short distance from the U.S. capital, no one can guarantee that the masters of the *ji-had* won't someday order the derauling of American trains, as well.

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