

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the Jamaat-ud-Dawa: the case for a Pakistani narrative

Mohammad Waqas Sajjad and Ahmad Jawad *

When allegations and defences are repeated for a long time, they acquire a safe diplomatic quality and become emblematic of difficulties in international relations. For Pakistan, this has been the story of at least a decade. Terrorism in the country covers a broad canvas – claims, for instance, that Pakistan is the most dangerous place in the world,¹ or that it offers safe havens to militants,² or that it does not do enough to bring them to justice, or most dangerously, that it sponsors terrorism.³ The usual defence is a reminder that Pakistan itself is a victim and has suffered tremendous casualties,⁴ and that it is fighting to its full capacity against an enemy that people know little about. While these become mundane debates, they can lead to irreparable damage if one side takes control of the narrative at the expense of the other.

The unilateral operation by the United States that led to the reported assassination of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad was one of those instances when the safe rhetoric appeared to lose its benign diplomatic strength. With the al-Qaeda returning to the front pages, the meta-narrative of its ideological and physical dominance will become a concern in the coming months and years. A recent and more realistic assessment of its influence divides a core group of bin Laden and his associates from affiliated networks and ‘al-Qaeda-inspired [but] non-affiliated cells and individuals’ all over the world.⁵ It is in the latter that many militant groups in Pakistan are categorized even if they do not adhere ideologically and institutionally to al-Qaeda-ism.

There are fears that bin Laden’s assassination would reinvigorate many such militant groups. It is debatable how many owe allegiance to al-Qaeda or bin Laden beyond misjudged admiration, but it has become conventional wisdom to see terrorist organizations as a monolith in the overarching theme of Islamic fundamentalism, itself a misnomer. However, even a crude analysis would show that while spreading terror in the name of religion, many have little in common in their institutionalization, ideologies and targets. Indeed, a media and politically-

* Mohammad Waqas Sajjad is Acting Director (South Asia), Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), and Ahmad Jawad is an undergraduate student of Political Science and Economics at Trinity College, USA.

inspired manufacturing - whether out of apprehension, lack of understanding or political agendas - the created connections between local and global terrorist groups become real as life ends up imitating art.

In this paper, it is one such group – the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (or LeT) that becomes the subject of discussion. The post-bin Laden narrative finds Pakistan and its intelligence agencies in hot water, and the LeT, given its history and alleged connections, is likely to be highlighted. Matters are not made easier with the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), which is largely recognized as a charitable front for the LeT, lauding bin Laden, calling him a martyr, publicly mourning him, and organizing funeral prayers.⁶

With LeT recognized as an organized, well-financed and bold militant group and increasingly seen as an affiliate of al-Qaeda, many of whose leaders have been captured in Pakistan,⁷ it is not surprising that the two are lumped together. There are unconvincing voices already calling it the next al-Qaeda.⁸ This is not insignificant since it affects international relationships and policy frameworks for countering extremism. What is required instead is a post-modern approach where meta-narratives are discarded for localized and contextual understandings of complex political, social and religious dimensions of the phenomenon. In Pakistan's case, the LeT (and the JuD) need to be viewed through such means.

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Far from seeing it as a global entity akin to the al-Qaeda, the LeT's regional goals and political beginnings need to be realized in order to tackle the terrorism it spreads. Similarly, the JuD should not, and cannot, be dismissed simply as a terrorist organization. It requires, instead, cognizance of South Asian issues and a more rationalized understanding so that the meta-narrative does not become the only narrative. And, for that, Pakistan needs to frame its own discourse on extremism; due to its multiple identities, impact, perceptions and shady origins, the LeT is at the centre of this post-modern approach.

Section I of this essay shall outline the LeT's history and operations and introduce it as a dangerous regional player; while in section II, the 'front' of the JuD, leadership and the Ahl-e-Hadith ideology will be given due attention. Section III shall cover the Lashkar's roles in Kashmir, India and a global jihad, including the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks in 2008, while the concluding section will provide a summary of the thesis, pushing for a Pakistani narrative and giving admittedly radical recommendations regarding the treatment of organizations such as the LeT and JuD.

Section I

In an age when a plethora of militant groups with misguided justifications for terrorism, different levels of political involvement and parochial, regional and global presence are competing for space, sustained spotlight has been hard to attain. In these circumstances, the LeT has done remarkably well to keep up appearances. It has been unique in having a narrower geographic outlook and political goals in the garb of Islam limited to South Asia and yet, it is now firmly established in Western perceptions as a global phenomenon that needs a global solution.⁹

Needless to say, the LeT is a prominent and dangerous organization and a subject of much interest when dealing with terrorism. However, by making it a global player with goals bigger than they are, Pakistan – and by implication India and the United States – cannot come up with a viable strategy to deal with yet another Frankenstein's monster. Moreover, that gives it legitimacy among extremists in the West and, ironically, provides it the opportunity and reason to expand its reach and make global alliances that did not previously exist.

History

Founded in the late 1980s¹⁰ by Hafiz Mohammad Saeed with support from Saudi money and the Pakistan's intelligence, the LeT was formed to aid the Afghan jihad against the Soviets. That was not surprising for the times; rather, it should be seen as an international folly where proxy fighters and groups became part of a narrow and unjustifiable policy during the uncertain and careless times of the Cold War. Ironically, other less known pioneers of the Markaz (and hence Lashkar), had a larger profile. Apart from Saeed, there was Professor Zafar Iqbal and Dr. Abdullah Azzam, the latter a professor at the International Islamic University, Islamabad, who is also 'described by many as the ideologue

for the Palestinian militant group, Hamas, besides being the religio-political mentor of Osama bin Laden.’¹¹

After the end of the Soviet and U.S. clash, there was an army of soldiers trained in the language of jihad left with no enemy to fight. The timing was just about right; in 1989, violent protests in Kashmir meant that the holy warriors were presented with a new arena. The mujahideen,

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allegedly in collusion with intelligence agencies in Pakistan, were shifted off for jihad in the valley¹² as the LeT was reborn among many loosely connected organizations. Since then, it has been focusing on India and Kashmir, and has lately become the centre of a global discourse quite disconnected from its history.

The LeT’s presence in the province of Kunar in Afghanistan, where it was based to aid in the jihad, was largely ignored and its role was ‘minimal’ – yet its potential was recognized.¹³ It emerged as a militant wing of the Markaz-e-Dawa-al-Irshad, which had been set up during the Islamization drive in Pakistan as a centre for

religious learning and preaching.¹⁴ A grand organization, its conservatism was also a reason for its mass appeal. Apart from military training – which again in the context was not seen as altogether militant since the geopolitical and strategic policies of Pakistan and the West endorsed this – it also had elements of social progress and education.¹⁵ Funded by the State and from the Middle East, the Markaz had a huge complex in Muridke, near Lahore, which is still in use by the JuD as its organizational base and head office.

Links between proxy groups and State institutions are now rightly shunned. However, the conventional wisdom of today belongs to a new milieu and when applied to the past, ends up being anachronistic. The rationale for creating proxy groups to fight your battles is weak in itself, and in hindsight, it has only proved to be a long-term hindrance since those groups develop self-sufficiency and independence. This is what has happened with the LeT, which is now a monster no longer in control.

Indian obsession with terrorism and the LeT is understandable, if not desirable. However, Western paranoia and consequent aggrandizement of terrorist groups only serves to legitimize, popularize and construct outfits such as the LeT in people's imaginations as the next al-Qaeda. The world, it seems, needs to have a global and larger-than-life 'other' as the antithesis of modernity. With the al-Qaeda increasingly seen as more of an intangible idea¹⁶ - although bin Laden's assassination postpones its cut-off date indefinitely - the LeT has become a suitable alternative. If there is truth in LeT's taking a global approach, then Pakistan needs to take quick action to ensure that its soil does not become the proverbial hotbed of terrorism that targets the world. Thus, groups such as the LeT need to be assessed as they are - and not how we expect them to be.

Recruitment and functioning

The debate also needs to ask whether organizations with shady beginnings should ever be allowed to evolve and gain legitimacy, and whether any 'good' work they do should be recognized – a significant case in point being the JuD. The idea of extremism itself is debateable and prone to changes from time to time. Not too long ago, jihad was bona fide war and groups such as the LeT had the opportunity to blatantly carry out recruitment drives and publish what would now be extremist material for their cause. Even a year after the events of 9/11, it was calling for recruits through pamphlets comparable to 'an advertisement for a trendy health spa'.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, religion was ubiquitous in its recruitment and aims. In a pamphlet "Let us become Mujahids" appear four rhetorical questions for potential recruits:¹⁸

1. Do you want the dominance of Allah's D[i]n, the destruction of forces of evil and disbelief, the death of systems of injustice and oppression?
2. Do you want Muslim Ummah to rise again as a dignified nation and do you want that a befitting reply is given to all activities and machinations against Muslims?
3. Do you want that peace and tranquillity prevail in Muslim society, humanity is adored and the virtues of piety, morality and other attributes of good character?
4. Do you want an end to all evils and western culture? Do you want that the rights of Allah and the rights of people are taken care of?

Answering in the affirmative guides the jihadi-to-be towards this self-assured, proud group working for Islam. The self-glorification and pride, which becomes a topic of interest when one considers religious injunctions for the denial of ego and the criticism of arrogance, is expected. For many, it would be in bad taste, but for a large organization with advertisements, magazines and journals aiming for recruits, ‘the bravado and glitzy romanticism of the would-be warriors of Allah’¹⁹ is profitable marketing for the right target group.

Interestingly, there is effective use of gender in recruitment. The ‘mothers of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba’ become agents who, despite losing sons in the holy path, are influential sacrificial people that play a big role.²⁰ Indeed, as one analyst notes, the LeT is ‘extremely ingenuous and creative in attracting people, including women, to its fold.’²¹ The idea martyrdom is very attractive; using the right message through its magazines and websites that are now difficult to get hold of, the LeT became a religious body apparently serving Islam through its Jihad. That was of course a different time.

The LeT also embraced technology for an ‘online jihad’, and until a few years ago, it had a strong online presence. The JuD too maintained a website replete with religious injunctions, books, articles and sermons in Urdu, English and Arabic. Since the two groups have been banned in 2002 and 2008, respectively, their online activities have also stalled.

While its Ahl-e-Hadith ideology comes into focus in the next section, it is relevant to mention that its approach has also been strategic. In the south of Punjab for instance, it has marketed itself effectively in a ‘predominantly ... Barelvi stronghold with only a secondary influence of Deobandism’. Conflicts have been avoided, however, since it is banned and thus cannot operate openly; hence, its ideology is not considered a threat.²²

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is thus alleged to be using education to propagate its views and recruiting and raising finances for the LeT in the time that the latter could not freely promote its message.

While it is suggested that the LeT ‘continues to draw people to its fold through intelligent propaganda mechanisms’ including social development after natural disasters, this needs to be scrutinized further. Such an argument assumes the LeT and JuD to be practically the same; It is contended, however, that they need to be de-linked, not just to make the narrative realistic, but also to make it a means to achieve an end to extremism.

Regional and global roles

Hafiz Saeed, the erstwhile leader of LeT who now heads JuD and constantly denies any links between the two, commands respect and wields significant power. While strong anti-Indian sentiments are part of his message, focused attention on a global jihad has not emerged. Indeed, there are comments against the West – but that has not been adopted in the modus operandi specifically of Hafiz Saeed, JuD or LeT. Rather, such anti-Americanism is pervasive in society²⁵ and finds outlets through many religious and non-religious groups. It becomes a self-legitimising trademark of conservatism against liberalism of the West and should be seen in the same context. Is it dangerous – yes; but is it showing a ‘global’ role for the LeT or Hafiz Saeed – not more so than it is doing the same for hundreds of other political, social and religious organizations and individuals in Pakistan and all over the world.

That said, the Lashkar’s image as having a ‘maximalist agenda for global jihad’²⁶ is enhanced through its own rhetoric. In a Markaz publication explaining its jihad, the United States, India and Israel are seen as enemies. Reasons put forward include the need to ‘eliminate evil and facilitate conversion to Islam’, to ‘avenge the blood of Muslims’ and ‘liberate Muslim territories under non-Muslim occupation’.²⁷

Given Pakistan’s resource constraints, taking strong action against a group that has traditionally never targeted the country will not be easy, especially since that could mobilize its well-resourced ranks against Pakistan. Moreover, any action against the JuD needs to be taken even more carefully given its religious identity and a seemingly non-militant and charitable presence.

However, time has not been on offer due to apprehensions that the LeT is the new al-Qaeda focusing on foreigners and the West.²⁸ That

essentially means that it has failed in its declared goals of liberating Kashmir. For many who see it as the most powerful and resourceful militant organization, that would be a severe contradiction since it is denying its position as the biggest South Asian terrorist group.

That said, the LeT's role in Kashmir has dwindled of late – the protests in 2010, where it was initially blamed, emerged to be part of an indigenous movement. It appears instead that it is focusing on grand entries through attention-grabbing attacks such as those in Mumbai in 2008. This is a far cry from its otherwise ubiquitous presence in Kashmir when it was the 'most well-organised, well-trained and heavily armed' group that gave the 'most serious challenge to the Indian armed forces.'²⁹ It is now also reported that elements within the group are joining hands with other organizations in Kashmir, such as through the "Save Kashmir Movement".³⁰

There is by and large agreement now that the LeT survives and flourishes as an independent body. However, its links with the intelligence agencies also arise time after time. Sometimes, these are almost embedded so that one commentator notes – wrongly and hastily - that 'the suspicion of the Pakistan Army's involvement [in the 2008 Mumbai attacks] has set in stone.'

The debate now continues within the umbrella of the al-Qaeda where this obsession in Western media and policy circles has given several smaller groups a reason to link up with the movement, or to claim to have done so. Not only does this give them a global profile, it also raises their legitimacy in view of rising anti-Americanism in the Muslim world.³¹ The LeT is one such group with a significant national militant image that has now emerged on the global stage with the apparent blessings of al-Qaeda.

This international image establishes a religious superiority – something that purely political and militant organizations are unable to demonstrate. Thus, the erudite nature of some al-Qaeda members – misplaced and incorrect as they are – is not reflected in a similar ideological framework that LeT-types follow. For them, the ideologue remains the slogan-chanter and hate-monger against necessarily political entities, even as the larger ideology of the al-Qaeda provides the reasons for intolerance and belligerence towards the proverbial other.

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agencies also arise time after time. Sometimes, these are almost embedded so that one commentator notes – wrongly and hastily - that ‘the suspicion of the Pakistan Army’s involvement [in the 2008 Mumbai attacks] has set in stone.’³² Needless to say, here too care must be taken to differentiate between a Pakistani narrative, an Indian narrative and a neutral (and not always objective) narrative. The baggage of history and politics has meant that perceptions built up remain strong, and for a new narrative to emerge – one which allows for progress –stubbornly ‘traditional’ positions need to be sidelined. This has never been more important than in the post-Mumbai 2008 era.

Section II

The Ahl-e-Hadith ideology distinguishes the LeT and JuD from other groups in Pakistan and the latter’s social work and enigmatic leadership further complicate the debate. For studying militancy, it is interesting to see the work of Sayyid Qutb, a leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood of the 1950s and 1960s who is often credited as being the ‘father of modern fundamentalism’ and a major influence on Osama bin Laden.³³ His short and popular book *Milestones*, a critique of society and a guide for the resurgence of Islam, highlights that Western leadership has failed and that “even the Western world realises that Western civilization is unable to present any healthy values for the guidance of mankind. It knows that it does not possess anything which will satisfy its own conscience and justify its existence.”³⁴ Using classic Islamic terminology, he writes, “We are surrounded by *Jahiliyyah* [ignorance] today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper.”³⁵ This means that “our foremost objective is to change the practices of this society.”³⁶

Qutb criticizes modern apologists and those who have narrowed down the concept of jihad and begun to act defensively,¹ in the same way that the extremists of today criticize the so-called ‘moderates’. It is a fascinating work that echoes in the acts of Osama bin Laden and his ilk - targets and reasons are identical, as is the religious approach to life.

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fascinating work that echoes in the acts of Osama bin Laden and his ilk - targets and reasons are identical, as is the religious approach to life. And while it may be said to influence all anti-Western elements such as the al-Qaeda, it is wrong to attribute the same to the LeT, whose raison d'être, as opposed to the theological and global ideas of the former, is regional and political.

A collective feeling of victimization, nostalgia for a romanticized golden era of Islam, and of bringing justice to Muslim lands have greatly enhanced since 9/11 and created a shared space for extremist groups. For many disgruntled and frustrated Muslims, facing dismissive Western powers, condescending wars, and hypocritical foreign policies,³⁸ Qutb becomes relevant again. Consequently, extremism flourishes. This, then, makes groups such as the LeT appear dangerous on a global stage, brings its Ahl-e-Hadith ideology into question, and naturally creates scepticism of the JuD, all of which need to be seen in the Pakistani context.

The Ahl-e-Hadith in Pakistan

Institutionalized Sunni Islam in Pakistan is dominated by the Ahl-e-Sunnat, which includes the Barelvis and Deobandis following the Hanafi jurisprudence. The difference between these and the Ahl-e-Hadith is primarily in the latter's rejection of the authority of schools of law such as the Hanafi school, and hence the label 'ghair muqqalidun' or non-followers,³⁹ and the interchangeable use of the term Salafi.

A relatively new ideology in South Asia, it was founded in the early nineteenth century as a movement attempting to purge Islam of Hindu influences. It called for (and this continues to be its defining factor) Muslims to return to the original sources of the Quran and the Hadith, and abandon all other beliefs and practices. Thus, it would term as bid'a (innovation) the practices of Sufis and schools of law. Due to their attacks on the established faces of Islam though, it was for the most part 'doomed to a marginal existence... and hence not able to emerge as a mass movement.'⁴⁰

Thus, the Ahl-e-Hadith began as a 'predominantly merchant-based group', practicing 'pietist quietism' against colonial rulers, and unlike other religious groups, never claiming political leadership.⁴¹ In 1955, in a 'fundamentalist stand' against the power of the Deobandis and Barelvis, it established the Markaz-e-Jamiyyat Ahl-e-Hadith in Faisalabad and became further institutionalized.⁴² It is still assumed to be limited to small areas, outside of which it has little representation. That is understandable

since it is predominantly urban with an ‘elitist character’, has a tendency for fundamentalism, and does not offer room for rites and rituals, thus alienating the masses.⁴³ However, while institutionally less significant, the leadership of Hafiz Saeed and the mass support of the JuD, which is a powerful charitable body, manifest its rising strength in Pakistan.

This goes in line with the overall rise of institutionalized religion in the country. As Ayesha Jalal notes, “Before it became an assembly line supplying jihadists for America’s covert war in Afghanistan, Pakistan was a Barelvi-Deobandi state that subscribed to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. State patronage of Deobandi imams in government-run mosques and the rise of the sect’s militias spurred both the Barelvis and the Ahl-i-Hadith into action. As the politics of local influence tilted in favour of the Deobandis, the Barelvis and Ahl-i-Hadith entered the business of exploiting religion for profit by building mosques and madrassas with money contributed by the Pakistani expatriate community.”⁴⁴ Thus, one finds a situation where there is competition between these movements as they all develop niches, both geographically and ideologically.

It is far from a monolithic group however, and differences of opinion exist on important matters including warfare, politics and pan-Islamism as well as support for foreign policies on, say, Afghanistan and Kashmir.¹ Thus, Ahl-e-Hadith is not simply another word for extremism.

The Ahl-e-Hadith have made their presence felt especially since the 1980s when ‘from being a relatively minor group in Pakistan’s Islamic landscape ... [they] grew ... into a major force, with scores of madrasas all over the country, particularly in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province, and several newspapers and journals articulating its vision of an Islamic revolution.’⁴⁵ While still lagging far behind the Deobandi and Barelvi madrasas, its mosques have been growing often in richer neighbourhoods, showing its financial clout. It is far from a monolithic group however, and differences of opinion exist on important matters including warfare, politics and pan-Islamism as well as support for foreign policies on, say, Afghanistan and Kashmir.⁴⁶ Thus, Ahl-e-Hadith is not simply another word for extremism.

Olivier Roy’s concept of ‘neo-fundamentalism’, which is not a precise school of thought, but rather a trend, a state of mind and a dogmatic

relation to the fundamentals of religion,⁴⁷ explains the situation better. For the LeT, its politicized ideas of liberation for Kashmir and war against India need also to be incorporated within its 'state of mind'. The main trend is Salafi (or Ahl-e-Hadith) while the LeT would be in the author's terminology, a 'Salafi jihadist'.⁴⁸ He notes that a 'mixture of political radicalism, Salafi rigor [sic] and closeness to the religion and even political establishment' is found in organizations all over the Muslim world; the Ahl-e-Hadith and its military branch LeT have the same traits and could be prime examples of neo-fundamentalism in Pakistan.

Jamaat-ud-Dawa and the LeT dilemma

It is perhaps more important for the sake of Pakistan to rationalize the Jamaat-ud-Dawa. With established historical ties with the LeT that are reflected in its ameer, Hafiz Saeed, who not long ago was the LeT leader, it is widely regarded as an offshoot of or a front for the terrorist outfit. Its legal status remains unclear; it has been banned following the UN's categorizing it as a terrorist group, but it continues to function publicly from its Muridke headquarters. Indeed, it is ubiquitous and has 'scored a few wins in court against the government and is up and running again.'⁴⁹

Simply changing the name of the organization was once a less-than-creative but easy means to keep operations running, but this is legally no longer possible.⁵⁰ Hence, when the JuD itself morphs into the smaller Falah-e-Insaniyat – an organization that propped up after the floods of 2010 – one can either speculate that this is to gain more credibility, or one would even argue, to increase its reach to non-Ahl-e-Hadith institutions and mosques, which would normally be wary of the JuD's ideology.

After the Mumbai attacks in late 2008, there was immense international pressure – specifically from India – on Pakistan to arrest Saeed and enforce the ban on the JuD. Saeed's public rhetoric has mass appeal; he declares, for instance, that, "If America with the help of NATO and all its weapons could not maintain its occupation in Afghanistan, India too will not be able to hold on to Kashmir anymore."⁵¹ Thus, he has all the attributes of a true politician – taking up the public rhetoric, raising his own and his organization's profile through the use of religion, and 'Islamizing' his diatribes. And, he finds friends in the strangest of places.

There was a huge scandal when the government of Punjab was discovered to have funded the JuD,⁵² leading to embarrassment and apologies and a political scuffle that Pakistan has become only too used to. However, given the charitable role of the JuD and the respect it has garnered as a professional organization working for humanitarian goals, a

more nuanced approach needs to be taken – one would argue indeed that the JuD needs to be mainstreamed and worked *with* in order to achieve the larger objectives of countering extremism, and that it needs to be facilitated to completely de-link itself from the LeT.

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The JuD came under tremendous scrutiny after the earthquake in 2005 and floods in 2010. It has had remarkable success in reaching out to people in its relief work and incorporating volunteers in its cause. With its network all over the country, it emerged as an organization working effectively round the clock, and its presence in some stations came even before the state as it openly flaunted its banners and efforts, garnering tremendous respect. Banning it is clearly not the answer.

The floods in 2010 also took apprehensions about Pakistan to new levels. Voices were raised that the disgruntled population would start veering towards militancy because of organizations such as the JuD. The feeling was widespread and statements such as the following were not uncommon: ‘While its finances, recruits, training grounds, and approval ratings have declined, Al Qaeda is prospering through its heir-apparent organizations, most notably Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and is relishing the aftermath of the worst floods in Pakistan’s history.’⁵³ There were concerns that the LeT has allied with al-Qaeda; thus, says the same report that, ‘Not only is Al Qaeda taking advantage of the floods, but through a nine-year “train the trainer program” and symbiotic partnerships with equally dangerous organizations like Lashkar-e-Taiba, it has increased its growth, appeal, and reach.’⁵⁴ A year later, it must be acknowledged that these were exaggerations at best, as neither was JuD working solely to recruit people to its cause, nor is the population inherently insane or militant enough to allow them to do so.

Its help to refugees affected by the floods and also by the military operations in the northern parts of the country is definitely mixed with a religio-political message, but it goes without saying that its volunteers cannot all be termed extremists. And that is where the nuanced approach is necessary. A black and white, us and them, moderate and extremist jargon is bound to fail in these circumstances. It is only when these groups are involved in militant activities that they can justifiably be clamped down

on. Otherwise, according to one analyst, ‘They will be closely watched, but if they remain confined to rehabilitation and relief probably no one is going to lay a finger on them [since] they can’t really be challenged in a court of law ... unless they do some mischief.’⁵⁵

The primary problem with the JuD is its links – some would say interchangeable nomenclature – with the LeT. It has maintained that it is separate from the LeT, despite acknowledging sympathy for the Kashmir jihad and has asserted continuously that there is no militant or armed movement by the group itself.⁵⁶ Instead, it focuses on its social role without compromising on its ideological opposition to the West, and makes the country’s economy a primal talking point,⁵⁷ noting that it has no political ambitions.⁵⁸ It openly calls itself a religious organization, but there is almost no doubt that it has (or had) been training militants both in Pakistan and in Kashmir.⁵⁹ However, the LeT and JuD are often lumped together and used interchangeably; it is, instead, contended here that, over time, it has been advantageous for the JuD to be separated from the LeT and present an image of a religious charity not to act as a front for a militant group, but to be able to use this platform to do what its name suggests – preach for its ideology. This then can also be used to position the JuD within the discourse on re-radicalization in Pakistan.

While there are claims that crackdowns on the LeT and JuD have been successful,⁶⁰ the reality becomes clear when one sees the visible evidence and even impressive functioning of the JuD. Indeed, while reports of schools, offices and dispensaries of the JuD being sealed are presented, they are taken with a pinch of salt – it took the Punjab government more than two months after the 2008 attacks on Mumbai to take over the Muridke Markaz and employ its own administrator to run the place.⁶¹ And, yet, the JuD remains what it was, if not stronger and more visible, and Hafiz Saeed goes from strength to strength.

The most wanted man

Hafiz Saeed, ‘India’s Most Wanted Man’,⁶² has never been successfully prosecuted, leading India to claim that Pakistan is not serious about tackling terrorism. This is a strong line of argument that prevents progress on improvement in Pakistan-India ties. While Pakistani authorities have contended that – regardless of allegations of involvement in Mumbai – Saeed is a ‘continuing security threat’,⁶³ and it is the country’s legal system that is handling the process of his prosecution.

It has to be acknowledged that arresting the main man may not actually be the best policy; it may indeed exacerbate matters. Such is the figure of Hafiz Saeed that any arrest based on conjecture alone would lead to violence and open up multiple avenues of trouble for Pakistan. For the country's grassroots security, alienating the Ahl-e-Hadith by arresting without credible evidence their most prominent leader would be a folly of great magnitude, and not be as conducive to better Pakistan-India ties as it seems. It is also unlikely to find sympathy from people who see his organization, the JuD, as a commendable charitable group.⁶⁴

Two weeks after the Mumbai attacks when he had been made into a public enemy, an interviewer described him as an 'academician', 'friendly', 'humble', 'jovial'¹ – hardly words that are normally ascribed to an alleged terrorist. But that is the paradox of Hafiz Saeed.

After the Mumbai attacks, the UN Security Council listed four members of the LeT, including Hafiz Saeed and Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakhvi, for targeted sanctions, and recognized JuD as an alias for the group. Consequently, on December 11, 2008, the Pakistani government closed 11 offices of the JuD, put Saeed – who had been denying charges and protesting against the sanctions - under house arrest. He had been adamant that his group had no links to the Mumbai attacks and that it had split from the LeT following the 2001 attack on Indian parliament.⁶⁵ During this period, it had expanded its network to more than 66 cities and was functioning smartly with English and Urdu websites to boot. These have since been banned even as its operations continue.

Inevitably, this evokes a reaction with the implication that closure of JuD's activities will lead to widespread angst amongst the people benefiting from its work. Thus it was in December 2008 that the (then-functional) English-language website of the JuD reacted to the UN ban by emphasizing its work and publishing a statement titled: "Who will suffer from Jama't-us-Dawah's closure?"⁶⁶ and listing the thousands of people who live off its medical help, relief activities and humanitarian assistance. It noted that it spends some Rs. 5 million every month, helping refugees and the poorer segments of society. Donations were, however, also used to build Ahl-e-Hadith mosques 'mainly in regions dominated by the Sufi sect[s]'⁶⁷ as it used its humanitarian work to also disseminate its religious ideology.

Hafiz Saeed has acquired almost mythical status. Two weeks after the Mumbai attacks when he had been made into a public enemy, an

interviewer described him as an ‘academician’, ‘friendly’, ‘humble’, ‘jovial’⁶⁸ – hardly words that are normally ascribed to an alleged terrorist. But that is the paradox of Hafiz Saeed. His worldview is replete with jihad and while negating claims that his organization is part of it, he supports militant groups engaging in, what is in his view, a valid jihad in Kashmir. Moreover, he does not believe that the LeT would kill civilians – rather he notes that the allegations are simply to restrict its freedom struggle in Kashmir, and claims that India misleads the world by linking the LeT and JuD with Al-Qaeda and the ISI.⁶⁹

The anti-Western ideas that have begun to show up in Saeed’s vernacular are a new phenomenon since he had until a decade ago not expressed ‘deep hatred’ for the West ‘unlike most fundamentalists’ and has close family living in the United States.⁷⁰ More recently, with Saeed apparently going on a public relations campaign, interviews have become more common. Robert Fisk became the first Western journalist to meet him for an interview in which he reiterated that the JuD had no connections with the LeT, and that he had only briefly once met Osama bin Laden during pilgrimage in the 1980s. He has also continued to support a freedom struggle in Kashmir, including the LeT’s role, and developed a penchant for criticizing American foreign policy – a line of approach that has reportedly led to calls for his arrest by the U.S.⁷¹

Lashkar equals Jamaat?

The Markaz that, while training students for an Islamic life and propagation, was always a modern-looking and computerized university cut off from the rest of the country with only very few journalists allowed in. There was lesser secrecy a decade ago – understandably since LeT was not banned and it was seen as a place of religious learning. The warning signs, though, should have been clear even then as it became conspicuous for being an ‘Islamic state that has banned music, television and smoking on its heavily guarded premises.’⁷² Moreover, with rumours of Osama bin Laden having financed a mosque and having played a role in its early development,⁷³ and after his assassination, being granted funeral prayers with JuD openly mourning him, one can make the connections quite strongly between what was the LeT and what is the JuD. If it is the same thing even now, however, is debatable.

In fact, there have been reports of the LeT and JuD following different command structures so that when the former’s Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi was arrested after the Mumbai attacks, he was reportedly ‘furious at the Jamaat-ud-Daawa (JuD) leadership’s decision to publicly disown him in

his hour of trial instead of trying to bail him out' and 'extremely hurt' at this snub.⁷⁴ This perhaps is one of the biggest indicators that the JuD, given its more overt presence and respect with the masses, is attempting to shed a militant image even as it remains controversial and supportive of, say, the struggle in Kashmir, and a staunch opponent of the United States and Israel. The point is that these are political views held not only by religious leaders and parties, but are widespread in Pakistan and hence do not make the JuD or Hafiz Saeed special. The JuD will find it convenient to slowly separate itself from the LeT in order to have the soft power necessary for the Ahl-e-Hadith message to spread.

Thus, it is a question of understanding the Ahl-e-Hadith dynamics in Pakistan, as well as getting to the roots of what makes the JuD a remarkable religio-social body that needs to be used as part of the solution. For this to happen, it has to be de-linked from the LeT and seen from a purely Pakistani context since a process of de-radicalization needs to begin from within.

Section III

It goes without saying that before such a de-radicalization programme can be initiated, there needs to be a better understanding of the role that the LeT has adopted in its jihad. From its operations in Kashmir to sporadic attacks in India, and from a limited part in Afghanistan to a more expanded ideological jihad against the West; there is a need to understand its militant dynamics. In this section, it is this very subject that is being addressed in order for more sense to be made of its vision and strategies.

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba's role in Afghanistan

The LeT, created by three Pakistani professors including Hafiz Mohammad Saeed of the prestigious University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore,⁷⁵ finds strong global attitudes in its origins. That is because its pioneers collaborated with Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, a teacher of Osama bin Laden, during his days in Saudi Arabia.⁷⁶ It is not surprising then that its ideology and financing are heavily influenced since they essentially bring approaches that are in essence alien to the masses.

Nonetheless, the LeT remains a Pakistan-based militant group with a focus on India and Kashmir. Its global role is increasingly being discussed but its re-focus in Afghanistan – after initial unsuccessful forays into the Soviet-occupied country in the 1980s – is somewhat glossed upon. It has been reported in June 2010 that since at least 2006 it has expanded its

operations to Afghanistan, inflicting casualties on Afghans and Indians alike, and has ‘planned or executed three major attacks against Indian government employees and private workers in Afghanistan in recent months.’⁷⁷ Thus, the suggestion that it remains an India-centric terrorist outfit continues to hold true even as the arena changes.

There are suggestions that the group’s expansion to Afghanistan is through its working closely with other militant organizations such as the Punjabi Taliban – itself a loosely-used term – the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Haqqani network and others. Although the LeT is participating in the Afghan jihad, it is also suspected that this becomes a means for its otherwise primary target of recruiting fighters for jihad in Kashmir.⁷⁸ The scale of this activity cannot be precisely stated, however, and remains speculative at best.

Reports show that LeT’s involvement in Afghanistan might have emerged as a result of its increasing, if also subtle, alliances with militant groups with wider agendas. However, it could just as well be suggested that it is pushing its Indian-centric agenda in Afghanistan as well – be it through targeted killings of Indians or recruitment for the Kashmiri jihad. Hence, it could be safe to assume that although the LeT has entered the Afghanistan theatre, the involvement is on a small scale. It also becomes important here to point out the ideological divide between the LeT and the other Deobandi militant organizations that have always denied legitimacy to the LeT due to its erstwhile limited focus on Kashmir and India, and its Ahl-e-Hadith beliefs. Playing a part in Afghanistan serves to legitimize it and give it a larger Islamist profile.

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba in India

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of jihad in the ceaselessly war-torn western neighbour of Pakistan, the LeT found a new purpose in the east as it saw India as a new target. The organization began a new jihad in India and Kashmir and the latter became the focus of its activities – circumstances in Kashmir allowed justification for such claims and hence the LeT’s beginnings were more heroic in the eyes of many than its image today of a terrorist organization. It did not take long for this to happen –the LeT has a nasty record in India and Kashmir, and just like other militant groups such as the al-Qaeda, it has also faced much criticism due to its killing of civilians.

Currently, Indian pressure on Pakistan to deal with terrorism, including the LeT, is understandable, and it is pertinent to see why this is

so. LeT activities in India began to be highlighted at the turn of the new millennium as on December 22, 2000, it launched an attack within the army garrison at the Red Fort in New Delhi. The attackers escaped after killing three military personnel. Barely a year later, it was again blamed for the attack on Indian parliament. It was suspected to have provided logistical support to the Punjabi terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), with which it shares certain objectives. Subsequently, it was in the same year that both the LeT and JeM were categorized terrorist outfits by the State Department of the United States of America.⁷⁹

The LeT carried out large-scale dramatic activities in India, along with many other minor incursions. Pakistani authorities and intelligence agencies were constantly blamed by the Indian government for supporting and nurturing the LeT, and this continues to be the case as these allegations have brought many ups and downs in the relationship of the two countries. That was again the case after the deadliest attacks in Mumbai in 2008 derailed what had become a peace process between both countries and led to an entirely new discourse.⁸⁰ The infamous 26/11 attacks saw nearly 200 people killed, including many foreigners, and are to date the largest and best organized terrorist attacks on Indian soil.

As India and the world watched in horror, ten coordinated incidents of shootings and bombings across Mumbai attacked prime locations including the Taj Hotel & Towers, the Leopold Café and the Cama Hospital. Almost immediately, fingers were pointed at Pakistan as Indian officials claimed that the attacks had been carried out by Pakistanis who had entered Indian territory through sea.

Initially, Pakistan rejected these allegations, but as the time passed, it accepted that the attacks were partially planned on its soil, and subsequently arrested seven suspects, one of whom was Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi – the alleged mastermind behind the attacks.⁸¹ Hafiz Saeed was also put under house arrest⁸² after India officially submitted a request to the U.N. to declare the Jamaat-ud-Daawa a terrorist organization.⁸³ He was, however, set free by the Lahore High Court in June 2009,⁸⁴ after which India publicly expressed its disappointment while Pakistani authorities filed a request for the court to review its decision. In October the same year, the High Court reviewed and reaffirmed its decision, clearing Saeed of all charges,⁸⁵ much to India's chagrin.

Lakhvi, on the other hand, captured from Muzzafarabad in a reported raid on a training camp,⁸⁶ was tried in Pakistani courts as authorities refused to hand over suspects to Indian counterparts. On November 25,

2009, he, along with six others, was formally charged for planning and helping execute the carnage.⁸⁷

However, there slowly emerged a more global picture behind the Mumbai attacks as David Coleman Headley and Tahawwur Rana were accused in the U.S. as well. Both were charged in 2009 for plotting attacks against Danish newspapers for the infamous cartoon controversy⁸⁸ and during interrogations, their links to the Mumbai attacks were also established. Rana, who was reported to have contacts in the LeT, denied any involvement⁸⁹ and was eventually acquitted of charges of material help but was charged for other crimes such as planning attacks in Denmark.⁹⁰

Headley, an American national of Pakistani descent, was tried in court and found to have links with Mumbai attacks. He named Rana as a fellow conspirator and also testified against the ISI,⁹¹ while also confessing that he had received training by the LeT back in 2002.⁹² Needless to say, this brings with it other issues of home-grown terrorism in the West, and also of strains between Indian and American intelligence agencies; for all its global planning however, the LeT has remained focused on India as its primary target.

The LeT in Kashmir

The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan left many militants without an arena for Jihad as the purpose of ridding the world of evil and the enemies of Islam brought them a fresh desire to look for alternatives. Kashmir was a perfect place for that purpose; fresh from its own protests and violence of the late 1980s, occupied by Indian 'Hindu' forces, it was a place of immense relevance in the context of South Asian history and politics.

The Indian government's reported rigging of the 1987 elections in Occupied Kashmir, which is almost a widely accepted fact by the international community, did not help matters as it legitimized the LeT's violence.

Violence, killings, insurgency, jihad, activism, terrorism – call it what you may – has been part of LeT's role since then. The Indian government's reported rigging of the 1987 elections in Occupied Kashmir, which is almost a widely accepted fact by the international community, did not help matters as it legitimized the LeT's violence. In a documentary on the subject,⁹³ a militant clearly stated that the people of Kashmir did

have some hope from the Indian government, but after the rigged elections, they saw it as a lost cause and took up arms. These were the circumstances in which the LeT entered the fray. Emotions were running high and the religious cover was easy to take; people were ready to be incited, and hatred against Indian troops and the government was rife. All in all, it was a perfect playing field for the LeT to enter.

The importance of the role the LeT has played in Kashmir can be highlighted and understood only by observing the gravity of the many incidents that have caused it to be labelled the best organized and dangerous organization in the Valley. In January 1988, it was blamed for the massacre of 23 Kashmiri Pundits in Wandhama and made headlines again the same year when it was accused of carrying out the massacre of 25 persons in Doda, before killing another 35 Sikhs in Chattisingpura in May 2000.⁹⁴

In January 2001, the LeT claimed responsibility for raiding the Srinagar airport in an incident in which 10 persons, including two Indian military personnel, two civilians, and all six attackers, were reportedly killed.⁹⁵ It was one of the deadliest attacks on the Indian military. Then, on March 23, 2003 – a date symbolic for Pakistan’s creation – 24 Kashmiri Pundits were gunned down by militants in Nadimarg⁹⁶ and the attacks were once again traced back to the LeT.

After these notable events, violence in Kashmir took a downturn even as there were sporadic militant attacks, and the LeT added another dimension to its portfolio by holding protests and marches against the Indian troops and government. Meanwhile, its activities in India gained momentum and it has been suggested, even by the Indian government, that the LeT has split into two groups in Kashmir. More recently, with the protests in 2010, one finds a natural diminishing of active LeT role as the movement adopts an indigenous, political and human rights flavour and moves beyond religious rhetoric and jihad.

A global jihad?

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pseudo-religious ideology of protecting Islam and waging war against its enemies. Predictably, Jews, Hindus, Kashmir and the United States are part and parcel of such rhetoric.

Yet, it is difficult to assert with conviction that it has global ambitions and aims to carry out operations around the world. Indeed, it is difficult to establish what its motives might be in the international arena, away from India and Kashmir. Its history shows an organization with regional and overtly political aims in the garb of religion. It does exercise strong influence within the South Asian diaspora but struggles to impose its authority elsewhere. Elements within the organization may have links with other global terrorist organizations, but its own motives and agenda remain largely localized.

However, there is speculation regarding the LeT's seeking a more global role. Speculations in these troubled times, though, must be discouraged if they are not grounded in fact. The point to be made is that this gives the organization legitimacy and a global profile and allows for the creation of linkages with more external actors – thus ironically bringing circumstances that are being argued against. When speaking of its 'Jewish problem', one analyst notes that it has increasingly demonstrated 'violent global ambitions beyond the South Asian theatre ... [and] the anti-Semitic component to its target selection has only more recently been demonstrated.'⁹⁷ Such analyses find basis in LeT informer David Headley and his role in Mumbai and unsuccessful plans of attacks in Denmark. The Mumbai attacks did also target a Jewish centre, but in the context of South Asia and the LeT, this must not be overstated. Instead, individuals with links to the LeT all over the world must be seen as home-grown terrorists looking for a suitable organization – the media hype surrounding the LeT simply eases their way to misguided salvation and serves as 'a path for jihad for Westerners'.⁹⁸

In Bob Woodward's acclaimed *Obama's Wars*, there are underlying, lesser debated and relatively few, but significant references to the LeT from which one can gauge the increasing international importance that this once Kashmir- and India-centric group has come to occupy. For instance, while confirming that conventional wisdom that Pakistan backed the LeT in its Mumbai 2008 carnage is incorrect,⁹⁹ it also shows amazement at the 'ease of planning, low cost [and] sophistication of communication systems' that included Google Earth maps and commercially available encryption devices. It notes that 'the FBI was horrified by the low-cost, high-tech operation that had paralyzed Mumbai [as] American cities were just as vulnerable.'¹⁰⁰

The recent cases of Headley and Rana have further examined this idea of how the West is a target for the LeT. As far as Headley is concerned, being an American citizen, it is easy to see how links with Western individuals for the LeT come in handy – that he was able to travel to India a number of times before the Mumbai attacks, is simply strategic planning of an organization that knows what it is doing. His plans for Denmark are more complicated, but one can argue that this was more due to al-Qaeda's influence than part of the LeT's plans.¹⁰¹ That said, it should also cause one to be more serious in finding out how well established its links with the al-Qaeda actually are, before categorically stating that the group is 'determined to hit India and the West.'¹⁰²

Section IV

In this study, an attempt has been made to place the LeT within a Pakistani security paradigm, and to rationalize, if not humanize, the JuD without completely legitimizing it within the country's development discourse. The contention is not so much that all opinions, no matter how extreme, are valid if they are not violent; rather, it is that the latter has to be treated not solely as an organization affiliated with the overtly militant LeT, but as one with the potential to be used for countering extremism and playing a legitimate role in society. The process has to be gradual and trust needs to be built up. That requires effective handling of the situation from a uniquely Pakistani perspective in order to integrate the JuD into the development discourse and tackle, if not mainstream, radical organizations in the political narrative. Subsequently, policies in Pakistan should not just come as a result of UN or U.S. assessments.

What also needs to be made sense of is LeT's alleged global presence and how sensible it is for Pakistan to tackle the group, not just to appease India and ease Western pressure, but to ensure that it does not become a chronic threat. The only way that can be achieved is if the JuD is separated from the LeT and, indeed, if religious organizations and scholars are taken on board to find a solution. In Pakistan, a country characterized by poor social and economic indicators, it is the local religious authorities that hold power in the community. Creating a national narrative to retract popular opinion that validates violence in Kashmir, for instance, needs to be replaced – and that requires a grassroots effort. It is not simply about banning the group publicly or arresting leaders – that has never caused functions to cease. Even as the LeT is a regional organization with no pretences of following the al-Qaeda path, it is conceivable that it may develop a reactionary and politically convenient global jihadist attitude in

future. In the short term, it will become an internal security threat that Pakistan may not be able to tackle.

The point to be made here is this: the LeT is among a host of militant groups in Pakistan following a jihadi path – at least in Kashmir – that many find legitimate. Banning these groups becomes a superficial exercise since financing is not affected. There needs to be an internal discourse in the country regarding mainstreaming – and the LeT needs to be at the centre of such a discourse. There are obvious hurdles here, and this should not be seen as a compromise; neither should mainstreaming apply to every group. It need nonetheless, be a policy option on the table. It should be understood that extremist opinions, howsoever invalid, do exist because they are socially and ideologically constructed and hence are part of society. Any hasty, physical action – such as the Red Mosque operation in 2007 – will, at best, delay the worst. While the long-term strategy is essentially about providing access to social services, the short-term solution has to deal with negotiations, alternative social paths (such as the JuD) and even in some cases political mainstreaming. However, it has to be a slow internal process – the fallout of the Nizam-e-Adl in Swat shows how mainstreaming, if mishandled, will be disastrous.

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There are reports based more on individual rather than institutional links – and it is argued here that the difference needs to be made – that the LeT’s support for a global jihad is more in terms of ‘logistical and ideological infrastructure to the regional jihadist movement.’¹⁰³ That includes groups such as the Indian Mujahideen; the question to be asked is whether they are to be seen in the same light as the JuD – another organization that shares the same roots. That is where it gets complicated since it has tremendous social clout operating within an often narrow religious paradigm that is not too different from other ‘non-banned’ organizations that also find voice in Pakistan.

That does not mean that no action is necessary. Indeed, the post-Mumbai 2008 scenario has seen crackdowns, though limited, since there was a fear that efforts to shut down the JuD (the visible, tangible group as opposed to the LeT, which has essentially no physical headquarters that

could be targeted) could ‘provoke both a political backlash and violent protests.’¹⁰⁴ Once again, the question is of differentiating between the LeT and the JuD; dismantling the former is definitely in Pakistan’s interest, as is limiting any negative influence of the latter. However, any ‘sweeping action’ such as that taken in late 2008 in response to Indian pressure by ‘arresting the charity organization's leaders and closing its offices a day after the United Nations declared it a terror front,’¹⁰⁵ is not a sustainable solution; nor is it workable.

For Pakistan, there is a risk of facing what has been called ‘street power’ and the ‘religious parties and the extremists joining hands’ leading to violence,¹⁰⁶ but it is not limited to that alone. It has also to do with the actual work of the JuD on the ground. Very recent history has shown that banning itself does not help. It may in fact make matters worse and ‘banning the banned organisations seems little more than a device to deflect international and domestic criticism’ as the government comes under pressure ‘to take meaningful action.’¹⁰⁷ Moreover, it has had little impact since these organizations can resume their activities once the pressure eases and then build up a system of ‘covers for their operations’ – the LeT, for instance, along with being a front of the JuD, is said to be carrying out its activities as Tehreek-e-Hurmat-e-Rasool, and through Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq for its charitable projects,¹⁰⁸ in addition to the newer Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation that emerged during 2010.¹⁰⁹

While it is accepted beyond doubt that the LeT’s main focus is on Kashmir, the situation in the last decade or so, culminating in the protests of 2010, also shows a new strand of thought developing.¹¹⁰ In such a scenario, perhaps it will also be redefining its goals and appear more global in nature; there remains, albeit in a minority, a notion of the unification of all Muslims in the Subcontinent – the ‘precise goals’ of its jihad, then, are unclear.¹¹¹ With moderate leaders also pointing out that differences between ‘the indigenous Kashmiri movement and global radical Islam have become blurred,’ it is suggested that the liberation of Kashmir is to be followed by the ‘greater goal’ of the future Islamization of India.¹¹²

It obviously makes sense for India – and it might as well be a real apprehension – to see the LeT as a group that is global in its intentions and outreach. Would it not work in India’s favour – both to stop any further attacks by the LeT on Indian soil and its role in Kashmir, and for gaining an upper hand in its bilateral ties with Pakistan – that the Western world, in particular the United States, begins to pressurize Pakistan in its handling of the LeT and the Mumbai attackers? Already, the U.S. sees the LeT as

one of the five 'most dangerous bad guy' groups working in Pakistan¹¹³ and declares its intention to 'smash' it.¹¹⁴

Where does one go from here? The problem is with perceptions, and here we return to the idea of creating a national narrative on terrorism and on how it is to be dealt with. For Pakistan, the problem has been created over decades, and it is inane to assume that immediate and strong responses will lead to anything more than a short-term solution. With a renewed focus on reintegration and reconciliation even with the Taliban in Afghanistan, this also needs to be part of the Pakistani narrative.

It goes without saying, then, that despite not being a security threat per se for attacks inside the country it is a major threat to Pakistan's security in the larger scheme of things.

Unregulated mosques, madrasas and religious institutions need to ideally be looked at as part of its overall strategy of countering extremism. The problem is of a lack of training in any civil society and government organization as well as an issue of trust. Local religious leaders wield tremendous power – from calling for outright murder¹¹⁵ to inciting hatred. However, we have reached a stage where an otherwise intelligent policy of, for instance, having a state-approved Friday sermon, or a state-approved curriculum is not just impractical, it is also inadvisable, given the power dynamics at play. Ceding power to religious leaders for political convenience, expediency, a vote bank, or legitimacy, has taken Pakistan to a point where any management of Islamic institutions from the outside is seen as interference and an attack on religion itself.

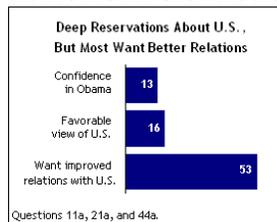
In these circumstances, where does the LeT fit in? It is a banned group that is functional, financially strong and remarkably bold. Working independently, it has managed to become a larger than life body and the biggest stumbling block between Pakistan and India. It goes without saying, then, that despite not being a security threat per se for attacks inside the country it is a major threat to Pakistan's security in the larger scheme of things. Regardless of that, there needs to be a more realistic approach that focuses on the LeT's regional and political role, support base and the Ahl-e-Hadith ideology, as well as the potential for a global mobilization, which at the moment is not its central idea. Moreover, the JuD needs to be seen as an effective social sector organization with a role to play as part of the solution.

The argument that Pakistan only has its own interests to look out for when it embarks on counterterrorism measures has its critics. Regardless of what the Western or Indian media and analysts portray – and there is hardly any doubt that a crackdown on the Lashkar will be seen as a victory for their coercive diplomacy – Pakistan’s own policymakers and strategists should approach it as a Pakistani decision. And, that involves, in the end, a selfish realization that the war on extremism in the country is de-linked from the global war on terror; policies designed for the JuD or the LeT need to be rationalized, localised and implemented keeping this in mind. That is what will make the narrative Pakistani and realistic, and hence pave the way to a better indigenous policy for countering extremist groups and ideologies – one that does not involve banning or physical attacks. This is a generational process, and the current generation needs to take the first step.

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