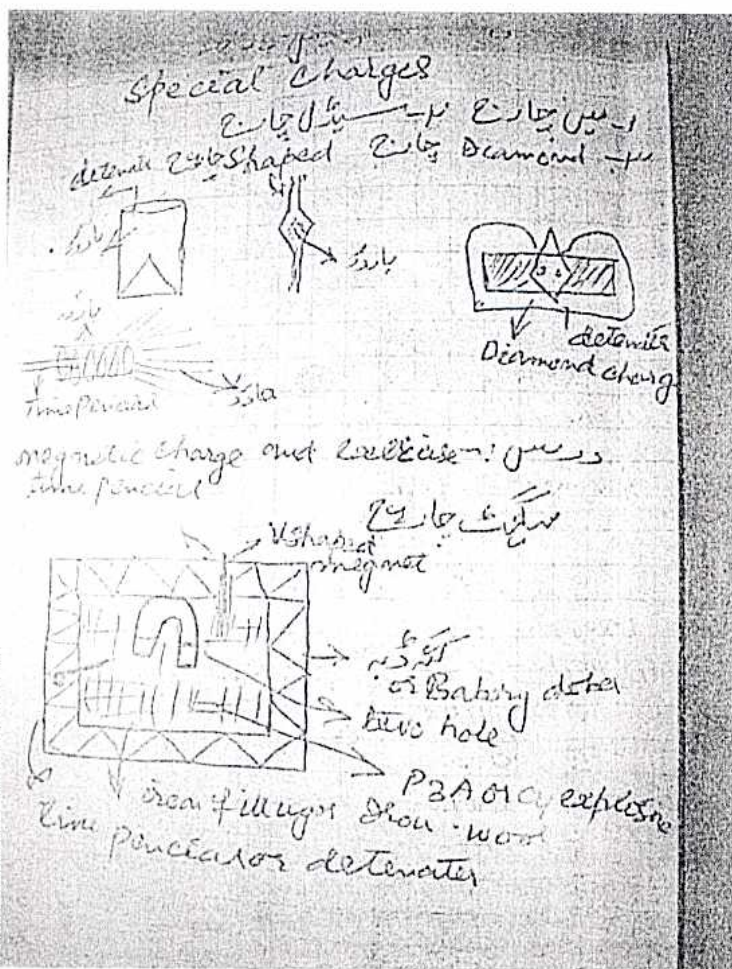


Lashkar-e-Tayyiba leads the Kashmiri insurgency

Despite asserting that it is cracking down on Kashmiri militants based on its soil, the long-term interests and aspirations of Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir means that its intelligence services are continuing to provide training and support to jihadist groups, such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. Peter Chalk and Chris Fair report.



◆ LeT sketches and training notes. The LeT has proven adept at targeting military convoys with bombs, landmines and other improvised devices.

revolution across the Indian sub-continent. Although the official website of the MDI also asserts that it is incumbent on every Muslim to struggle "until Islam as a Way of Life dominates the whole of the world", the LeT has, as yet, not pursued this wider global agenda, confining its operations to India and Indian-held Kashmir.

The LeT views the conflict in J&K not as a territorial dispute between New Delhi and Islamabad, but as nothing less than a holy war between the forces of Islamic belief and disbelief – the world of the Kafir. In this vein, Lashkar recruitment posters specifically call on its followers to "kill the leadership of the [Indian] Kafir". While Hindu oppressors are regarded as the immediate cause of discord in the province, their destruction is justified as only the first stage in a wider jihad against all non-Muslim infidels in the sub-continent.

Interestingly, commentaries written for the LeT's official magazine have also offered more secularised interpretations of the J&K conflict. In one primer for guerrilla warfare, a leading operational commander affirms that the "ongoing Kashmiri jihad will encourage the downtrodden and crushed nations and races of the world to fight for their survival". The author continues: "Regardless of where such war will be fought and for how long, one thing is amply clear: after these wars, there will be a long-lasting peace in the world."

Leadership and organisation

Following President General Pervez Musharraf's crackdown on militant organisations last May, the group reportedly shifted its entire command

The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has become one of the main centres of extremist Islamic activity in South Asia.

Between 1998 and July 2002 fighting in the disputed region resulted in 14,165 casualties, including 4,038 civilians, 2,314 security force personnel and 7,813 militants. At the forefront of much of this violence is the 'Army of the Pure' (Lashkar-e-Tayyiba – LeT), which has emerged as the most lethal and brutal of all the jihadist groups currently fighting in J&K.

The LeT was established in 1993 as the

military arm of the Markaz-ad-Da'awa-Wal-Irshad (MDI), a prominent Pakistani madrassa based in a sprawling 200 acre campus at Muridke, with some 130 satellite institutions under its auspices. The group is ostensibly led by Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, a former professor at Lahore's University of Engineering and Technology, and is committed to a two-fold ideological agenda that is both pan-Islamic and state-centric.

Specifically, the organisation seeks to institute a fundamentalist theocratic order in Pakistan, while exploiting ethno-religious tension in J&K to trigger a wider religious

This article was first available on jir.janes.com on 17 October 2002.

Peter Chalk and Chris Fair specialise in South Asian security issues.

structure to Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistan-occupied (or Azad, 'Free') Kashmir (POK). While Saeed continues to act as the supreme ideological force behind LeT, a new General Council under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Wahid Kashmiri has reportedly emerged, with Zaki ur Rehman Lakhwi as the alleged military commander in J&K. According to Indian sources, other members of the council include:

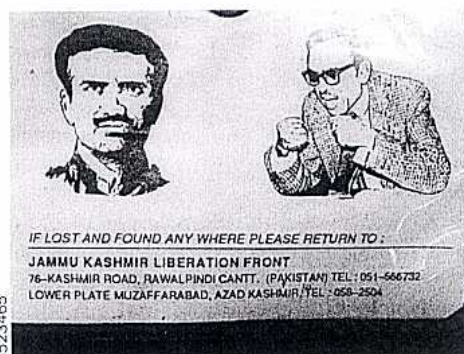
- Haji Mohammed Azam;
- Muzammil Butt;
- Mohammed Umair;
- Chaudri Abdullah Khalid Chauhan;
- Rafiq Akhtar;
- Aftab Hussein;
- Faisal Dar;
- Chaudri Yusuf;
- Maulana Mohammed Sharif Balghari;
- Raja Mohammed Irshad;
- Massoud Lone.

The group has an estimated 1,500 cadres on the ground in J&K (roughly half of all the Pakistani-based militants in the state), which are organised at district levels under sub-regional commanders. Within Pakistan, the LeT runs a network of branch offices, which undertake recruitment and collection of finances. The organisation is composed almost exclusively of non-Kashmiris, with the bulk of its membership comprised mostly of Pakistani Punjabis, but also including Baluchis, Pashtuns and Afghans (for a 10-man cell in J&K, nine would be non-indigenous). These militants typically 'serve' on a contract mercenary basis, receiving between Rs10,000 and Rs20,000 per month in salary as well as an end of tenure payment of between Rs300,000 to Rs500,000 for every year of 'active' service completed in J&K.

Training, most of which is conducted through camps run by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, falls into three phases. First there is a six-month induction period where recruits learn basic field craft and weapons handling. This is then followed by four to five months of advanced training that focuses on language proficiency, urban warfare and small unit tactics, sabotage and assassination. The most able cadres go on to a tertiary stage of specialist instruction, which, according to statements from captured militants, covers suicide assaults, computer skills, field communications and advanced explosive techniques.

Tactics

The LeT has targeted both civilians and the security forces. The group has become especially infamous for carrying out



◆ A detail of an LeT recruitment poster. Any group with over a hundred members is recommended to include a dedicated propaganda cell.

The LeT views the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir not as a territorial dispute between New Delhi and Islamabad, but as nothing less than a holy war between the forces of Islamic belief and disbelief.

massacres of non-Muslims. Militants typically focus on remote villages and settlements where there is little military or police presence, often winning the initial confidence of local inhabitants by disguising themselves as members of the army. On certain occasions, victims have been severely mutilated following an assault, both to maximise publicity and extract public allegiance out of fear.

Attacks on the security forces generally take the form of suicide assaults carried out by dedicated fidayeen squads. In most cases, small units of two to five members will storm a military base or camp, entrenching themselves inside the facility with the aim of eliminating as many personnel before they are killed. Although

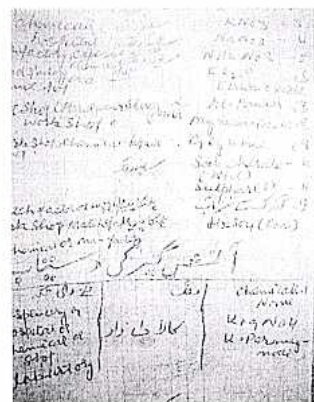
certainly an extreme form of sub-state violence, these strikes have yet to utilise 'human bomb' assaults characteristic of groups such as Hamas and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam — manifesting more as extreme high-risk than true martyr operations. Indeed, in certain instances, fidayeen members have successfully fled after carrying out a mission.

The LeT has additionally proven remarkably adept at targeting military convoys with bombs, land mines and other improvised incendiary devices, which have been variously detonated from roadsides, over-hanging tree branches and abandoned vehicles. Explosive material is mostly smuggled into J&K from POK, although consignments are also known to have been shipped from cells located in other parts of India, generally through Rajasthan, via either Gujarat or Bombay.

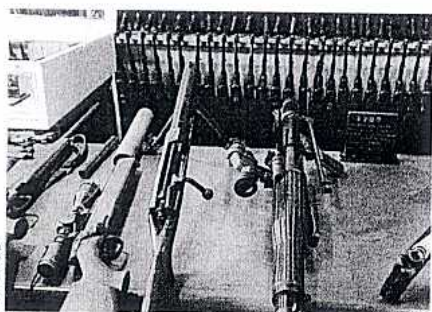
The LeT has augmented its overall firepower with a rudimentary surface-to-air capacity. While the organisation is not known to have access to a dedicated anti-aircraft system — training in the use of shoulder-fired Stinger missiles is given 'on paper' only — it has periodically used heavy machine guns and anti-tank projectiles to shoot at helicopters and other low-flying airborne assets. Despite the fact that these weapons have yet to have a decisive operational impact, their use does represent a degree of tactical innovation that senior members of the Indian Army's 15 Corps in Srinagar admit it has been forced to note.

The LeT, like most Islamist militant groups in Pakistan, has made extensive use of criminal elements in carrying out its tactical agenda. This has been particularly true of low-skill operations such as bomb drops as well as the perpetration of particularly bloody attacks with which the group does not wish to have a direct association. Certain Lashkar members have also turned to organised crime, either for funding purposes or to obtain munitions. One syndicate that has been tied closely to the machinations of various Kashmiri outfits is the Bombay mafia, whose principal 'don' remains the chief suspect behind the devastating series of explosions that ripped through Bombay in 1993.

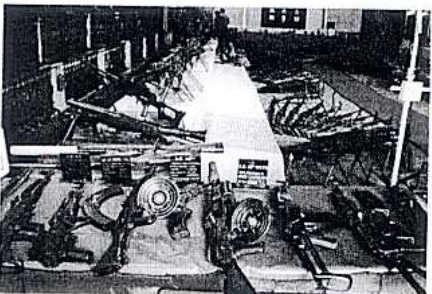
Operationally, the LeT has published a detailed primer articulating the specific requirements for conducting sustained guerrilla attacks. The manual outlines the following critical structures, assets and capabilities that all ground insurgent forces should be able to institute or otherwise access: supply chain management; weapons substitution; munitions; explosives; blankets; uniforms;



◆ Example of LeT training notes.



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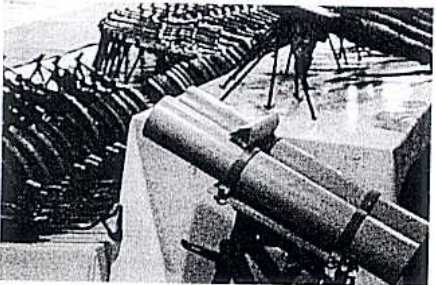


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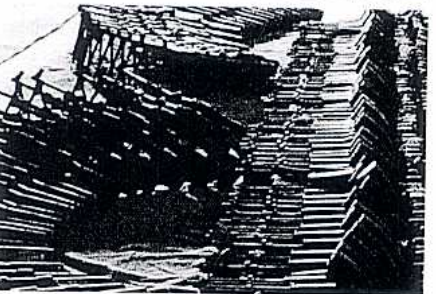
◆ Arms seizures registered by the security forces suggest access to a wide-ranging and extensive assortment of sophisticated weaponry. In the Kashmir Valley region alone, 16,047 assault rifles, 738 rocket propelled grenades, 223 sniper rifles, 57 mortars, 4,813 pistols and 839 general purpose machine guns have been captured since 1990, in addition to numerous night vision devices, advanced radio sets (complete with solar charges) and field binoculars.



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communications; transport; and propaganda. Itemised recommendations are made in a number of discrete areas. For example:

- communications: Field radio sets should be available to any group larger than 20 members;
- medical aid: Any group larger than 20 members must include a doctor or an individual trained in first aid and must have access to basic medical supplies (which can be captured from the enemy);
- transport: Guerrillas require an integrated transport system, drawing on a wide range of modes including vehicles, pack mules/donkeys and human porters; and
- propaganda: Any group over a hundred members should include a dedicated propaganda cell capable of designing and printing posters and advertisements.

The primer argues for a drawn-out war with India that aims to deplete New Delhi's overall pool of manpower, diminish the security forces' morale in the counterinsurgency grid and exploit general weaknesses in the government's supply chain. It stresses that, ultimately, cadres must maintain first-strike capabilities at all times and conduct operations in such a way that guerrilla strikes can be integrated into a more conventional war strategy at short notice and with minimal disruption to overall force tempo.

Areas of operation

The bulk of LeT activities are focused on the Kashmir Valley, which, given its majority Muslim population, has traditionally formed the crux of J&K militancy. Government sources in India claim that since August the group has concentrated most of its energies on disrupting elections for the state's legislature (carried out in stages during October), systematically targeting political workers, security personnel, local government officials, candidates, party rallies and civilians. During one day in mid-September, co-ordinated attacks thought to have been led by the LeT resulted in 20 deaths, 25 injuries and the assassinations of the state's law minister Mustaq Ahmed Lone and the governing National Conference's women's wing district president Mehra Begum.

The LeT has also moved to extend its operations to J&K's southern districts, particularly in the winter months when infiltration further north becomes problematic due to reduced visibility, heavy snow fall and frigid ground temperatures (which can easily fall to as

The LeT, like most Islamist militant groups in Pakistan, has made extensive use of criminal elements in carrying out its tactical agenda.

low as -30°). Indian sources claim that group activists have been especially active in the Jammu region where a large Punjabi population allows for relatively easy penetration into local societal networks.

Further afield, the LeT has been tied to terrorist cells in New Delhi, Bombay, Gujarat, Agra, Hyderabad and Uttar Pradesh. Indian intelligence believes that at least 110 operational cells are currently in existence, the bulk of which are being used either to foment communal violence and unrest, or as staging points from which to launch attacks against economic, political, tourist and other infrastructure/symbolic targets. Interviews conducted with both Lashkar members in Pakistan and journalists familiar with the group lend credence to these assertions.

In terms of specific activities, LeT militants have been tied to some of the most serious terrorist atrocities that have taken place in Indian territory over the last three years. Prominent attacks that have been either directly or indirectly attributed to the group include:

- a major car bombing in Srinagar in December 2000 (11 killed, 20 injured);
- a series of massacres in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2000 (102 killed);
- an attack on the army's Delhi Red Fort garrison in December 2000 (three killed);
- a suicide strike against the Srinagar state legislature in October 2001 (38 killed, 50 wounded);
- a direct assault on the country's national parliament in December 2001 (14 killed);
- an attack on the US Calcutta Cultural Center in January 2002 (five killed, 20 wounded);
- a suicide bombing in Karachi in May 2002 (11 French citizens killed); and
- later that same month, a major strike on an army camp in Kaluchak (J&K) (31 killed, mostly the wives and children of soldiers).

The scale and scope of this political violence is indicative of the increased firepower and experience that has become available to the LeT over the last few years. Arms seizures registered by the security forces suggest access to a wide-ranging and extensive assortment of sophisticated weaponry. In the Kashmir Valley region alone, 16,047 assault rifles, 738 rocket

propelled grenades, 223 sniper rifles, 57 mortars, 4,813 pistols and 839 general purpose machine guns have been captured since 1990, in addition to numerous night vision devices, advanced radio sets (complete with solar charges) and field binoculars.

Arguably of more importance, December 2001's assault against the Indian national parliament – a joint LeT/Army of Mohammed (Jaish-e-Mohammed – JeM) operation that triggered a tense military standoff between New Delhi and Islamabad – has not only underscored the resourcefulness of contemporary Kashmiri terrorism, it has also highlighted an organisational ability to strike, disrupt and destroy far beyond the primary J&K theatre of engagement.

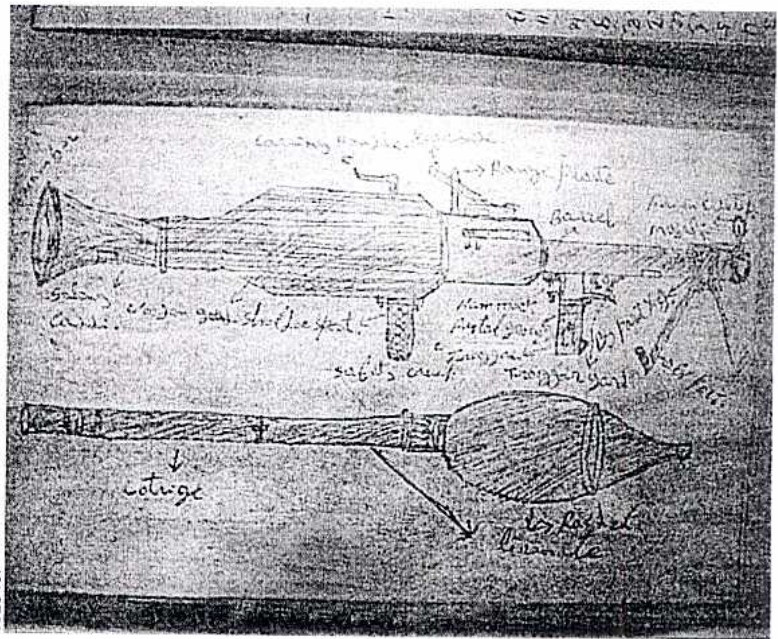
The Pakistani factor

Undoubtedly, one of the main factors accounting for the enhanced power projection and operational potential of the LeT is the broad ranging and comprehensive support the group has received from Pakistan's ISI. Through its two Joint Intelligence Miscellaneous and Joint Intelligence North sub-divisions, the agency has been involved in numerous facets of the group's activities, co-ordinating, at one time or another:

- training;
- policy, planning and organisation;
- provision of equipment, weapons and funds;
- abetment of cross-Line of Control (LoC) infiltration and exfiltration; and
- targeting

ISI support to the LeT essentially revolves around the perennial conflict with New Delhi. India has long been regarded as an aggressive state that poses a fundamental threat to Pakistan's long-term territorial integrity. This perception stems from both historical considerations – Islamabad specifically blames its neighbour for orchestrating the creation of Bangladesh out of East Pakistan in 1971 – and India's greater geographic, demographic, economic and military weight. Backing for the LeT is regarded as a relatively cheap and effective way of overcoming existing power

◆ LeT sketch of weapons. Its arsenal includes RPGs, machine guns, sniper rifles and pistols.



symmetries, while simultaneously tying down Indian troops and, thereby, creating a bulwark along the country's vulnerable southern flank. In the words of Hamid Gul, the former director general of the ISI: "We have gained a lot because of our offensive in Kashmir. This is a psychological and political offensive that is designed to make India bleed through a thousand cuts."

In pursuit of this objective, the ISI has sought to replicate the success of the international anti-Soviet jihad that it oversaw in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Believing that this strategy could be effectively translated to the Kashmiri theatre, the directorate has actively inducted foreign militants into J&K, working in close co-operation with the radical religious elements such as the MDI and Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam. Both of these groups retain important links with numerous extremist Muslim groups in Asia and the Arab world, and through their widespread madrassa network, constitute a fertile ground for ideological indoctrination and recruitment. Unfortunately, this system has preyed on Pakistan's most vulnerable. As Jessica Stern noted in a *Foreign Affairs* article, whereas the wealthy give their money, the poor families give their sons, confident in the knowledge that their shaheed will help them in their next life, 'the real life'.

One particular aspect of ISI support that has elicited growing concern in recent years is the directorate's alleged role in helping to foster organisational linkages between the LeT and other militant outfits. Indian authorities believe that the directorate is actively encouraging a tactical union with the JeM – a prominent

addition to J&K militancy since 2000 – which has allowed both groups to consolidate logistical assets and further expand their overall operational reach. Intelligence sources in Srinagar also suspect that the ISI is working to build Lashkar's ties with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) and fear that the latter's predominant Kashmiri cadre is now providing vital ground intelligence on various target zones throughout the Valley region.

In future, there is reason to worry about the ISI's possible strategic and tactical use of pan-Islamist elements. One particularly disquieting post-Musharraf scenario would be the emergence of a more radical, 'internationally oriented' directorate that directly equates Indian belligerence with US support.

Post-11 September

As a result of the more restrictive global environment brought about by the September 2001 terrorist attacks, Pakistan has been forced to take several initiatives against the LeT in the context of curbing general militant activity emanating from its territory. Specifically, the group has been banned, its bank accounts frozen and several of its leading members detained (similar measures were also instituted against JeM and HM). President Musharraf has also vowed to enforce a permanent cessation of all jihadist infiltration across the LoC and provided assurances to the international community that no tolerance will be given to those who openly exhort or propagate terrorist violence. In addition, the Federal Cabinet has moved to more closely monitor and regulate madrassas

India has long been regarded as an aggressive state that poses a fundamental threat to Pakistan's long-term territorial integrity.

such as the MDI, mandating that these institutions register their network of satellite schools with the central government and fully disclose details of attending foreign students. Finally, certain tentative steps have been taken both to 'de-radicalise' the ISI's top leadership and restrict the latitude of those sub-units most closely associated with supporting Kashmiri militancy.

These moves have been applauded in the West and, together with Musharraf's support for the US campaign in Afghanistan, have won Pakistan some important economic concessions. The extent to which Musharraf's post-11 September initiatives will have a noticeably constraining effect on the LeT remains unclear, however. On the one hand, statements from Lashkar's general council have confirmed several changes that are affecting the group's operational activities, particularly the closure of ISI camps in the interior of POK and an increased military 'blocking' presence along the LoC.

This being said, the decisiveness of Islamabad's overall militant crackdown remains open to question. The bulk of LeT militants detained since January 2002 have been released, only a few hundred dollars in financial assets seized (the group was allegedly given three days advanced notice to empty its bank accounts) and many leading personalities remain free to conduct their activities in

It is not apparent that changes in the ISI will bear dividends in terms of curtailing active intelligence support for Kashmiri militancy and terrorism.

a largely unrestricted fashion, including Lashkar's supreme commander, Hafiz Mohammed Saeed. More seriously, a robust training infrastructure in POK clearly remains in place – at least 40 jihadist facilities have been identified by Indian intelligence – and infiltration across the LoC, following a brief decline of 40% between May and July 2002, has largely returned to pre-11 September levels.

It is also not apparent that changes in the ISI will bear dividends in terms of curtailing active intelligence support for Kashmiri militancy and terrorism. The most concerted links between the directorate and the LeT, JeM and HM do not occur at the level of the General Head Quarters but within the agency's middle management, which tends to be autonomous and often takes initiatives on its own. Moreover, Indian officials firmly believe that ISI operational units with responsibility for J&K were never pressured to decisively halt the activities of groups such as LeT, alleging that since August the directorate has been actively

encouraged to expedite the provision of funds, arms and recruits in order to disrupt the state's legislative elections.

These conflicting signs reflect the difficult balancing act that Musharraf faces in confronting the Kashmiri situation. While the president certainly realises the potential benefits of working with the international community in terms of counterterrorism, his ability to institute forceful action against jihadist groups is limited. Belief in Islamabad's historic right to rule J&K in its entirety is both the 'marrow' of Pakistani nationalism and the defining principle on which the security and intelligence forces have long defined their operational and ideological agendas. Abandoning the cause of Kashmiri liberation under such circumstances would, at best, be highly politically damaging and, at worst, cataclysmic.

Musharraf also no doubt appreciates the danger of triggering an Islamist backlash by moving to forcefully curtail the activities of extremist groups on Pakistani soil. The LeT is already openly talking about fomenting a fundamentalist revolution against the president, who has himself been the subject of at least two assassination plots. Indeed, this may be one of the main determinants currently influencing the military government's willingness to actively crack down on the LeT and other Kashmiri outfits – to keep them busy and, thus, out of Pakistan. ●

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