

Print  Close

## How Pakistan's intelligence agency created a pliant proxy and implacable foe of India

C. CHRISTINE FAIR | September 11, 2015 | 09:29



### In the beginning

In 1984 Zaki-ur-Rehman assembled a small group of Pakistani Ahl-e-Hadith adherents to wage jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. A year later, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed and Zafar Iqbal, two professors from the Islamic studies department of Lahore Engineering University, formed the Jamaat-ul-Dawa (Organization for Preaching, JuD), a small group that was primarily focused upon tabligh (proselytization) or dawa (missionary work) aiming to propagate the Ahl-e-Hadith creed. In 1986, Lakhvi merged his militia with JuD to create the Markaz Daawat ul Irshad (MDI, Center for Preaching and Guidance). MDI had three functions: jihad; proselytization of the Ahl-e-Hadith maslak, and the creation of a new generation of Muslims committed to their ideology. Within one year of forming, MDI established its first militant training camp, Muaskar-e-Taiba, in the Afghan province of Paktia, and established another camp, Muaskar-e-Aqsa, in Kunar.

After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, internecine warfare erupted the different mujahidin leaders in Afghanistan. MDI opposed this development and shifted its focus to Indian-administered Kashmir. To do so, it established several training camps in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. In 1990 MDI launched its first mission in Kashmir when its operatives ambushed a jeep that was carrying Indian air force personnel travelling towards Srinagar Airport. While attacks on Indian security forces by Kashmiri militants had become commonplace by 1990, this accuracy of this assault by a hitherto unknown militant group was unprecedented. In the early 1990s, MDI segmented its activities and organizational structure. While MDI continued the mission of proselytization and education, it hived off LeT as a tightly related militant wing of MDI. However, Saeed was the leader (amir) of both organizations attesting to the degree to which it was nearly impossible to distinguish MDI and LeT.

### The ISI picks the LeT

The Pakistan army and the intelligence agency it runs, the Inter-services Intelligence Directorate or ISI, did not create the LeT; but they did believe that LeT, with its demonstrable superior capabilities, would intensify the conflict in Kashmir and expand the geographical expanse of the insurgency. From the early 1990s, the ISI and the Pakistan army invested heavily in LeT. The army helped to build LeT's military apparatus specifically for use against India and it designed LeT's military training regime. It co-located army and ISI personnel at LeT training bases to help execute the regime and to train the organization's trainers and this remains true to date. All senior leadership have ISI handlers, even Saeed himself.

Pakistan's investments paid off: within a few years LeT became the biggest challenge to the Indian security forces in Kashmir prior to the introduction of the Jaish-e-Mohammad many years later. In 1999 LeT introduced a new kind of attack in Indian-administered Kashmir: the fidayeen attack (also spelled fedayeen). By introducing the fidayeen attack, the LeT and its Pakistani handlers aimed to reverse a three-year decline in militant activity in Indian-administered Kashmir. LeT's fidayeen missions are not "suicide attacks;" rather, high-risk missions in which well-trained commandos engage in fierce combat during which dying is preferable to being captured.

### Sleight of ban

In December 2001, Pakistan banned LeT, along with several other militant groups, after Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) attacked the Indian parliament earlier that month, bringing India and Pakistan to the brink of war. These bans deceived no one. Pakistan's intelligence agencies alerted the soon-to-be banned organizations of the upcoming proscription, providing them ample time to transfer their assets to new accounts and to reorganize and re-launch under new names. In the case of LeT, Saeed announced the organization had been restructured and would operate as Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). JuD subsumed the vast majority of LeT's human, financial and material assets, while the organizational nodes and operatives outside of Pakistan continued to serve under the banner of LeT. As further evidence of the organizational continuity between the various organizations, Saeed remained JuD's amir. Since then, Pakistan has not made any pretense of further restrictions on the organization. It resists all pressure from the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, India and the United Nations to do so.

Even after the sanguinary attack on a military school in Peshawar in early 2015 when Pakistani officials vowed it would no longer distinguish between good terrorists and bad, LeT (aka JuD) was never at risk. After all, the Pakistani deep state does not consider this organization to be "terrorist." In fact, it has never targeted the Pakistani state in sharp contrast to the myriad Deobandi militant groups who have long turned against their erstwhile handlers. In fact, Saeed widely claimed that the attack was done by Indian proxies and immediately after the school attack, Lakhvi, the mastermind of the November 2008 attacks on Mumbai, was granted bail. Lakhvi had been in jail, which was really a form of protective custody, since 2008.

### New Vistas of Jihad

By 2005 if not 2004, LeT formally sanctioned its cadres to go to Afghanistan to fight with the Afghan Taliban where they engaged US/ISAF, Afghan and Indian targets. LeT was not enthusiastic about doing so because it feared that extensive involvement in the Afghanistan insurgency would require its cadres to work with and through the various Deobandi groups who were at war with the Pakistani state.

The LeT entered the Afghan insurgency for several reasons. First, Pakistan was forced to retard Kashmir operations after the JeM attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 and the LeT attack on Indian military families in Kaluchak (in Kashmir) in May 2002. Under significant US pressure, Musharraf adopted the so-called "moderated jihad" strategy which denied LeT and other jihadi groups access to this prized theatre. The organization, seeking to retain fighters as well as experienced commanders who were anxious to engage in active combat, found Afghanistan a welcoming theatre. Second, the notion of fighting the infidels in Afghanistan was very attractive to many militants in Pakistan and LeT, like their Deobandi counterparts, succumbed to those demands. Third, some of the organization's donors believed that Afghanistan was a more important theatre than Kashmir after the ouster of the Taliban and al Qaeda and the subsequent occupation of the country by American and ISAF forces. Fourth, under the US security umbrella, India was able to establish a robust presence in Afghanistan which was a perennial irritant to Pakistan. Most importantly, the ISI sanctioned the organization's expanded role in Afghanistan where it, along with the Haqqani Network, became Pakistan's most important assets with which it could attack Indian and international military targets in Afghanistan. However, the Afghan theatre is of secondary importance to that of Kashmir and is a theatre of compulsion rather than a theatre of preference.

### LeT's domestic politics

Most analysts of LeT view the organization as a terrorist organization that Pakistan uses to secure its interests in India, and to some extent and more recently, in Afghanistan. However, LeT has an important and growing domestic political role within Pakistan in that LeT is the only organization to offer ideological resistance to the Deobandi violent agenda that is savaging Pakistanis and the state. It is critical to note the groups that have turned on the state are Deobandi and Deobandis commit most of the sectarian and communal attacks in Pakistan. JuD vigorously opposes attacking Pakistanis, which makes it an important tool in the hands of the deep state that is seeking to regain the upper hand over its Deobandi proxies who have turned against the state. In contrast, to the Deobandi terrorist organizations, JuD holds that all Pakistani Muslims must wage jihad against the "external kuffar" (external infidel, e.g. Hindus in India as well as Jews and Crusaders who are their allies) to first establish an Islamic government over all of India and then elsewhere. Kashmir is but an entry way: the real goal is liberating all of India. Jihad is the only way to preserve Pakistan's Islamic identity and the only way to ameliorate the various problems in Pakistani society, including sectarian and communal violence. The Pakistani state has tremendous self-interest in buttressing this domestic role of the organization. To do so, the state has supported JuD in particular as the "charitable arm" of the organization as well as the Filahe-e-Insaniat Foundation (FIF), which is JuD's official disaster relief arm. Organizational Structure





Curiously, very little reliable information about the organization's structure is available in the public domain despite the critical threat this organization poses to regional and international security. Estimates of its active cadres range from a high end of 50,000 to a low estimate of several thousand. Considerably more is known about the organization's leadership in part due to their public profiles, their numerous publications, and due to various arrests of LeT cadres and facilitators whose interrogations have offered important organizational and leadership insights. Saeed is the Amir of the organization, now operating within Pakistan under the moniker of JuD and LeT within Kashmir. He exercises extremely tight control over the organization which is compartmentalized into numerous departments that concern jihad, education, charity, religious affairs, and social welfare. To ensure maximal compliance with Saeed's diktats, Saeed appoints family members or close associates to key positions who answer directly to him. The organization of the jihad department resembles conventional military organizations with a supreme commander and deputy, provisional commander, divisional commanders, brigade commanders, and so forth. The chain of command is pyramidal and specialized with specific elements responsible for recruitment, training and the conduct of military operations. Saeed exercises tight command and control over these elements as well as through the various section heads who report directly to him.

Saeed's tight top-down control over the organization and emplacement of close associates likely explains why the organization has not experienced the fissures and subsequent rebellions against the state that the various Deobandi organizations have experienced whose command and control structures are more

delegated. Saeed's control over his cadres is also buttressed by ISI's willingness to use violence should LeT cadres disobey. ISI pressure coupled with Saeed's strong hold over the organization has contributed to its discipline in contrast to the other groups who have proven to be a problem for the Pakistani state.

To manage its varied domestic and international activities, it maintains several departments. The organization maintains offices in most of the major cities throughout Pakistan. As of 2000, it operated more than 70 district offices although it aspires to have offices in all of Pakistan's 138 districts and tribal areas. These offices undertake recruitment as well as funds collection. In addition to offices which are open to the public, JuD/LeT maintains training camps throughout Pakistan. LeT has a spokesperson named Mohammad Yahya Mujahid (with whom the author has met on several occasions). Like Saeed, he is a public figure who meets regularly and freely with domestic and international media even though the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 Committee (also known as the UNSC Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee) designated him in 2009 (UNSC 1267 Committee 2009). The organization also has a spokesperson for international media, Abdullah Muntazer, who also edits JuD's website.

Iqbal, who co-founded LeT with Saeed, is a senior leader within the organization and commensurate with his long tenure, he has held numerous posts over the years. According to the UNSC Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, as of late 2010, Iqbal headed JuD's finance department. As of early 2010, Iqbal also served as the head of the organization's education department, a position he has occupied from 2003 if not earlier. In his capacity as education chief, Iqbal has helped to recruit for the organization and he has developed curricula for the vast body of schools that the organization runs in Pakistan.

Saeed's deputy (naib amir) is Hafiz Abdul Salam Bhuttavi, a founding member of MDI/LeT. He is one of the organization's preeminent scholars and has issued fatwas that authorize the organization's varied military operations. He also participated in the preparation of the fidayeen who conducted the November 2008 attack on Mumbai. Abdul Rehman Makki, who is also Saeed's brother-in-law and the son of one of Saeed's maternal uncles, is a central leader of the organization and is the head of both the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Foreign Relations. Within Pakistan, district commanders oversee cadres who are managed at the district level. Throughout Pakistan, the organization maintains training camps and branch offices which facilitate recruitment and fundraising.

Sajid Mir is the Commander of Overseas Operations. Mir became notorious in 2008 because he was the "project manager" for the 2008 Mumbai attack. From his redoubts in Pakistan, he personally directed the killing spree through his continuous phone conversations with the attackers. Azam Cheema is the commander of the Indian Operations Branch and intelligence chief. He reports to Lakhvi. The US Department of Treasury claims he trained cadres in bomb-making and other skills needed to infiltrate and operate in India. He also provided training to the attackers who carried out the 2008 Mumbai assault.

Within Indian-administered Kashmir, the organization has a Chief Operations Commander for the Valley as well as regional division commanders for the Central, North and South Divisions who report to this Chief Operations Commander. These commands are further divided into area commands for increasingly smaller geographical areas.

In the last decade, LeT's senior leadership council appointed a commander to oversee operations in Afghanistan where their cadres tended to fight under the banner of other groups rather than that of LeT.

Financing the Army of the pure



JuD primarily uses its funds for three purposes: dawa (preaching), khidmat (provision of social services), and jihad-related activities (e.g. recruitment, training, and procurement of equipment and weapons). Unfortunately, it is impossible to know with certainty what the total operating budget for JuD is and how much of that budget comes directly from the state and how much of that is secured through the organization's own fundraising activities. Kambere et al. estimate that LeT's annual operation budget is about \$50 million of which about \$5.2 million is dedicated to military operations. Sharma (2014) suggests that the annual budget may be more \$100 million. With this operating budget the group runs numerous training centers all over Pakistan. It's estimated that the organization spends US\$330 on each recruit undertaking the groups' Daura-e-Aam (basic) course and about \$1,700 per cadre enrolled in the Daura-e-Khan (advanced three-month course).

It is unlikely that the state has to provide the full operating budget because the organization has a massive fund raising capability through its domestic and foreign charity solicitations, on-line solicitations, the sales of its numerous publications, its annual collection of sacrificial animal pelts among other lucrative endeavors. Astonishingly, the federal and Punjab governments provide overt support to the organization even though it has been declared a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the United States among other countries.

#### The future of LeT in India

LeT, so far, is the leading terrorist group in South Asia. Organizationally, it has no significant ties to al Qaeda or its competitor the Islamic State. In fact, allying itself to either of these groups would jeopardize its most important assets: unfettered support from the Pakistani state. However, the Islamic State has upped the ante in terms of the viciousness of violence. Whereas al Qaeda and LeT stunned the world with its ability to stage coordinated, multi-site, simultaneous attacks; the Islamic State focuses media attention upon such brutality that even the Taliban and al Qaeda have denounced the Islamic State as barbaric savages disgracing the name of Islam. However, the brutality of IS does put pressure on other terrorist groups to increase their barbarism. After all, all Islamist militant groups are competing for market share of funds and cadres. In some respects, the IS has shown that it need not win hearts and minds: it need only terrorize populations into succumbing to their brutality. This leaves open the possibility that LeT may also seek to deepen its own savagery, which is substantial. After all, LeT has had a long history of beheading people. Meeting or exceeding the brutality of IS is well within LeT's performance envelope.





Security forces personnel after an encounter with militants at Dinanagar in Gurdaspur

While Indians are likely correct to anticipate that the next attack on India may well come from the LeT; I encourage Indians to also remember the Jaish-e-Mohammad which launched the attack on India's parliament in December 2000. JeM had been dormant for years in part because their cadres had defected to the Pakistani Taliban. In recent years, the Pakistan army and ISI have resuscitated JeM in hopes of luring some of the of previous cadres back into the fold with the lure of killing Indians. JeM, it should be recalled, conducted its first attack-a suicide bombing in 2000-in Kashmir. JeM, unlike LeT, has long had ties to al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, once the world leaders in murderous brutality, and JeM's operatives have been working with the Pakistani Taliban whose attacks have been nearly as savage as that of IS. Indians would be wise to keep on eye on JeM in addition to LeT. The Pakistan army and the ISI needs both of these groups if its twin goals of pacifying Pakistan and setting India on fire are to be advanced.

#### References:

- \* Abou Zahab, Mariam. 2007. "I Shall be Waiting at the Door of Paradise: The Pakistani Martyrs of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure), in Aparna Rao et al. Eds. *The Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence*. New York: Berghahn Books: pp.133-158
- \* 2009. *Salafism in Pakistan: The Ahl-e Hadith Movement*. In Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press: 126-139.
- \* Bhattacharya, Sanchita. 2014. JuD: The Dependable Terrorist, *South Asia Intelligence Review*. Vol. 13, No. 2 (July). [http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/sair13/13\\_2.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/sair13/13_2.htm).
- \* Fair, C. Christine. 2007. India and Iran: New Delhi's Balancing Act. *The Washington Quarterly* 30 (Summer): pp. 145-159.
- \* 2011a. Lashkar-e-Tayiba and the Pakistani State. *Survival* 53 (August): 1-23.
- \* Kambere, Geoffrey et al. 2011. "The Financing of Lashkar-e-Taiba," *CTX Journal* 1, no. 1 (August 2011): <https://globalecco.org/ctx-v1n1/lashkar-e-taiba>.
- \* "Meet the Lashkar Super Boss." 2005. Rediff.com. <http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/nov/15sld2.htm>.
- \* Popovic, Milos. 2014. "The Perils of Weak Organization: Explaining Loyalty and Defection of Militant Organizations Toward Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, published online July 2015.
- \* Ranan, Muhammad Amir. 2004. (trans. Saba Ansari) *The A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistan*. Lahore: Mashal.
- \* 2011. The Man Behind Mumbai. November 13. ProPublica. <http://www.propublica.org/article/the-man-behind-mumbai>.
- \* Scott-Clark, Cathy and Adrian Levy. 2013. *The Siege: 68 Hours Inside the Taj Hotel*. New York.

\* Shafqat, Saeed. 2002. "From Official Islam to Islamism: The Rise of Dawat-ul-Irshad and Lashkar-e-Taiba," in Christophe Jaffrelot Ed. Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation. London: Zed Books: pp. 131-147.

\* Sharma, Surinder Kumar. 2012. "Book Review: LeT: Terror incorporated The Caliphate's Soldiers: The Lashkar-e-Tayyeba's Long War by Wilson John," Asia Times. February 4. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/NB04Dfo4.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NB04Dfo4.html).

\* Sikand, Yoginder. 2007. "The Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of the Lashkar-e-Taiba," in Aparna Rao et al. Eds. The Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence. New York: Berghahn Books: pp.215-238.

\* Tankel, Stephen. 2011a. Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba. New York: Oxford University Press.

***C. Christine Fair is an associate professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. This article is derived from her forthcoming book Lashkar-e-Taiba in its Own Words (Hurst 2016). She is the author of Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War (Oxford University Press, 2014). She can be followed on Twitter @cchristinefair***

Print  Close

---

**URL for this article :**

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/the-lashkars-empire-of-jihad/1/470905.html>

@ Copyright 2012 India Today Group.