



BULLETIN

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The Long-term Consequences of the Mumbai Terrorist Attacks for India and the Region

by Patryk Kugiel

Even though India has been grappling with the problem of terrorism for many years and although Mumbai itself was, in 1993 and 2006, the target of attacks with far more tragic consequences, the long-term effects of the November 2008 attacks could be very serious. The participation of Pakistani citizens in the organization of the attacks and India's decisive reaction have led to the most dangerous regional crisis since 2002. Although the attacks were carried out in India, they were also indirectly targeted at Pakistan and the stability of all Southern Asia. The possibilities of defusing the resulting crisis are mainly dependent on the course of internal developments in Pakistan.

The Scale of the Terrorist Threat in India. India is one of the countries in which the threat of terrorist attacks is the greatest in the world. During the past four years, 4,000 terrorist events with varying degrees of intensity took place there at the cost of almost 5,000 people killed and over 10,000 wounded. The number of recorded terrorist attacks during this period was greater only in Iraq. In 2007, India came fourth, after Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, in terms of the number of casualties of terrorist attacks (over 1,000 people). The phenomenon of terrorism in India is highly diverse. In addition to Muslim extremists, it also involves such groups as the Naxalites (Maoist partisans), separatists in the north-eastern provinces (such as Assam), and Hindu fundamentalists. Even though in the past few years the number of terrorist attacks organized in India by Muslims has been in decline (the Maoists have been more active), given their new targets (outside of Kashmir) and methods (attacks on civilians), the problem of Islamic terrorism is becoming one of India's principal internal security problems.

The Mumbai Attacks of 26 November 2008. The Mumbai attacks, in which almost 170 persons were killed and some 300 were wounded, differed from earlier terrorist attacks in India. They developed into long-lasting confrontations involving the use of automatic weapons, grenades, and hostage-taking. It is also worthwhile to note the terrorists' choice of targets, among which were foreign tourists and citizens of Israel. Coordinated attacks in a dozen city locations, the high degree of motivation and preparedness of the assailants indicate that they must have been prepared by a well-organized structure. The taking of responsibility for the attacks by the previously unknown group Deccan Mujahideen can most probably be viewed as a subterfuge intended to dissimulate the involvement of a more experienced group. Most probably, the attacks were conducted by: 1) terrorist organizations that are active in Kashmir and have ties with Pakistan (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammad), 2) India's home-grown Islamic groups (the Students Islamic Movement of India or Indian Mujahideen), and 3) members of the first two groups acting in cooperation. On the basis of the testimony provided by the sole captured terrorist, among other sources, India recognized Lashkar-e-Taiba as the perpetrator of the attacks. The goals of the attackers had both a local (striking against India) and a regional dimension (the terrorists could have hoped that an attack on such a scale in India would lead to an India-Pakistan conflict and, in consequence to the destabilization of the entire region).

Consequences for India's Internal Situation. The attacks have revealed many weaknesses of the Indian state, especially in its counter-intelligence and security forces, and thus undermined the credibility of that country. In the social dimension, the role of Muslims in the organization of the attacks could produce rising tensions and an explosion of religiously-motivated violence in India's multicultural society. The attacks will also have a significant impact on the upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled to take place in May 2009, reducing the chances for a Congress Party victory. The government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, accused of incompetence and passivity in the struggle against terrorism, will be subjected to criticism not only for having allowed the attacks to take place, but also for its security policy, which entails a dialogue with Pakistan. The members of India's main opposition party—the Indian People's Party (BJP)—are saying that their electoral slogan will be 'A Safe India,' and that they will make the subjects of combating terrorism and the weakness of the present authorities the most significant issues of the campaign. Although both parties are in agreement on the most important foreign policy issues, the arrival in power of the more confrontational BJP would make the normalization of relations with Pakistan more difficult. Moreover, the attacks have complicated the situation in Kashmir, which held elections to the State Assembly in December 2008. Increased tensions in relations with Pakistan will mean that the principal goal of the Indian government will be to reaffirm its total control over the region and assure security there. In this situation, the much-awaited debate on Kashmir's future will be postponed to a significant degree.

International Consequences. The attacks have led to a serious crisis in India–Pakistan relations and have interrupted the peace process that had been under way between the two countries since 2004. The visit of the Foreign Minister of Pakistan to India, begun on the day of the attacks, ended in fiasco. Chances for enlivening bilateral relations and for progress in negotiations that accompanied the political changes that occurred, among other places, in Pakistan and the United States, were reduced to naught. The Indian government blamed Pakistan for the attacks, and pointed to that country's ties with Lashkar-e-Taiba and to the participation of Pakistani army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers in the preparation of the attacks. In addition, it demanded that Pakistan take decisive steps against terrorist groups based in Pakistan, including the arrest and extradition of about 20 persons suspected of terrorist activities in India. Although the Pakistani authorities firmly condemned the attacks, while rejecting all accusations of participation in their organization, and offered to cooperate with India in fighting terrorism, tensions between the two countries remain at a dangerously high level. Pakistan has warned that in case of a threat from India, Pakistan could withdraw its army units that are engaged in fighting the Taliban along the Afghan border and send them to the border in Kashmir. Thus, the indirect consequences of the Mumbai attacks would also be felt by the NATO ISAF forces deployed in Afghanistan (a greater influx of fighters to Afghanistan from the ill-guarded Pakistani side of the border, problems with supplying the coalition forces, etc.). Anxiety connected with the rising India–Pakistan dispute was expressed by the main countries interested in stability in the region (including the United States, Great Britain, China, and Iran). They have also embarked on intensive diplomatic efforts aimed at calming the conflict. While for Pakistan, this entails a continued subjection to strong international pressure, India will most probably use the intensification of contacts with the international community to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the US and other Western states, while stressing common interests in combating terrorism.

Prospects. For many reasons (such as possession of nuclear weapons, and international pressure), the outbreak of a war between India and Pakistan seems the least likely scenario. It is in the interests of both countries to rebuild their relations and to return to the *status quo* ante 26 November 2008. This will depend most of all on the course of internal developments in Pakistan. The Mumbai attacks, similarly to the July attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul, were a reminder of the fact that Pakistan is home to forces that are interested in sustaining of the India–Pakistan conflict and which are in opposition to the official policy of the country's new President Asif Ali Zardari. Following the attacks, Zardari admitted that they were also targeted at Pakistan and its democratically elected government. The future of Pakistan's relations with India thus depends on whether Zardari, a proponent of normalization, will be able to subordinate the army and ISI to the civilian government or whether he will become dominated by those forces. In this context, Pakistan's decision to close down part of Lashkar-e-Taiba's offices and to arrest a number of its members, though hardly sufficient from India's viewpoint, should be treated as a sign of Zardari's growing influence and a good presage for the future. If Pakistan succeeds in effectively breaking up terrorist organizations on its territory, and no new unforeseen circumstances (such as new attacks in India, a coup in Pakistan) arise, India–Pakistan relations should slowly normalize. India intends to use firstly all available diplomatic means to reach its aims. If, however, Pakistan fails to take-up decisive measures against the terrorists, India may even consider strikes against terrorist targets on Pakistani territory.