



## In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba

C. Christine Fair. Hurst and Company, London, 2018. pp. xii + 307. Appendices. Notes. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £40. ISBN 9 7818 4904 5728

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but feel the ramifications of the deepening and widening cleavage the rise of Hindu communalism appears to be set on ensuring across India.

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Focused on South Asia's most infamous Jihadi organisation, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, (LeT), this important policy and security work complements the recent book by Samina Yasmeen (*Jihad and Dawah*: Hurst, 2017), and the earlier and more exploratory work by Stephen Tankel (*Storming the World*: Hurst, 2010), on the same topic.

The first two chapters of the book draw heavily from Fair's earlier work on the Pakistan Army, *Fighting till the End*, but underscore several important points. First is the centrality of the 1947 Partition narrative as 'unfinished business', which justifies moves to alter the status quo. Secondly, Fair emphasises that "... the history of Pakistan's nuclear program and strategy of proxy warfare are inexorably tied together," (p. 45), where the former lends itself as a cover for the latter to operate. Thirdly, Fair argues that the Jihadis, initially created for the Afghan war, were created for Pakistan's purposes too thereby challenging the oft-repeated belief that they were created mainly for American designs.

From chapter four starts the main part of the book with an examination of LeT's ideological roots, organisation and operation. Here Fair makes an important distinction, that while LeT follows the Ahl-e-Hadees sect (a type of South Asian Salafism), "the LeT rejects the opinions of the Ahl-e-Hadees ulema that Jihad is inappropriate under the prevailing conditions and that non-state actors can wage Jihad" (p. 71). This difference, Fair argues, limits the LeT's access to the Ahl-e-Hadees's religious institutions and also makes it more "... isolated and thus dependent on the ISI," the intelligence wing of the Pakistan military.

Narrating the development of the LeT during the latter part of the Afghan Jihad, and its links to the Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JuD), and the Markaz al-Dawah Irshad (MDI), Fair notes the three-pronged approach of these

organisations: Jihad, Tabligh (proselytisation), and Dawah (missionary work). She also shows how the “LeT/JuD has a very hierarchical commander-cadre structure,” (p. 88), with clearly established departments and a succession plan. Fair then closely delineates the financing, recruitment and training pattern of the LeT, especially noting its signature ‘Fidayeen’ attackers who differ from suicide bombers in that they “are killed only by the hands of their attackers, not by their own” (p. 78).

Chapter five focuses on the 918 martyr biographies which Fair has collected. While noting several problems in the dataset, Fair makes some significant arguments here. She argues that “... these biographies suggest that the LeT’s slain fighters are among Pakistan’s most educated males.” (p. 111). She further shows that only about one per cent of the fighters are of Kashmiri origin and that most of them (89 per cent) hail from the Punjab. Significantly, Fair also notes that about 56.9 per cent of her sample had attended a madrassa at some point, contradicting the earlier studies which showed a much smaller percentage. However, she notes that “madrassah education must complement, rather than substitute, non-religious education”.

Fair centralises the importance of the family in the recruitment and then operation of the LeT. Noting that ‘LeT is recruiting not just a member or a fighter but the entire immediate and extended family,’ (p. 130), Fair brings in the larger cause of the LeT where Dawah at home is an essential duty. Since a large number of recruits might never indulge in active militancy, a focus on the family is important for Tabligh and Dawah in the local community for the LeT. Focusing on the role of mothers, Fair notes that not only is LeT the only Jihadi organisation which has an active women’s wing, its focus on mothers testimonies about how they blessed their sons for jihad forms its strong recruiting strategy.

Chapter six focuses on the domestic front and emphasises that the domestic role of the LeT/JuD is as important as the external one, especially since the organisation does not advocate jihad within Pakistan. Hence it “performs the crucial domestic role of ideologically combatting those Islamist militant groups which are targeting the Pakistani state and its citizens” (p. 150). Fair also points out that not only does the LeT/JuD not indulge in *Takfir* (declaring other Muslims, non-Muslim), it also does not advocate violence against Christians and Hindus within Pakistan. Fascinatingly, Fair notes that she found ‘no mention’ of the heterodox Ahmadis in any JuD publications she read. The chapter also notes that

JuD even sees itself as a part of the ‘nation-building’ process in Pakistan with its founder, Hafiz Saeed, boldly claiming that the “government needs JuD’s ideology to resolve the issues of Balochistan,” where an insurgency has been persistent.

The last chapter focuses on the policy implications of Pakistan’s broader security strategy in the region. Here Fair argues that “the time to change is long overdue”. She contends that the USA, and also India, can no longer work with the nuclear blackmail of Pakistan and allow these militant organisations to flourish. She contends that, first, the USA needs to call Pakistan’s nuclear bluff that it is “too dangerous to fail”. Then she argues that the USA needs to “stop incentivizing Pakistan to continue producing ‘good jihadi assets’”. And thirdly that the USA should threaten to declare Pakistan a ‘State sponsor of terrorism’ with its regime of sanctions, to coerce it to curb these groups. Fair also argues for a more aggressive policy by India with regards to Pakistan. In the end, however, Fair acknowledges that there are no Good Options. Just ‘less Bad’ Options.

This book is a very readable, engaging, in-depth, and critical analysis of one of the most lethal jihadi organisations in the world, and its role in the broader security, regional and domestic framework of Pakistan, which makes this work a must read for years to come.

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