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Students Islamic Movement of India and the Indian Mujahideen: An Assessment

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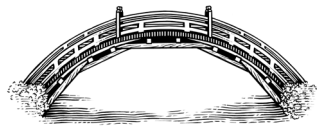

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay assesses the organization, ideology, and membership of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the Indian Mujahideen (IM), as well as India's ability to contend with this domestic security threat.

MAIN FINDINGS

- SIMI emerged as a student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami-i-Hind (JIH) in 1977. It remains unclear at when IM broke from SIMI or if IM has simply appropriated the militant elements of SIMI.
- Though IM recruits tend to be lower- and middle-class Muslims that are disaffected by Hindu nationalism, as well as those offended by Western values and polytheism, IM also claims leaders and cadres from professional backgrounds, especially from the IT sector.
- SIMI/IM has endorsed the goals of Osama bin Laden and seeks redress for violence against Indian Muslims, as well as recourse for the deprivation of socio-economic opportunities for India's Muslim community.
- SIMI/IM has long-standing ties to global Islamist organizations, including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami (HUJI), and mafia as well as Pakistani intelligence agencies and other criminal and militant organizations beyond India.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- An exact rendering of terrorist acts attributable to SIMI/IM is difficult because the Indian press tends to blame LeT for most attacks in India. This is likely due to India's reticence to acknowledge an indigenous threat, as well as its political interest in attributing India's domestic security challenges to Pakistan.
- India's internal security will continue to be fraught, owing to the ongoing support from Pakistan for a variety of militant groups operating in India from Pakistan. India's internal security situation is deeply problematic, riven by interagency discord, pervasive corruption, and a lack of political will to make changes required to protect the citizenry.
- Given the pervasive social inequity of India's Muslim population, the internationalization of jihadist groups operating in the guise of social justice, and India's domestic barriers to developing a robust internal security apparatus, India's citizenry will remain vulnerable, as will other domestic and international terrorism targets within India.

This essay examines several aspects of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the Indian Mujahideen (IM) and aims to provide information about the groups' origins, known leadership, ideological roots, and cadres, as well as their international linkages among other elements. This essay also examines the various impediments to India's ability to contend with the array of domestic security threats to the state.

It should be stated at the outset that several questions remain about the precise linkages between these two groups. Some analysts contend that IM split off from SIMI, attracting those inclined toward militancy, and, thus, that IM is the militant wing of SIMI. Other reporting suggests that SIMI and IM are separate yet inherently linked organizations. During a trip to India in July 2009, most analysts the author approached expressed the belief that IM and SIMI are, for all intents and purposes, the same organization.

This essay is organized as follows:

SOURCES FOR THIS ASSESSMENT

In addition to information the author obtained during a July 2009 trip to India, this essay draws mostly from Indian press reports, assessments by Indian terrorism analysts, and a very limited secondary literature. Only Yoginder Sikand has conducted in-depth scholarly analysis of SIMI.[1] Given

[1] See Yoginder Sikand, *Muslims in India Since 1947: Islamic Perspectives on Interfaith Relations* (London: Routledge, 2004); Yoginder Sikand, "The SIMI Story," *Countercurrents.org*, July 15, 2006 ~ http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-sikand150706.htm; and Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi-Jama'at* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002).

the nature of the press reports and the paucity of secondary literature, it is nearly impossible to validate the authenticity of the journalistic accounts of the organizations and their actions. The most prominent Indian journalist on this subject is Praveen Swami, who is exceedingly well-connected to the Indian intelligence community and is well-regarded as one of the most knowledgeable analysts of domestic Islamist militancy in India.

Given the potential biases in such reporting, some of the most extreme allegations about Pakistan merit further inquiry through other means. One of the most problematic issues inherent in such a study is that many—if not most—of the terrorism attacks that have taken place across India have been attributed by Indian media and official organizations as the work of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). This may be driven in part by a reluctance of Indian officials to recognize that India has a problem with domestic terrorism as well as by a political agenda to assert that India's internal security problem is due to Pakistan. Though it is possible that some of these attacks involved SIMI/IM operating in conjunction with LeT or supported by LeT (or other Pakistan-based organizations), it is difficult to discern the role of the IM or SIMI in these attacks due to the nature of the open-source reporting of these assaults.

Despite the importance of Islamist militant groups in India and the potentially volatile environment in which they operate, very little has been written about SIMI or IM, apart from journalistic accounts that often fail to provide adequate context or background for the various reports. As such, there is a significant paucity of reliable and comprehensive information that can be obtained through open-source accounts of these organizations. This dearth of information renders it difficult to make assessments on such issues of interest as the potential impact of the recent terrorist events in India on the support base that SIMI/IM enjoys or the evidentiary bases of the various claims made about these groups and their ties to other militant or international organizations.

SIMI AND IM: ORIGINS

Currently, most prominent Indian analysts believe that SIMI and IM are no longer (if they were ever) distinct organizations; rather, these analysts believe that IM emerged largely from militant elements of SIMI, enjoying the support of, and possibly personnel from, Pakistan-based LeT and

Bangladesh-based Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami (HUJI-B).[2] This stands in contrast to earlier assessments that treated the SIMI and IM as distinct organizations that share a common origin, leadership, and cadres.[3] Others have suggested that IM does not exist at all but is instead an effort by Pakistan's external intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to project an Indian face to the activities of Pakistan-based militant groups.[4] This essay treats IM as an evolution of SIMI, in a narrative that begins with the origins of the SIMI and continues with an exposition about IM's formation. This narrative is subject to the caveat that the assumption that IM is an evolution of SIMI has merit.

SIMI formed in 1977 at Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh), initially as a student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH).[5] It is believed that SIMI was established to revitalize the JIH's older student wing, the Students Islamic Organization (SIO), which was set up in 1956. SIMI's founding president was Mohammad Ahmadullah, who had been a professor of Journalism and Public Relations at Western Illinois University. JIH reportedly began distancing itself from SIMI in 1981, when several SIMI activists protested against Yasser Arafat's visit to India. SIMI's youth perceived Arafat as a puppet of the West, whereas JIH viewed him as a champion of the Palestinian cause. SIMI and JIH had other differences. JIH was discomfited with SIMI's support of the Iranian Revolution and its communal orientation. After distancing itself from SIMI, JIH reverted to relying on the older student organization, SIO.[6]

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2 Author interview with Praveen Swami, New Delhi, July 2009; and Animesh Roul, "India's Home-Grown Jihadi Threat: A Profile of the Indian Mujahideen," Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor VII, no. 4, March 3, 2009 ~ http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TM_007_4_03.pdf.

3 See Lisa Curtis, "After Mumbai: Time to Strengthen US-India Counterterrorism Cooperation," Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder no. 2,217, December 9, 2008 ~ http://www.heritage.org/research/asiaandthepacific/bg2217.cfm.

4 For a full discussion of these possibilities, see Khurschchev Singh, "Who are the 'Indian Mujahideen?'"Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), Strategic Comments, May 30, 2008 ~ http://www.idsa.in/backgrounder-IndianMujahideen.htm.

5 Jaamat-e-Islam-i-Hind (JIH) was the first organized Islamic reformist movement in the Indian subcontinent. The group was formed on August 24, 1941, in Lahore under the leadership of Syed Abul Ala Maududi. After partition, which JIH opposed because it would separate the *umma* (Muslim community) along nationalist lines, Maududi moved to Pakistan where Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) founded the Pakistan branch. After 1971, when Bangladesh separated from Pakistan, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh emerged. JI was widely seen as a collaborator in the deaths of Bangladeshis in the 1971 war, and the organization was outlawed. Though JI has recuperated itself, many continue to call for accountability for the group's war crimes. For more information about JIH, see Jaamat-e-Islam-i-Hind's website ~ http://www.jamaateislamihind.org/index.php?do=category&id=46&blockid=46. For information about Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jam'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (London: IB Taurus, 1994).

6 See "Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)," South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) ~ http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/simi.htm; and the Students Islamic Organization's website ~ http://www.sio-india.org/zone/head-quarters.

The relationship, if any, between the SIMI and SIO is difficult to ascertain. Some reports suggest that SIMI was a competitive splinter of SIO, whereas others see the rise of SIMI as a means of revitalizing SIO. Yet others believe that SIMI was a deliberate spin off from JIH to allow JIH to pursue its goal of an Islamic state by proxy while still maintaining its moderate standing within India. Irrespective of their relationship, SIMI and SIO maintained cordial relations after the formal split.[7]

However, SIMI continued to vex and strain relations with JIH. For example, in 1986, SIMI openly called for liberating India's Muslims. Nonetheless, JIH continued to share platforms with SIMI until at least 1992, when SIMI convened a conference in Mumbai that propounded the virtues of militant Islam. Reports conflict about the degree to which SIMI and JIH continue their organizational links to date.[8]

At some point, perhaps as late as 1999, a militant movement within SIMI emerged. Praveen Swami reports that in that year, a SIMI convention took place in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, when Mohammad Amir Shakeel Ahmad—a SIMI cadre arrested in 2005 for smuggling military-grade explosive and assault rifles for a series of attacks in Gujarat, along with over a dozen of SIMI-linked LeT—declared that "Islam is our Nation, not India."[9] Swami reports that Ahmad became "one of hundreds" of SIMI cadre who joined terrorist networks that attacked sites throughout India and who were linked to LeT. According to interlocutors in India and Bangladesh, SIMI is believed to be a major conduit for LeT activities working in association with HUJI-B in Bangladesh to move people and war material into and out of Pakistan and India.

The Indian Mujahideen emerged from SIMI perhaps as early as 2001, when some 25,000 SIMI activists met at what was SIMI's last public convention. During that convention, SIMI activists were called to jihad and later mobilized demonstrations in support of Osama bin Laden.[10] Key future IM leaders continued to migrate from moderate SIMI positions toward that of militancy. For example, Sadiq Israr Sheikh joined SIMI in 1996, when SIMI was still a legal organization.[11] He, along with other SIMI cadres, attended the weekly meeting

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7 See the discussion in Sikand, *Muslims in India Since 1947*, 183–92.

8 "A Home Ministry Report on SIMI Activities," *Newspaper Today*, September 27, 2001 ~ http://www.hvk.org/articles/0901/180.html.

9 Praveen Swami, "Tussle Within: Members of the Students Islamic Movement of India Are Rethinking the Organization's Future," *Frontline*, March 29–April 11, 2008 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/fline/fl2507/stories/20080411250708700.htm.

10 Praveen Swami, "Storm Rages within SIMI," *Hindu*, March 11, 2008 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/2008/03/11/stories/2008031154661000.htm.

11 Praveen Swami, "Indian Mujahideen Born over Tea and Biscuits," *Hindu*, May 7, 2009 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/2009/05/07/stories/2009050759901100.htm.

at the home of a Dr. Tayyeb Ali. (No further information can be found about this person in the open-source media.) Apparently several other senior Mumbai SIMI members were also in attendance, including Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri (alias Riyaz Bhatkal) and Altaf Subhan Qureshi (alias Tauqeer). Qureshi, Sheikh, and Shahbandri helped found the terrorist cell that would later become the IM. Shahbandri became a key commander of the IM/SIMI networks responsible for staging numerous urban bombings since 2006.[12]

Although members of SIMI embraced militancy and began merging into what is now IM, IM as an organization did not appear formally until much later. In November 2007, IM claimed responsibility for several simultaneous blasts targeting lawyers in court premises in three cities in Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Lucknow). IM explained that these attacks were "Islamic raids," precipitated by the purported refusal of the lawyers to take on the cases of accused terrorists. In the wake of these attacks, Indian agencies increased pressure on the organization. At least six senior IM members reportedly fled to Pakistan, including Shahbandri.[13]

SIMI was banned in September 2001, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967, due to alleged working relations with al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other Islamist terrorist groups.[14] SIMI has unsuccessfully challenged the ban in the Supreme Court to seek its revocation.[15]

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, LEADERSHIP, AND MEMBERSHIP

Organizational Structure and Roles

Before being banned, SIMI claimed some four hundred full-time workers known as *ansars* (helpers), 20,000 sympathizers known as *ikhwans* (brothers), and the Shahin force for enlisting children between the ages of seven and eleven. In addition, SIMI set up the Tehrik-e-Tulaba-i-Arabia to reach madrassah students and *ulema* (learned religious scholars).[16]

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12 Praveen Swami, "Politics of Hate Gave Birth to Top Terror Commander," *Hindu*, February 23, 2009 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/2009/02/23/stories/2009022355351000.htm.

13 Roul, "India's Home Grown Jihadi Threat."

14 The author was unable to corroborate the assertion with other evidence—outside of Indian circles—confirming or disconfirming these allegations that SIMI or IM are tied to al Qaeda or the Taliban, apart from statements issuing support for bin Laden and al Qaeda's goals.

15 R. Upadhyay, "SIMI & Its Alarming Growth," South Asia Analysis Group, Paper, no. 2,676, April 22, 2008 ~ http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers27%5Cpaper2676.html.

16 Sikand, *Muslims in India Since 1947*, 186.

It is believed that IM has a complicated organizational structure. As should be apparent, the below noted description of IM bares considerable similarity to the notes on SIMI. Given the nature of Indian reporting, which tends to treat SIMI and IM as one organization, it is difficult to discern whether the descriptions were derived independently for IM or whether they were derived from earlier information about SIMI.[17]

Core group ~ There is a core group of twelve leaders of which the only known member is Altaf Subhan Qureshi (alias Tauqeer). This estimate of twelve is apparently derived from leaked Indian intelligence sources and therefore cannot be confirmed.

Call of Islam ~ The largest group is code-named Call of Islam. Members of this group are reputed to be over 35 years of age and may number as many as 60,000. They are dispersed across the country and tend to be professionals—teachers who appear to be "law abiding citizens but issue instructions to those below them based on orders they get from top leadership."[18]

Ikhwan ~ Below the Call of Islam are the ikhwan, with about 6,000 core members. They are described as "sleepers" that are called into action for a particular purpose, and then they return to their sleeper status.

Ansars ~ Below the ikhwan are the ansars. Ansars are deeply involved in the terrorist attacks.

Shaheen ~ Below the ansars are the Shaheen (white falcon) members whose job is to enlist and indoctrinate new children between the ages of seven and eleven years of age.

Muslim Brotherhood ~ Finally, there is a group code-named the Muslim Brotherhood, whose main function appears to be fundraising through *hawala* (an informal Islamic financial transaction system) and from Muslims serving in the Gulf. Reportedly, they have enlisted some one million (10 lakh) regular donors, many of whom are in the Gulf.

Recent arrests of IM cadres provide further insights into the command structure of the IM/SIMI.[19]

Shahabuddin Ghouri Brigade ~ Headed by Amir Raza and based in Kerala, this group is responsible for planning and executing attacks in southern India.

Muhammad Ghaznai Brigade ~ This group (leader unknown) is responsible for targeting high-value civilian targets in northern India.

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17 As reported in Roul, "India's Home Grown Jihadi Threat."

18 Ibid.

19 Drawn from Ibid.

Shaheed-al-Zarqaqi Brigade ~ This group targets high-value personalities and organizes suicide attacks.

Media wing ~ Headquartered in Pune (Maharashtra), this group dispatches email and print communications (e.g., manifestos) before or after IM attacks.

Leadership of SIMI and IM

As noted earlier, IM emerged from militarized elements of SIMI. The following discussion offers some known details about SIMI's leadership and those SIMI elements that forged IM.

Shahid Badar Falah served as the president of SIMI, with Safdar Nagori as the general secretary, until the organization was proscribed in 2001. Falah was arrested in 2001 and Nagori was arrested subsequently in 2008. Despite being banned, SIMI remained the principle platform for Islamist violence in India.[20]

Nagori, who was 38 years of age at the time of his arrest, split away from moderate elements of SIMI in 2005. He is believed to have been a primary ideologue and organizer for attacks, although Indian analysts do not believe he personally carried out attacks. Nagori is believed to have nurtured SIMI's organizational networks in Central and Western India.[21]

Mufti Abu Bashir, who is approximately 29 years of age as of 2009, is an Islamic preacher from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh; he also taught in a madrassah in Hyderabad. A primary ideologue of IM, he was arrested in 2008. Bashir oversaw the planning of terrorism attacks along with Altaf Subhan Qureshi (alias Tauqeer) and Qayamuddin Kapadia.[22]

Though several SIMI/IM activists have been arrested in recent years, Altaf Subhan Qureshi remains at large. Qureshi, age 37 as of 2009, is believed to have been the mastermind of the blasts in Bangalore (July 2008), Ahmadabad (July 2008), and New Delhi (September 2008). He is a software engineer by training and worked for a leading computer firm before joining SIMI. He is the author of the virulent emails dispatched prior to every IM attack.[23]

Qayamuddin Kapadia, around 28 years of age as of 2009, is a petty merchant in Vadodar (Gujarat) and leader of the Gujarat IM unit. He escaped

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20 Praveen Swami, "Terror Links," *Frontline*, December 21, 2007 ~ www.thehindu.com/fline/fl2424/.../20071221500300400.htm.

21 Praveen Swamy, "Indore Raids Net Top SIMI Leadership" *Hindu*, March 28, 2008 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/2008/03/28/stories/2008032857550100.htm; and Uday Mahurkar, "The New Terror," *India Today*, September 18, 2008 ~ http://indiatoday.intoday.in/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&&issueid=72&id=15621&sectionid=3&Itemid=1&page=in&latn=2.

22 Mahurkar, "The New Terror."

23 Ibid.

arrest when Nagori was apprehended and is believed to be the second-in-command to Qureshi. Analysts believe that he was the main coordinator of the Ahmadabad blasts.

Membership

SIMI and IM activists are all Indian. Analysts such as Praveen Swami note that the personal backgrounds of some SIMI and IM activists involve direct or indirect experience with communal violence, and these experiences may have served as a motivation for joining these groups.[24] Cadres in SIMI and IM hail from all over India, attesting the geographical reach of these groups across India. Yoginder Sikand notes that SIMI's activists come from lower- and middle-class families and appeal to those who have felt underprivileged and increasingly victimized by the rise of Hindu nationalism and a state that privileges Hindu interests. SIMI also attracted those Muslims who believe in the intrinsic superiority of Islam both over a decadent and morally depraved West and over polytheistic Hindus.[25]

To accommodate those who espoused such concerns about society's immorality and decadence, SIMI organized an "anti-immorality" week where it supposedly burned obscene literature. One year later, the group held an "anti-capitalist week" in Kerala to compete with the state's left-wing constituents. Unlike the left, however, SIMI argued that it is Islam—not socialism—that can mitigate the ills of capitalism. SIMI also worked with victims of communal violence and provided educational opportunities for poor Muslims residing in riot-affected areas.[26]

Curiously, many high-profile SIMI/IM cadres are computer-literate and, in some cases, have had impressive private sector employment; they joined the movement upon experiencing religious discrimination within multinational corporations. Other cadres have had other professional careers, such as Mohammad Abrar Qasim, who was a dentist. Qasim joined SIMI in 1993 after attending his first meeting at a mosque (Jamia Masjid) in Mominpura, a slum where LeT formed Indian networks. Qasim used his earnings from dentistry to serve as SIMI's chief in Bihar.[27] In another instance, SIMI/IM leaders set

24 Swami, "Politics of Hate Gave Birth to Top Terror Commander."

25 Sikand, *Muslims in India Since 1947*, 187.

26 Swami, "Terror Links."

27 Swami, "Tussle Within."

up a Bangalore jihad cell that recruited at least six IT workers through a front organization called Sarani.[28]

Many members of IM/SIMI enjoyed mafia links as well, especially with networks of the Bombay underworld "don," Dawood Ibrahim. These connections between the Indian mafia and SIMI/IM were mutually beneficial. The mafia link allowed the Islamist militants to acquire and move materials as well as personnel in and out of various countries for training and to position personnel and material in order to perpetrate terrorist attacks. In turn, the relationship afforded the mafia an opportunity to claim that it was helping a vulnerable community.

Indian analysts and officials also believe that the organizations receive money from the ISI. This suspicion is bolstered by Nagori's admission upon being arrested that SIMI received funds from the ISI.[29]

IDEOLOGY AND MOTIVATION

Ideologically, SIMI rejects Hinduism, secularism, democracy, and nationalism, which are keystones of India's constitutional establishment. Similarly, SIMI embraces the restoration of the Khilafat (Caliphate) and emphasizes the importance of the *ummah* (Muslim community) and the need to wage a jihad to exert Islam's supremacy. SIMI contends that Osama bin Laden is an exemplary *mujahid* who has embraced jihad at the behest of the ummah.[30]

Reflecting IM's emergence from SIMI, the organization's ideology and motivation are nearly isomorphous with that of SIMI. Given that IM typically issues email messages to the media prior to attacks, its ideology and motivation are relatively easy to discern. These messages aim to exposit IM's positions on controversial subjects such as the 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque (Ayodhya), the anti-Muslim pogroms in 2002, and other events in which Muslims have been disproportionately affected. According to various public pronouncements, IM advocates spreading Islam throughout India, waging jihad against non-Muslims, and establishing a government based on the Koran.[31]

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28 Praveen Swami, "Lucknow Businessman Wrote Terror Mail: Police," *Hindu*, August 28, 2008 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/2008/08/27/stories/2008082755641200.htm.

29 Mahurkar, "The New Terror."

30 "Students Islamic Movement of India"; and "A Home Ministry Report on SIMI Activities."

31 Roul, "India's Home Grown Jihadi Threat"; and Singh, "Who are the 'Indian Mujahideen?'"

IM, in its manifestos, seeks to cultivate support among members of India's large Muslim population that harbor, to varying degrees, grievances regarding access to public- and private-sector jobs, development, educational opportunities, the rising tide of Hindu nationalism, and anti-Muslim violence, among other issues.[32]

In 2008, IM claimed responsibility for at least four high-profile attacks, which are described below. IM justified the attacks by characterizing the terrorism campaign as the "rise of Jihad" and the "revenge of Gujarat."[33] Other IM recruitment materials include CDs containing footage of U.S. forces killing Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan.[34]

As noted earlier, SIMI/IM appears to be an important vector of LeT infiltration and cultivation of Indian leaders and cadres. Indian recruits to LeT, like those identified as SIMI or IM, appear to have been motivated by anti-Muslim violence in India. Even women were moved to join LeT after having experienced the violence of the 2002 pogroms in Gujarat. LeT has publically called for Indian Muslims to embrace jihad since then. In 2004, Swami observed that LeT had been able to recruit several dozen Indian Muslims in the wake of the 2002 pogrom.[35] It is not clear whether LeT nurtured the splits within SIMI and the formation of the IM or whether LeT was simply well-positioned to benefit from these developments.

TIES TO OTHER TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES

Since the destruction of the Babri Masjid and consequent anti-Muslim violence, as well as the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat, the LeT has been effective at recruiting Indians for group actions.[36] For example, the July 11, 2006, attack on multiple targets in Mumbai appears to have been an LeT operation outsourced through SIMI. One of the main Indian masterminds of that attack was Raheel Abdul Rehman Sheikh (along with Zabiuddin Ansar and Zulfikar Fayyaz Qazi). Sheikh grew up in an economically impoverished area, and actually became involved with the Markaz-i-Ahl-e-Hadith, a Salafist organization. Swami argues that while there is no evidence directly linking Sheikh to SIMI,

32 Praveen Swami, "Lashkar Fishes in Troubled Waters," *Hindu*, June 27, 2004 ~ http://www.hindu.com/2004/06/27/stories/2004062705880100.htm.

33 Roul, "India's Home Grown Jihadi Threat."

34 Mahurkar, "The New Terror."

35 Swami, "Lashkar Fishes in Troubled Waters."

36 Ibid.

he likely forged his contacts with LeT through SIMI's convention in 1999. If true, this would attest to the networked nature of the groups operating in India and their ties to Pakistan-based groups. Sheikh also worked with mafioso Dawood Ibrahim, who used his own network to ship weapons and used several mafia operatives to move people via Dhaka to Karachi on fake passports.[37] Thus, it would appear that the criminal underworld is a shared collaborative resource for India's militant groups.

SIMI is believed to have enjoyed considerable international support, including that of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) in Riyadh. Terrorism analysts believe that WAMY has ties to terrorist groups throughout the world. The organization has chapters in 55 countries and was founded by Osama bin Laden's nephew. It holds conferences and distributes literature that promote jihad as well as raises funds for terrorist groups such as Hamas. WAMY has been tied to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.[38] (The organization provides a very different account of itself on its website, focusing on peaceful assembly and networking among Muslims.)[39]

SIMI has also benefited from its ties to the International Islamic Federation of Students' Organizations in Kuwait, another organization with alleged ties to terrorist groups.[40] SIMI continued to grow especially after 1982 with the support of these and other organizations, which helped the group establish numerous magazines in many vernacular languages that promoted the notion of Islamic revolution. These magazines include the *Islamic Movement* (in Urdu, Hindi, and English), *Iqra* (in Gujarati), *Rupantar* (in Bengali), *Sedi Malar* (in Tamil), and *Vivekam* (in Malayalam).[41]

In addition, SIMI/IM maintains links with Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) organizations in Pakistan as well as in Bangladesh.[42] SIMI has, for example, maintained linkages with the student wing of JI-Bangladesh, Chatra Shabir.[43]

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37 Praveen Swami, "Maximum Terror and Its Mechanics," *Frontline*, July 15–28, 2006 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/fline/fl2314/stories/20060728004600400.htm.

38 Mathew Levitt, "Charitable Organizations and Terrorist Financing: A War on Terror Status-Check" (paper presented at the workshop "The Dimensions of Terrorist Financing," University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 19, 2004) ~ http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=104.

39 See the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) ~ http://www.wamy.co.uk/.

40 "Just What is SIMI?" *Rediff.com*, July 13, 2006 ~ http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/jul/13george.htm.

41 Praveen Swami, "A Bend in the Road," *OutlookIndia.com*, March 28, 2008 ~ http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?236995.

42 "Students Islamic Movement of India."

43 Author's fieldwork in Dhaka, July 2006.

Despite these allegations, SIMI/IM denies such linkages with the ISI or any Pakistan or Bangladesh-based militant groups.[44]

POTENTIAL CLEAVAGES?

There is a lingering—if unanswerable—question surrounding the contemporary relationship between SIMI and IM and about the coherence of SIMI itself in the wake of IM's emergence. Some analysts interviewed by the author during fieldwork in India in July 2009 argued that SIMI is now IM. Others were more dubious about this sweeping statement. Praveen Swami, for example, believes that part of SIMI would like to renounce any ties to violence or support thereof. Indeed, there is evidence that SIMI members would like to disassociate themselves from violent extremism, while those committed to violence have formed the rump of IM.

Several SIMI activists have even turned themselves in with the hope of eventually regaining some degree of legitimacy for the organization and to reintegrate themselves back into society. For example, the above noted Abrar Qasim walked into a court in Nagpur and announced that he wished to surrender. The clerks were befuddled when he explained to them that he was wanted by the Maharashtra Police in connection with the Mumbai serial bombings of July 2006. Qasim sought to clear his name. In the weeks following his surrender, he told authorities that most of SIMI's rank and file wanted to emerge from the underworld. He said that "moderates in SIMI want to come over ground….for we have nothing to hide."[45] Qasim joined SIMI in 1993, following the controversial destruction of the Babri Masjid.

Using the cover of a summit for the National Urdu Promotion Council, SIMI elected several new office bearers who were charged with lobbying political and religious leadership to remove the ban on SIMI. Swami reports that most members of this new team were anti-jihad political Islamists, and several believed that SIMI's ties with jihadi groups undermined the group as well as the Indian Muslim community writ large. Among those espousing this view was the new SIMI president, Misbah-ul-Islam, from West Bengal.[46]

Later in January 2007, SIMI leadership again met with a senior New Delhi-based JI leader, who sought to encourage the militant elements within

44 Roul, "India's Home Grown Jihadi Threat."

45 Swami, "Tussle Within."

46 Ibid.

SIMI to surrender and demanded to know why SIMI helped perpetrate the 2006 Mumbai attack. In the absence of a possible compromise, SIMI's political Islamists convened again in Kozhikode (Kerala) in mid-November 2007. Misbah-ul-Islam argued at that time that, if SIMI were to ever function as a political organization, its leadership would have to face prosecution. Qasim was the first to volunteer. Swami reports that a senior SIMI functionary believed that the leaders wanted to see if coming out would open doors for SIMI to recuperate itself.[47] During interviews with the author, Swami explained that many of SIMI's members would like to restore their organization's credibility and legitimacy.[48]

While this may have been the majority view and the view of the new senior leadership, there were important dissenters. For example, Shibly Peedical Abdul (a computer engineer from Kerala) was among those operatives that retained a commitment to militancy. During the January 2007 meeting, Abdul responded that jihadist activities will continue and accused JI and other leadership of "selling out."[49] Abdul set up an important cell, which with his organizational assistance executed the July 2006 serial attacks in Mumbai. It is believed that this attack was conducted as an LeT operation working through these SIMI/IM activists. After the bombing, Abdul fled while other SIMI operatives were arrested in conjunction with the attack.[50] Abdul apparently recruited a dozen or more men through the religious front organization Sarani. After the Mumbai attacks, officials began examining Abdul's networks, which spanned the country and included SIMI activists associated with the Jammu-Kashmir Islamist leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani. Abdul had also set up Fatah Business Solution, which is believed to have laundered money for terrorist activities.[51]

It would appear that while moderate SIMI activists were and are trying to find a way to become a legitimate organization again, the militancy-inclined members among SIMI were also rethinking their strategy to redouble efforts toward jihad.[52] It is likely that the more militant-inclined among SIMI's ranks formed the IM.

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47 Swami, "Tussle Within."

48 Author interview with Praveen Swami, New Delhi, July 2009.

49 Swami, "Tussle Within."

50 Ibid.

51 Swami, "Bend in the Road."

52 Swami, "Tussle Within."

MAJOR IM/SIMI OPERATIONS

SIMI/IM is likely responsible for numerous attacks from at least 2000; however, the Indian media frequently attributes these attacks to LeT.[53] Below is a sampling of recent attacks for which SIMI/IM has claimed responsibility.[54]

- *Jaipur (Rajasthan), May 2008:* Nine blasts in markets; killed over 60 people and injured many more.
- *Bangalore (Karnataka), July 2008:* Eight simultaneous low-intensity blasts; killed 2 people and injured 7.
- *Ahmadabad (Gujrat), July 2008:* Sixteen synchronized bomb blasts occurred in largely crowed urban centers; 38 were killed and more than 100 were injured. (Curtis claims that 56 were killed in this attack.)[55]
- *New Delhi, September 2008:* Five bomb blasts occurred in heavily trafficked market areas, killing 30 people and injuring more than 100.[56]

As noted, these are only the most recent and high-profile incidents; SIMI/IM may have been involved in many more attacks.

INDIAN INTERNAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

Given Pakistan's long-standing history of supporting terrorism in India, and the inability of India or the United States to compel Pakistan to cease such activities, India is likely to continue facing threats from external and internal actors. Yet, India has been slow—if not outright unwilling—to take the necessary steps to improve internal security. In the wake of the 1999 Kargil War, the Kargil Review Committee was established to review both how the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry was able to seize territory kilometers within India's borders and what deficient security arrangements precipitated India's inability to detect the territorial incursion until months after it had taken place. In addition, the committee made a number of recommendations to ensure that India is neither vulnerable to such a territorial assault nor unprepared to contend with the challenge should it arise again. That report offered several initiatives to fortify India's defense and internal security

53 For a detailed incident list, see "Student Islamic Movement of India."

54 Drawn from Roul, "India's Home Grown Jihadi Threat."

55 Curtis, "After Mumbai."

56 See Saikat Datta, "Tracing Virtual Footprints," *OutlookIndia.com*, September 28, 2008 ~ http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?238509.

situation.[57] Some ten years later, however, most of those recommendations have yet to be implemented.[58]

Following the November 2008 attack in Mumbai, the Indian government announced that it would undertake numerous reforms to address the country's internal security challenges. On December 11, 2008, India's home minister, P. Chidambaram, proclaimed that the government would *inter alia* create a Coastal Command to secure 4,650 miles of shoreline, establish twenty counterterrorism schools and standing regional commando units, create a national agency to investigate suspected terrorism activity, and strengthen anti-terrorism laws.[59]

India's parliament surprisingly acted quickly to make some of these reforms a reality. On December 17, 2008, India's lower house (the Lok Sabha) approved new anti-terrorism legislation, which was approved by the upper house (the Rajya Sabha) the next day. The new Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act provides new powers to the security services, including the ability to hold suspects for six months without charges. It also makes provisions to establish a national investigative agency that will be responsible for investigating terrorism and gathering and processing intelligence. Some of these provisions (such as lengthy detentions without charge) have drawn domestic criticism.[60] In July 2009, however, interlocutors had already grown wary of the Indian political system and most believed that—like Kargil—the Mumbai attack would not jolt the Indian system into action.

India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), does not interface well with domestic intelligence agencies, which are responsible for dealing with the police (a state subject). There is no FBI equivalent in India. Unfortunately, corruption is an enormous problem that ultimately will undermine efforts to fortify India's internal security—especially efforts to professionalize the police. As one columnist astutely noted only days before the Mumbai attack:

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57 Kargil Review Committee, *The Kargil Review Committee Report: From Surprise to Reckoning* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000). The recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee can be accessed at the Government of India, Ministry of Defense website ~ http://mod.nic.in.

58 "The Kargil Review Committee Report: 'The Kargil Battle was Fought with Less than Optimum Communications Capability,'" *Rediff.com*, Special Report, March 2001 ~ http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/mar/01kargil.htm.

59 Rama Lakshmi, "Indian Official Unveils Plan to Strengthen Security," *Washington Post*, December 11, 2008.

60 "UAPA Retains Most of POTA's Stringent Provisions," *Times of India*, December 17, 2008 ~ http://www.indiatimes.com/India/UAPA_retains_most_of_POTAs_stringent_provisions/articleshow/3847843.cms.

> The police are treated as subjects of whatever local politicians reign in a particular state. The political parties use the police to serve their own ends, so police behavior reflects the agenda of the political party that governs that state. Political changes are quickly reflected within the police force. Given the fact that a considerable number of Indian politicians are criminals, it is no surprise that the police they control mirror them in this respect.[61]

Thus, while India tends to claim that the Mumbai attack was India's September 11, the attack—however horrific—has not comprehensively moved the Indian system to undertake massive reform of its domestic security arrangements.[62] Having said that, Chidambaram is extremely concerned about these issues and has made reforming India's internal security arrangements a priority. It remains to be seen how effective he will be in moving a large, lethargic bureaucracy on these politically challenging issues.

CONCLUSION

In the early years after September 11, analysts remarked that India's Muslims have not become part of the global jihad, a view that Indian officials readily endorsed. This claim was tenuous at best. If, as India claims, the groups operating in Kashmir were international, then the local population's support, however limited, would undermine that statement. Indeed, Pakistan-based groups have, for years, enjoyed logistical support among Indians, even if they had not developed Indian militant leaders or cadres.

In recent years, Indian officials have had to concede that the country does indeed have an internal security problem stemming from "home grown" militants. The Indian government seems to believe—or adopts the public position—that if Pakistan were to cease support for India's terrorist groups, these domestic and foreign terrorists would disappear, be captured, or killed in action. Few embrace the possibility that it is India's domestic socio-political arrangements and inequitable treatment of Muslims that present opportunities for militants and outside support. Yet, as Praveen Swami has noted,

> For several reasons, the Indian experience of Islamism and jihadism is of particular significance. India has the third-largest population of Muslims in the world. Muslims make up 13.4% of the country's estimated 1.2 billion population, or 138 million

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61 Bijo Francis, "Indian Police Need More than a Facelift." *UPIAsia.com*, November 24, 2008 ~ http://www.upiasia.com/Human_Rights/2008/11/24/indian_police_need_more_than_a_face-lift/9266/.

62 For more information about the Mumbai attack and the Indian response, see Angel Rabasa et al., *The Lessons of Mumbai*, RAND Occasional Paper 249 (Santa Monica: RAND, 2009) ~ http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP249/.

> people….Many Muslims have done well in independent India… But despite the constitutional promise of equality, Muslims remain underrepresented in government jobs, suffer significant discrimination in employment, income levels and land-holding, and are worse-off even than India's scheduled castes in education.[63]

Swami has argued that it is these domestic conditions that motivated the rise of Indian jihadists, and, indeed, though SIMI and IM endorse the al Qaeda message, they appear to motivate cadres and leaders by focusing on the plight of India's Muslims rather than those of the larger Muslim world. SIMI/IM—unlike al Qaeda—does not advance an agenda for the global umma. Unfortunately, India's inadequate security arrangement and lethargic political institutions seem ill-prepared to contend with the emerging threat.

As noted throughout this essay, there are several questions that the open-source literature cannot address comprehensively, namely: What was the relationship between SIMI and JIH? Are IM and the militant elements of SIMI the same? Did LeT and the ISI foster these developments or were the ISI and its clients merely well-positioned to exploit these developments? As long as SIMI/IM remain domestically oriented per press reports, what prospects exist for this to become a problem beyond India? How have recent high-profile terrorist events affected the support base that SIMI and IM enjoy? Arguments can be made both for increased support as well as for decreased support. Given the pervasive problems confronting India's vast and variegated Muslim communities, why is terrorism not more pervasive among them? These issues require further study in order to better situate IM and SIMI within the contexts of regional as well as extraregional terrorism networks. ◈

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63 "Data on Religion," Census of India, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2001 ~ http://www.censusindia.gov.in/; and Praveen Swami, "A Road to Perdition? The New Jihad in India," September 2009 (unpublished draft). See also Seema Chishti, "Schools, Jobs, Poverty, Land Ownership: On All These Counts, Muslims Worse Off than OBCs," *Indian Express*, October 31, 2006 ~ http://www.indianexpress.com/news/schools-jobs-poverty-land-ownership-on-all-these-counts-muslims-worse-off-than-obcs/15734/.