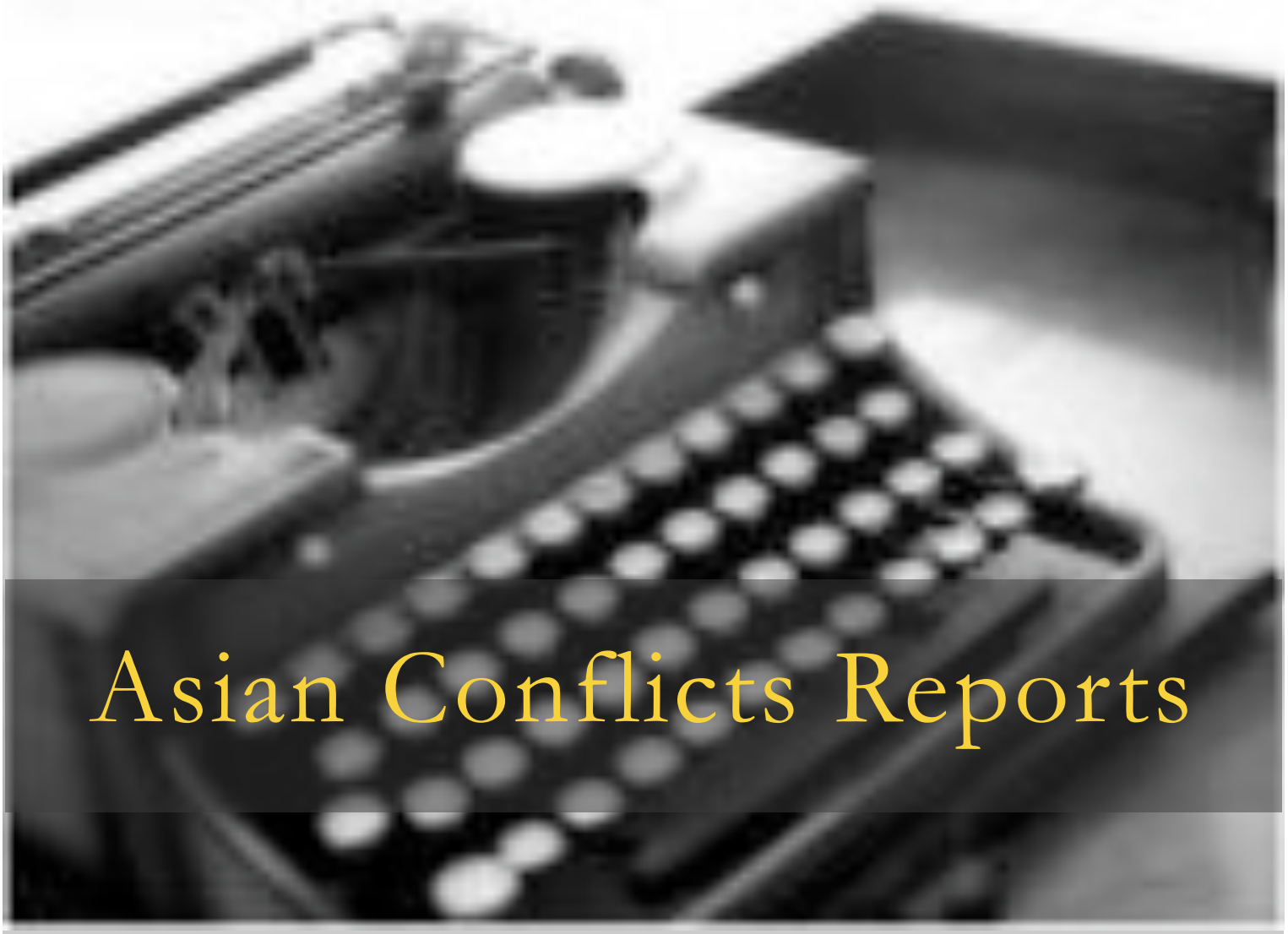

Asian Conflicts Reports

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Council For Asian Terrorism Research

The Bangladesh Rifles Mutiny

Shafqat Munir

On 25 and 26 February 2009, over a period spanning thirty six hours, Dhaka was torn apart by a bloody mutiny. Members of the Bangladesh Rifles, a paramilitary force which guards Bangladesh's borders, took up arms in revolt. In the initial period, it appeared that the mutiny was essentially geared towards demands for better remuneration and working conditions. However, there is speculation that the mutiny may also have been linked to terrorist groups.

February's mutiny had a massive cost in terms of human lives. Horrific images appeared of mutilated bodies thrown in mass graves. A total of fifty nine officers of the Bangladesh Army seconded to BDR, including some members of the paramilitary, were killed during the mutiny. The victims included the Director General of the BDR, a two star general, one Brigadier General and more than ten colonels and number of other officers. While the human dimension of the crisis is immense, the mutiny also has significant security implications for Bangladesh and South Asia.

After a number of attempts by the government to negotiate with the mutineers, the mutiny ended with a significant number of participating BDR soldiers escaping from the BDR headquarters. It has since become apparent that they took with them a large cache of automatic weapons, ammunition and explosives, including grenades used by the BDR. The government has since launched a major operation involving Army, Police and other law enforcement agencies – 'Operation Rebel Hunt' – aimed at capturing the fugitive mutineers and recovering the stolen weapons and ammunition. In addition to pursuing BDR personnel who fled with weapons, police have arrested a number of other individuals attempting, in the confusion, to enter the BDR compound to steal weapons. As part of the investigation process, Bangladesh authorities are trying to ascertain the total number of weapons, explosives and ammunition stolen; however, this has turned out to be an uphill task. While the combing operation launched by the Army and law enforcement agencies to recover the missing weapons may meet with a degree of success, the full recovery of the stolen weapons does not seem plausible at this stage.

There is, in fact, a strong possibility that some significant portion of the stolen weapons, ammunition and explosives will end up in the hands of terrorist and militant organizations. While it is a well known fact that Bangladesh faces a critical threat from Islamist militant organizations, the country also faces a serious security challenge from left wing militants and organized criminal gangs. To gain access to a large cache of automatic weapons, ammunition and explosives would be a windfall for any of these organizations and would create a major security challenge for the Bangladeshi state. In short, this is a significant setback to counter-terrorism efforts in Bangladesh. The state had achieved a degree of success in curbing the operations of some terrorist organizations over the past two years. Denying terrorist groups access to automatic weapons constitutes a major part of counter-terrorism strategy in most countries. The sudden outflow of a large cache of weapons and ammunition, potentially into the hands of terrorists, creates a major challenge in that regard. While Bangladeshi terrorist groups have, in the past, been able to gain occasional access to sophisticated grenades, they have largely resorted to improvised explosive devices or IED's. The sudden availability of automatic weapons, including rifles and sub machine guns, along with sophisticated grenades amounts to a major augmentation of their operational capability. In addition to terrorists,, criminal gangs operating in urban as well as rural areas may also try to obtain a share of the stolen weapons and explosives.

A Terrorist Connection?

Since the mutiny ended, analysts and commentators have speculated about possible outside linkages to the mutiny. The two investigations currently underway have yet to submit their final reports to the government; however, the Minister in charge of coordinating the investigation process has recently remarked that there is credible evidence suggesting the involvement of one or more terrorist organizations in the mutiny. While it is difficult to analyze the implications of such an involvement until the full investigation is complete, the possibility of such an involvement would have serious implications. The remarks made by the Minister, along with subsequent media reports, have pointed towards a possible involvement by the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a banned terrorist organization which has carried out a number

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1 February's BDR mutiny has several implications for Bangladesh and South Asia

2 The prospect that the BDR may have been infiltrated by terrorist groups is a serious concern

3 There is also a possibility of stolen weapons making their way to terrorist groups

of attacks in the past, including a coordinated serial bomb blast in 2005. The possibility that a terrorist organization was able to infiltrate into a paramilitary force and initiate an insurrection raises serious questions about Bangladesh's national security. While groups such as JMB have carried out a number of attacks in the past, none of those attacks have resulted in the death of so many people in one single incident. Furthermore, previous JMB attacks have never been able to target a major national security institution such as the BDR.

In addition the looted weapons, fleeing mutineers made off with or destroyed a large number of classified documents of national security import. This again raises suspicions of an outside hand: were the mutiny just a result of internal strife and demands for better pay and benefits, the mutineers would not have the need or motivation to access classified documents contained in BDR headquarters. Media reports have, further, indicated that the mutineers attempted to access information stored in BDR computers. Since the BDR is a major pillar of the national security establishment of Bangladesh, the safety of its classified information is certainly important. The possibility that some of the classified information contained in those files may have been compromised creates a major security challenge for the Bangladeshi state and national security establishment and is another factor pointing towards the possible involvement of forces outside BDR in the mutiny.

For Bangladesh, a country with serious resource constraints, it will certainly not be an easy task to replace fifty nine well trained officers, including a large number of senior officers. The mutiny resulted in the sudden, complete annihilation of the senior command structure of the BDR. Comradeship and *espirit de corps* forms one of the critical elements of any disciplined force and is not easily replaced; thus, reconstituting the BDR and restoring its previous levels of professionalism will prove to be a major long-term challenge for the Bangladeshi state.

Bangladesh's borders with India are long and porous. Of India's immediate neighbors, it shares the longest frontier with Bangladesh. The threat of transnational crime and terrorism looms large on both sides; yet, during and immediately after the mutiny, the border remained unguarded on the Bangladeshi side. This temporary collapse of border security mechanisms on the Bangladeshi side thus created a security challenge not only for Bangladesh but also for its immediate neighbors, particularly India. The terrorist and militant groups operating in Bangladesh are known to have strong operational and ideological linkages to other terrorist groups in the South Asian region. There is a distinct possibility that these groups have tried to take advantage of the precarious border security situation. Furthermore, any problem concerning border security also increases the threat of criminal activities such as narcotics and small arms trafficking, both of which remain major challenges for Bangladesh and India. At least some of the weapons and explosives stolen from BDR premises may have channeled across the border into India. Given the nature of small arms proliferation in the South Asian region, there is no guarantee that those weapons will not eventually end up in another South Asian country. Groups engaged in organized crime and human trafficking may also have exploited the lack of security in the border. In short, the situation created by the BDR mutiny presents lasting security challenges not only for Bangladesh but also for India and the broader South Asian region.

The BDR mutiny has been a major shock for the Bangladeshi state. Coming just at a time when Bangladesh is reviving the democratic process after a two year hiatus, this incident constitutes a major setback. As Bangladesh faces myriad challenges including terrorism, effects of climate change, and the impact of the global recession on its economy, this particular incident presents a fresh set of unwelcome of challenges. It can be argued that since its emergence as an independent nation state in 1971, Bangladesh has faced few national security crises that are as complex. Therefore, it is now essential that the state deal with the situation with prudence and alacrity. The state's first priority is to investigate and identify the causes behind the mutiny and take preventive measures to counter similar occurrences in the future. Furthermore, it will also be important to thoroughly revisit the nature of the terrorist threat in the light of this incident. It will be important to analyze the threat from terror groups, understand how they have been able to benefit from the chaos surrounding the BDR mutiny, and take remedial measures. Failure to identify the lessons of the mutiny and implement effective reforms to prevent similar events in the future would not only have a detrimental impact on the security of Bangladesh but on the security and stability of the South Asian region as a whole.

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Intelligence reform in Pakistan's transitional democracy

Frederic Grare

As President Barak Obama's administration sets about shaping its policies towards Pakistan, the question of reforming its intelligence services has acquired centre stage

The role of intelligence agencies in Pakistan has always been highly controversial. They have too often been used to meddle in the country's domestic politics. Their role may have occasionally been exaggerated but operations against dissenting politicians, objective intellectuals and activists through systematic harassment, disinformation campaigns, fictitious trials, kidnapping, torture and assassination have been a reality. Pakistan's civilian governments have indeed been victim of the agencies manipulations in the past. The reform of the intelligence agencies is therefore imperative, and the depoliticization of the intelligence process as much an element of national reconciliation as of consolidation of power.

Intelligence agencies are always an expression of the fundamental character of the state. In the case of Pakistan, the agencies' activities reflect the traditional dominance of the army which has translated into standard operations such as intimidation of individual and groups, bribery, manipulation, occasional murder, and the political surveillance of virtually the entire population.

Pakistan has seen several forms of efforts of efforts to subvert the political system. Among them are funding of political parties, as exposed by the Mehran Bank scandal in which sums were given by a state bank to the ISI and later served as a mean of funding political parties opposed to the government. There is also political engineering such as the creation of the IJI, a coalition of political parties opposed to Benazir Bhutto in 1988. Finally, the media is influenced, both by cooption and cooercion. All of these practices are typical of authoritarian regimes.

Manipulation of political violence, however, is a form of subversion specific to Pakistan. Divide and rule tactics are as old as governance itself. But over the years Pakistan's intelligence agencies have developed the peculiar habit of creating enemies for their enemies—and then dividing them in order to rule them. Be it the jihadi and sectarian groups or the Muttahida Quami Movement, the agencies have created a series of Frankenstein's Monsters whose powers they have had to limit at times by pitting them against each other. The effort has been not to eliminate these Monsters, but simply make sure they remained compliant enough to execute whatever tasks they were assigned.

Pakistan's agencies typically encouraged the formation of a group to pressure their adversaries, each time generating a new problem that will ultimately have to be dealt with in the same fashion. Thus, they created a vicious circle which is partly responsible for the current disastrous security situation in the country. This situation benefits the regime as long as it is able to control its various proxies. It becomes vulnerable, though, as soon as the balance created among the diverse organizations supported by the agencies is upset by internal or external actors.

The long term impact of the intelligence agencies operations is even more devastating. In most totalitarian or authoritarian regimes , the confrontation between the state and the opposition is direct, not mediated through proxies. Any state can be required to use force in the face of specific situations. But when the state itself, as is the case of Pakistan, engages in a proxy war against its own citizens, pitting communities against one another, it turns violence into an acceptable means of managing social and political relations. As such, the state itself is weakened. In the process the agencies have created a culture of violence that is likely to be a lasting legacy for the country. In a country where, following decades of indoctrination, jihad is still a romantic notion, this *de facto* legitimization of violence is destructive to the social and political fabric of an already fragile state and could prove to be suicidal.

Reforming the intelligence agencies is therefore a necessity. But it is indeed a complex process. Reforms are not exclusively legal and constitutional issues. During the 1990s, the military never directly opposed the nomination of Directors-General of the ISI by the civilian government, even if it did not approve them. Therefore therefore, never strictly speaking broke the law. It did however bypass the democratic process, ostracizing the government nominees and ensuring that their leadership remained ineffective.

Nor is the reform purely a matter of organizational restructuring. It should start with clarifying the philosophy and redefining the mission, focus and priorities of intelligence in order to establish a new culture of intelligence. It therefore requires a change of mind of the actors

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1 Democratic control of the intelligence services is essential if Pakistan is to stabilize

2 The West must primarily work with Pakistan's elected government towards that end.

3 Change will be slow—but inaction is a recipe for disaster

involved as much as a change in the state.

The obstacles to reform intelligence agencies are numerous. Because it inevitably implies a measure of disruption of existing mechanisms and institutions, reforming intelligence agencies also involve issues of timing. In addition, it also takes place in a context where reform depends on the strength of a political body whose weakening is a top priority of the military. In Pakistan, uncertainty regarding the actual position of the military on counter-terrorism is an additional difficulty. Disorder (or the appearance of disorder) serves the military by demonstrating their own indispensability.

However, neither the predominance of the military in politics, nor the role of the intelligence agencies are facts of life. Common wisdom about Pakistan states that the polity is so weak and so corrupt, the military so entrenched in the political process and so essential for the country's unity and survival, and the intelligence agencies so strong that any change other than the marginal is simply impossible.

Yet countries like Indonesia and Chile, where the military enjoyed a similarly dominant position and where the intelligence agencies were an equally ruthless instrument of power, have managed to reduce the power of both the military institution and of the intelligence agencies. In both countries the establishment of democratic control over the intelligence agencies remains incomplete, imperfect , and in some respects flawed. Yet, both countries have come a long way since the days of their dictatorships.

In both cases two factors were essential for the transformation of the regime:

- A popular tolerance to pressures and regime abuses close to zero. Public opinion is always the condition for change and the best guarantee against a return to previous practices;
- Participation, or at least acquiescence, in the transition process by the military.

Overall the establishment of a real democratic control over intelligence agencies is a long term process because the reform reflects inevitably the evolution of the polity as a whole. Similarly, the institutionalization of the reform can be effective only if the gap that the hierarchy that the reform establishes between the various state institutions and the reality of the balance of power within the regime diminishes. In no case can the reform be more democratic than the regime.

The primary responsibility of the reform lies with the elected government. In the Pakistani context, the development of police forces as effective counter-terrorism forces and counter power to the military and their intelligence agencies, a strict separation between civilian (Intelligence Bureau) and military (Military Intelligence, Inter Services Intelligence) agencies, the appropriation of the foreign affairs and security policy debate by the civilian, the restoration and reform of the judiciary: all these are necessary steps for the government to gradually establish its pre eminence over military institutions. It will however be able to do so only if the civilian government does accept the need to confront the military whenever necessary and does manage carefully public expectations in order to preserve its own credibility and political capital.

The international community obviously has an important role to play in encouraging such behavior, but is so far inhibited by the question of terrorism. Most western governments are reluctant to help promote a reform of Pakistan's intelligence agencies by fear of being perceived as hostile. They fear first and foremost the end of the cooperation of ISI cooperation in counter-terrorism and a consecutive increase of the terrorist threat on their own territories.

This fear should however be mitigated by the knowledge that ISI is actively supporting terrorism. As a result, any compromise with the Pakistani intelligence agency buys only marginal additional security but create a rent for the agency which can bargain its cooperation while maintaining actively the cause for this cooperation. However, as the agency's control over the terrorist groups it protects becomes more elusive, the justification for this rent diminishes as well although it does not totally disappear.

Ultimately, any policy aiming at a better control of the Pakistani intelligence agencies by the civilian government in Pakistan will have to target primarily the military and aim at its de-politicization. In this perspective, working primarily and effectively through the Pakistani governments and not the military is a must. It is also possible to condition all military assistance to measurable results in the control of intelligence agencies, assessed through their performances in counter-terrorism matters for example.

Change is always slow, frustrating and painful. It is nevertheless possible. Taking absolute control out the hands of the military and placing it into the hands of a civilian leader constitutes neither a guarantee against civilian authoritarianism nor a guarantee of democratic progress. That should not however be an alibi for inaction for the status quo—for inaction will undoubtedly prove a recipe for disaster.

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Obama's administration—the view from down under

Clive Williams

The main Australian public focus in the lead-up to the Obama inauguration was the surreal no-decision period in Washington before President Bush departed and President Obama took office, and the Israeli offensive in Gaza which to no one's surprise ended just before the Bush Administration left office.

President Obama was a popular choice in Australia as he seems to be a man with fresh ideas and a common touch. Pre-election pro-Obama bumper stickers were not uncommon here, even though very few Australian residents were eligible to vote.

Most Australians had felt let down by the Bush Administration and Howard government. The Howard government departed office in December 2007 with its tail between its legs, with Prime Minister Howard suffering the ultimate ignominy of losing his previously "safe" electorate (the first time an incumbent Prime Minister had lost his seat since 1929.)

President Obama comes to office with enormous international goodwill and the weight of high expectations on his shoulders. Australians believe that with all the goodwill in the world, it will be difficult for him to live up to Americans' and others' expectations.

Admiral Dennis C. Blair, the US Director of National Intelligence, sounded an optimistic intelligence community note about violent extremism with his 12 February 2009 report to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, with a section titled "Turning the Corner on Violent Extremism".

There have certainly been many positives for the US in 2008, including no terrorist attacks in the US or on major allies at home, al-Qaeda's declining fortunes in Iraq, no JI terrorist attacks in Indonesia – even after the execution of three high-profile terrorists responsible for Bali 2002, and a general impression that Muslims generally are becoming less supportive or tolerant of al-Qaeda.

1 Obama's strategic review should clarify US aims in Afghanistan

2 Pakistan is a great concern because of the radicalization of young Muslims

3 The economic downturn and the Palestine conflict could also empower Islamist extremists in the region

There are however lots of geographic areas where the situation is either unchanged or going backwards—including Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, the Philippines, southern Thailand, the Maghreb, east Africa, Yemen, Palestine/Lebanon, central Asia and eastern Europe. Most concerns are related to Islamist extremism, but what we are also seeing in many parts of the world, particularly in Europe, is a resurgence of right wing and neo-Nazi extremism. The latter can have implications for societies where right wing attacks on Muslim immigrants can lead to their alienation and radicalization. In the Philippines, left wing groups are also gaining ground because of local corruption and general economic dissatisfaction.

While there was pleasing progress in Iraq (where Australia now has only a very small military presence), the situation in Afghanistan is less promising. There are not the troop numbers there – or the strategy - to make a difference, even with the small surge of 17,000 US troops planned for 2009. Much of NATO seems to be cynical about the relevance of Afghanistan to NATO's security concerns in Europe. The Australian public is also questioning Australia's modest troop commitment to Afghanistan (1,000+) and asking: "Is Afghanistan to terrorism what Vietnam was to communism?" In other words, with the discredited domino theory in mind, "Is what happens in Afghanistan really related to a terrorism threat to Australia?"

Australia is likely to come under pressure from the Obama Administration to send more troops to Afghanistan, particularly once its Strategic Review is completed. Australia's preference, if it agrees, will probably be to send them to Oruzgan Province where we already have our major deployment. Deployment of more Australian troops will not be popular electorally. The Rudd Government will have to come up with a better reason than terrorism to convince the Australian public that we need to be there. The real reason is of course alliance solidarity, but deployment could also be promoted on the basis of saving Afghans from a life of medieval misery under the Taliban. Pakistan is a greater concern in Australia (and the UK), mainly because of our home-grown second-generation Muslim youths becoming radicalized and trained in Pakistan. Australia has 80,000 residents from Pakistan among its population. Indeed, the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan has much more dangerous implications for South Asia and the rest of the world than what is happening in Afghanistan. It goes well beyond the attack in Lahore on 3 March 2009, and before that the September 2008 bombing of the Islamabad Marriott, or the December 2007 killing of Benazir Bhutto in Peshawar. Concerns centre on a corrupt and

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unpopular civilian president, a military focused mainly on the threat from India, a growing urban terrorism problem, and a security situation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and North West Frontier Province that seems to have spiraled out of control.

One of the positives in Europe is the UK's Muslim outreach program which seems to be making a difference, although the British government is also faced with credibility problems created by its Guantanamo returnees. Australia has two Guantanamo returnees: David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib.

Hicks has remained silent since his return to Australia and is, according to his father, not yet ready to speak in public. Hicks pleaded guilty to "providing material support for terrorism"as part of a plea bargain to get himself out of Guantanamo; he served the final nine months of his sentence in Australia and was released in December 2007. Because Hicks was convicted of a criminal offence, under Australian law he cannot profit from his experience. Mamdouh Habib, who was returned to Australia in January 2005 without having been charged, claimed to have been renditioned by the US from Pakistan to Egypt in 2001 and, five months later, to Guantanamo. Habib credibly alleges being tortured and abused and has written a book about his treatment.

Despite the negative comments by released detainees, Guantanamo's planned closure is seen internationally as a big plus for President Obama.

In the year ahead, what could particularly unravel Dennis Blair's optimistic assessment of progress on Islamist extremism are the international effects of the US economic crisis and the formation of an uncompromising hard-line Netanyahu coalition government in Israel.

President Obama has little leverage over these developments. There is some public doubt in Australia about fiscal stimulation and spending money you do not have to try to avoid a recession-- the US and Australia are doing. The US national debt is expected to reach 11 trillion dollars soon. In Australia, much of the financial stimulus handout given to low-income earners before Christmas 2008 was spent on imported consumer goods, like plasma TVs, thereby probably benefiting China more than Australia!

Knock-on effects of the US sub-prime mortgage disaster in Australia are likely to be less government taxation revenue for national security-related areas, and increased international political instability. The former encompasses not only counterterrorism, intelligence and border security, but also soft-power tools such as foreign aid and diplomacy.

Another danger is that as the economic downturn hits in areas vulnerable to Islamist extremism, it will create an unemployed youth problem and political instability. Radical clerics could well exploit the situation by blaming the US for the increased unemployment and local economic problems. Indonesia is a case in point, with radical cleric Abu Bakar Bashir seemingly always ready to take advantage of such propaganda opportunities.

Dennis Blair did not mention the elephant-in-the-room issue for Islam, which is an equitable peace process in the Middle East between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Despite the unexpectedly robust approach to the settlement issue in Jerusalem by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the likelihood is that the Netanyahu government will either ignore the peace process or not be prepared to engage in it meaningfully. It is in fact doubtful that Israel has the capability to remove the estimated 250,000 hard-line settlers from the West Bank, even if it wanted to. In frustration, the Palestinians will continue to launch rockets into Israel, and Israel will continue to retaliate. This unresolved issue will continue to undermine US foreign policy in the Middle East and its attempts to engage positively with Islam elsewhere.

The Palestine issue also has an effect in Australia where the Rudd government—which was quick to congratulate Israel on its 60th birthday, but slow to comment on the Gaza invasion—has begun to appreciate that there are more Muslim voters in Australia now than Jewish ones. Everyone here was reminded of the changing demographics by the scale of the protests in Australian cities. (Australia's Muslim population is primarily from Lebanon and Turkey.)

Australia tends to see itself as America's best friend, but there has been some surprise and disappointment that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did not include Australia in her recent Asian regional visit.

In summary, the Australian public warmly welcomes the Obama Administration and is hopeful that President Obama can make a difference in areas like human and civil rights, and in reasserting America's moral leadership, but is doubtful that President Obama can do much about the economic crisis (a view seemingly shared by Wall Street, given its reaction to the stimulus package), or that the level of western commitment in Afghanistan and Pakistan will be sufficient to make much of a difference.

President Obama could not have come into office at a more challenging time.

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India's elections and the Islamist terror threat

Praveen Swami

"Remember my friends", Hafiz Mohammad Saeed had said in a February 5, 2007 speech, "that the jihad has been ordained by Allah". "It is not an order of a general", the chief of the Lashkar-e-Taiba continued, "that can be started one day and stopped the other day".

From April 16, India will begin conducting elections to its Parliament: a gigantic exercise which will involve over 714 million voters—and an estimated half a million police and paramilitary personnel who will fan out across 543 constituencies.

Ever since November's murderous attacks on Mumbai, it has been clear that Saeed's threats aren't idle. India's police and intelligence services have warned that, given the deteriorating situation in Pakistan, there is a high probability of election-time attacks. Last month, the Indian Premier League—a multi-million dollar cricket tournament—announced that it was relocating this year to South Africa. IPL's organizers were told that preventing incidents like last month's attack on the Sri Lanka cricket team in Lahore would require extraordinary levels of security—security for which police simply could not be freed-up during the elections.

Evidence of the threat isn't hard to come by. Late in March, eight Indian soldiers and nineteen Lashkar jihadists were killed in intense high altitude fighting along the Line of Control in northern Jammu and Kashmir—the highest numbers killed in a single fire engagement in years.

The Lashkar in India

But the most pressing threat to India comes from Lashkar assets who will not have to cross the oceans or scale the mountains across the Line of Control.

Key leaders of Indian Mujahideen—a Lashkar-linked terrorist network responsible for a string of urban bombings since 2005—escaped a nationwide police hunt which led to the arrest of over 80 of its operatives in six states last year.

Police services across India say they have credible intelligence that the Indian Mujahideen is indeed planning further strikes. Two men are thought to be: Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri, who organised the quasi-industrial production of the ready-to-assemble ammonium nitrate-based 'u'-shaped bombs used in its bombing campaign, and the man tasked by the Lashkar's central commanders to link these units together, Mumbai-based Abdul Subhan Usman Qureshi.

Shahbandri—the son of the owner of a leather-tanning factory in Mumbai's Kurla area who went on to obtain a degree in electrical engineering—was part of the circle of student Islamists who joined the now-proscribed Students Islamic Movement of India around 1998. Like others in SIMI, Bhatkal believed that the problems of discrimination and violence confronting India's Muslims were the consequence of secular modernity—and that the answer lay in fighting to create an Islamic state. Along with his elder brother Iqbal Shahbandri, a cleric who also practiced traditional medicine, Bhatkal became a key figure at SIMI's Mumbai office.

SIMI old-timers recall that Shahbandri brothers attended SIMI's last public gathering—a 2001 rally held at the Bandra Reclamation grounds in Mumbai. Much of the language used at that convention was incendiary. Osama bin-Laden was described as a "true *mujahid* [Islamic warrior]". Indian Muslims were exhorted to "trample the infidels."

Soon after, though, SIMI was proscribed—and the Mumbai Police began knocking on the Shahbandri family's door. Tiring of confrontation with the law, the brothers left for Mangalore, the small fishing town in south India from where their father had begun his journey to becoming a successful Mumbai businessman.

Incenced by the 2003 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, though, Riyaz Shahbandri renewed his contacts with the jihadist movement. He made contact with Pakistan-based mafioso Amir Raza Khan, who had started financing jihadist groups after his Islamist-linked brother was killed by the Gujarat Police in a 2001 shootout. Khan, police investigators believe, provided Shahbandri with the finances and fake passport that allowed him to train late that year at Lashkar-e-Taiba

Back in Mangalore, the Shahbandri borthers began to recruit the men who would later form the bomb-manufacture cell of the Indian Mujahideen. Some were small businessmen, like arrested suspects Ahmad Baba Abu Bakr, Ali Mohammad Ahmad, Javed Mohammad Ali and Syed Mohammad Naushad. Most, however, were highly-educated professionals. Mansoor Asghar Peerbhoy, the software engineer who is charged with having helped design, produce and

1 There is a high probability of terrorist attacks during the coming elections in India.

2 Major strikes by Islamist groups could lead to the escalation of India-Pakistan tensions

3 The USA must exert pressure on Islamabad to dismantle Pakistan's jihadist infrastructure.

of the largest wholesale fruit suppliers to the Indian Army's southern command.

Kerala's Abdul Sattar, a Kannur resident also known by the alias Sainuddhin, and his long standing associate Tadiyantavide Nasir, also formed a key part of the circle of jihadists recruited by the Shahbandri brothers. Sattar and Nasir, the police claim, supplied much of the ammonium nitrate used in the bombs used by the Indian Mujahideen in Gujarat and Bangalore. Evidence also exists that the Kerala jihad leaders had sent upwards of 40 men for military training at Lashkar camps in Pakistan. In October, four Kerala men training with the Lashkar in the mountains above the north Kashmir town of Kupwara were shot dead by the Jammu and Kashmir Police. One of the four, Abdul Raheem, was Sattar's son-in-law. He had earlier been charged with participating in the 2005 torching of a bus in Tamil Nadu.

In the north, similar jihadist modules were forming. In late 2001, Azamgarh resident Mohammad Sadiq Sheikh left for Pakistan. Sheikh, an ideological Islamist linked to SIMI in Uttar Pradesh, had succeeded in making contact with the Lashkar through his brother-in-law, Mujahid Salim—the son of Hyderabad-based Islamist cleric Maulana Abdul Aleem Islahi, who founded the Jamiat-ul-Sheikh Maududi, named for the founder of the Jamaaat-e-Islami. Like Bhatkal, Sheikh's travel to Pakistan was arranged through Khan's criminal network.

Sheikh, after his return, recruited several figures alleged to have played a key role in the Indian Mujahideen bombings. Indian Mujahideen commander Atif Amin, who was killed in a September shootout with the Delhi Police in Jamia Nagar, is thought to have trained in Pakistan, as did Mumbai-based Arif Badr Sheikh. So, too, did Shahnawaz Khan, a Lucknow-based Unani doctor whose brother, Mohammad Saif, was arrested during the Jamia Nagar raid.

Mumbai's Qureshi, investigators believe, had the critical task of helping these complex, local cells of jihadists knit together into a single unity. His task was complex in the Ahmedabad attacks, for example, Qureshi mated Bhatkal's bomb-making assets with a group of SIMI operatives raised by computer graphics designer Qayamuddin Kapadia, who in turn provided safehouses and logistical support for Atif Amin's assault team.

Like Bhatkal, Qureshi was the son of migrants to Mumbai—in this case from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Qureshi obtained a diploma in industrial electronics in 1995, and went on to work at several private information technology firms in Mumbai. It is unclear just when Qureshi encountered SIMI, but he was present at the organisation's 1999 convention—a time when he was working on setting up an intranet project at the multinational Bharat Petrochemicals. His links with SIMI deepened over coming years. In March, 2001, Qureshi quit his job at the computer firm Datamatics, recording in a letter of resignation that he had "decided to devote one complete year to pursue religious and spiritual matters". He first edited SIMI's house magazine, *Islamic Movement*, and then travelled to Pakistan for training.

From 2005, the dozens Indian jihadists who had trained with the Lashkar after the Gujarat pogrom initiated a new phase in the Pakistan-based terror group's long-running war against India. Asad Yazdani, a resident of Hyderabad's Toli Chowki area who was among Maulana Nasir's first recruits, carried out a series of strikes starting with the assassination of Gujarat Home Minister Haren Pandya More often than not, these early operations, like the June, 2005 bombing of the Shramjeevi Express and the March, 2006, attack on the Sankat Mochan temple in Varanasi, relied on cross-border logistical assistance from the Lashkar or Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami.

In the wake of the Mumbai bombings, the Lashkar came under intense pressure from Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's regime to scale back offensive operations against India. Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakhvi and other Lashkar military commanders prodded Qureshi, Bhatkal and Sheikh to set up a self-sustaining network in India. On the eve of attacking three court buildings in Uttar Pradesh in November, 2007, the men finally gave their network a name: the Indian Mujahideen.

Just what consequences a major election-period attack by the Indian Mujahideen might have takes little imagination to see. Public pressure on India to act against militarily against Lashkar infrastructure in Pakistan swelled after November's attacks in Mumbai, but was defused by Islamabad's decision to arrest key terror leaders including Saeed. Since then, though, there has been little action. Pakistan is yet to initiate the prosecution of suspects in its custody, and has refused to provide the United States of America's Federal Bureau of Investigations access to question them. There is credible evidence that several of the suspects continue to have access to communications tools—and what doubt existed on the continued operation of Lashkar infrastructure in Pakistan has been dispelled by the recent fighting in Kashmir.

Preventing that infrastructure from precipitating a regional cataclysm will need sustained action by Pakistan against the jihadist groups its intelligence services created—and continue to patronize. And that, in turn, will require sustained prodding by the USA.

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Asian Conflicts Reports

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