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India Terror Attacks Point to Need for Stronger U.S.–India Counterterrorism Cooperation

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Wednesday's terrorist strikes in Mumbai are the latest in a string of attacks across India over the last year, most of which appear to have been perpetrated by local Islamists with external links. These most recent attacks should lead to greater counterterrorism cooperation between Washington and New Delhi, two nations whose interests in countering regional and global terrorism continue to converge. At the same time, these strikes could heighten tensions between India and Pakistan, especially if investigations reveal that the attackers received training, finances, or logistical support from Pakistan-based terror groups. Indeed, Indian authorities have already begun to accuse Pakistan-based groups of having links to Wednesday's attacks.

A New Kind of Terrorism in India. Although the name of the group claiming responsibility for Wednesday's attacks, Deccan Mujahideen, is new, the group is likely affiliated with the same individuals responsible for conducting a series of attacks across the country over the last year, attacks that have claimed the lives of hundreds of Indian citizens. For instance, a group calling itself the Indian Mujahideen (IM) claimed responsibility for the May 13 bomb blasts that exploded at crowded markets in the city of Jaipur. The IM also took credit for the similar November 23, 2007, attacks on the Indian cities of Varnasi, Faizabad, and Lucknow.

Additionally, an organization identifying itself as ISF-IM claimed responsibility for the October 30 serial blasts in Assam (a state in northeast India) that left 75 dead. Local police believe the acronym may stand for Indian Security Force–Indian Mujahideen.

Wednesday's attacks bear another similarity to IM bombings of the past year: Just as, in most instances, the IM takes credit for its atrocities via e-mails sent either prior to or immediately following an attack, shortly after the November 26 strikes, the Deccan Mujahideen apparently also sent e-mails claiming responsibility for the attacks.

By using names that relate to India, the terrorists clearly want to portray themselves as indigenous, but given the level of sophistication, planning, and organization of the attacks, especially Wednesday's assault on Mumbai, they almost certainly have external links and support. Focusing Wednesday's attacks on Americans also further demonstrates the group's pan-Islamic agenda, yet another strong indication that these terrorists could be under the command of a well-organized group located outside India.

Information gleaned about the IM from the previous attacks indicates India is facing a new kind of terrorist threat that is not limited to any one part of the country and involves homegrown extremists who are linking domestic grievances with pan-Islamic agendas. Many of the individuals arrested for involvement in the numerous attacks of the past year are young men (under the age of 35) with

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good educations and lucrative, prestigious occupations, such as web designers, doctors, and engineers—a fact that has surprised Indian authorities, as well as the general public. Although these individuals could be self-radicalizing through al-Qaeda propaganda over the Internet, it is possible they have received training and support from outside India. Indian terrorism analysts have yet to determine if IM is a single organization or a united front of several autonomous groups.

Impact on Indo–Pakistani Peace Talks. Wednesday's attack could have a negative impact on Indo–Pakistani ties, which—due to revelations of Pakistani intelligence involvement in the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul on July 7, 2008—were already strained.

Although Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has made several peace gestures toward India since he took office a few months ago, many Indians question whether the Pakistani security establishment supports his efforts to improve relations. Without backing from Pakistan's still-powerful army, Zardari's efforts at confidence building will have little real impact on boosting India–Pakistan ties, especially if India believes the Pakistani security establishment is fomenting violence against India. However, Islamabad and New Delhi did recently reopen a road between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir that had been closed for over 60 years, a significant milestone in improving relations between the two countries over the complex issue of Kashmir.

The historical animosity between Pakistan and India has also begun to increasingly manifest itself in Afghanistan, where Pakistan fears it is losing influence to India. New Delhi has pledged over \$1 billion in assistance to the Afghan government and increased its political and economic influence throughout the country over the last few years. Pakistan's ability to maintain influence in Afghanistan throughout the 1990s stemmed from its support to the Taliban, whose leadership is allied with al-Qaeda. Other than strengthening ties to Kabul through stronger economic and trade linkages, Pakistan now finds itself with few options to project influence in Afghanistan; any further dealings with the Taliban risk isolation from the international community.

Strengthening U.S.–India Counterterrorism Cooperation. The massive scale of the Mumbai attacks and the specific targeting of U.S. citizens should bring the U.S. and India closer in terms of counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing. U.S. and Indian counterterrorism interests are increasingly converging, and Wednesday's attack could help jolt both sides into even closer coordination with the goal of preventing further regional and global attacks.

Despite their agreement on the need to aggressively contain terrorist threats, Washington and New Delhi have failed in the past to work as closely as they could to minimize terrorist threats. This failure is largely the result of divergent geo-strategic perceptions, Indian reticence to deepen the intelligence relationship, and U.S. bureaucratic resistance toward elevating counterterrorism cooperation beyond a certain level. The gravity of the threat posed to both countries from terrorists in the region require New Delhi and Washington to overcome past suspicions and recognize that they both stand to gain considerably from stepping up their cooperation.

To some degree, intelligence cooperation between New Delhi and Washington may already be improving. For example, Indian media reports indicate that the U.S. possessed intelligence information related to the attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul that it shared with the Indian government weeks before the attack occurred. Unfortunately, U.S.–India intelligence sharing was unable to prevent this horrific attack, but there may be future opportunities for the U.S. and India to assist each other in preventing Taliban and al-Qaeda attacks against both coalition forces and Indian interests in Afghanistan.

Toward a Mutually Beneficial Relationship. Washington and New Delhi will both benefit by pooling their counterterrorism expertise and increasing joint activities to address regional and global terrorist threats. Since 90 percent of counterterrorism is about intelligence, Washington and New Delhi should focus on breaking down barriers to intelligence sharing. But to take full advantage of the opportunities for enhancing Indo–U.S. counterterrorism coordination, both sides will have to work on enhancing trust and confidence in each other's

counterterrorism strategies. Each nation will have to increase their understanding of the other's core national security interests that drive their respective counterterrorism objectives while demonstrating

that pre-9/11 regional narratives on the issue are no longer relevant.

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