



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Debate on 18 December: Recent Developments in India

This Library Note aims to provide background reading for the debate to be held on Thursday 18 December:

“To call attention to recent developments in India”

The Note focuses on the recent terrorist attacks on Mumbai in which over 170 people died. Firstly, it briefly outlines the events of 26–29 November and subsequent diplomatic developments, before offering perspectives on the attacks through the arguments put forward by a range of commentators and observers.

Clearly, events are moving quickly and, as such, it is possible that the immediate context for the 18 December debate may have shifted since the publication of this paper.

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1. Terrorist attacks on Mumbai

At 21:20 local time on Wednesday 26 November 2008, gunmen launched a series of attacks across the city of Mumbai. Targets in India's financial capital included: the Taj Mahal Palace hotel; the Oberoi-Trident hotel; the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station; Nariman House, which houses the Jewish Chabad Lubavitch outreach centre; the Cama hospital; and the Cafe Leopold restaurant. 60 hours later, on the morning of Saturday 29 November 2008, Indian police announced that the siege at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel was over. In total, 173 people are thought to have died in the attacks, with over 300 injured. 26 foreign nationals died, including UK, US, Australian, German, French, Canadian, Italian, Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, Thai and Singaporean citizens. Nine of the gunmen were killed, while one was apprehended, who remains in custody. In the aftermath of the attacks, the Indian Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, resigned in response to criticism of security lapses. The Indian Government has since announced a number of measures intended to bolster internal security.

In the days that followed the attacks, attention became focused on Indian/Pakistan relations as India claimed that the Pakistan administered Kashmir-based militant group, Lashkar-e-Toiba, was responsible for the attacks. India has been pressing Pakistan to take action against the group and has also requested that the United Nations put the Jamaat-ud-Dawa group, believed to be a front for Lashkar-e-Toiba, on the list of individuals and organisations proscribed by the UN for being associated with terrorism. The newly installed Home Minister, Shri P. Chidambaram, delivered a statement to the Lok Sabha (lower house) on 11 December 2008 in which he set out the Indian Government's analysis of how the terrorists reached Mumbai and reiterated the Indian Government's belief that "the finger of suspicion unmistakably points to the territory of our neighbour, Pakistan":

According to information gathered during the course of the investigations, it appears that 10 Pakistani nationals belonging to the Lashkar-e-Toiba, a proscribed terrorist outfit, had left Karachi on November 23, 2008; boarded a launch by the name of Al Hussaini; accosted and hijacked an Indian fishing vessel, M. V. Kuber, off the coast of Gujarat; killed its occupants; and a few miles short of the coast of Mumbai abandoned the fishing vessel, got into an inflatable rubber dinghy, and landed near Budhwar Park, Colaba, Mumbai between 8.00 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. on November 26, 2008...

I am, however, able to say that the finger of suspicion unmistakably points to the territory of our neighbour, Pakistan. The interrogation of the captured terrorist has yielded valuable material evidence. The origins of the ten terrorists who entered India have been established conclusively. There is also abundant evidence gathered from the inflatable rubber dinghy, the fishing vessel and the bodies of the terrorists that has enabled the investigators to reconstruct the sequence of events from the origin to the targets.

([HM announces measures to enhance security](#), Ministry of Home Affairs press release, 11 December 2008)

The President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, writing in the *International Herald Tribune* on 9 December 2008, pledged to co-operate with efforts to track down people involved in the attacks. He noted that Pakistan had already arrested militants, following raids on the main Lashkar-e-Toiba camp in Pakistan-administered Kashmir on 7 December 2008. However, he warned against “hasty judgments” and stressed that there were no links between the terrorists and the Pakistani Government:

Pakistan is committed to the pursuit, arrest, trial and punishment of anyone involved in these heinous attacks. But we caution against hasty judgments and inflammatory statements.

As was demonstrated in Sunday’s raids, which resulted in the arrest of militants, Pakistan will take action against the non-state actors found within our territory, treating them as criminals, terrorists and murderers. Not only are the terrorists not linked to the government of Pakistan in any way, we are their targets and we continue to be their victims.

India is a mature nation and a stable democracy. Pakistanis appreciate India’s democratic contributions. But as rage fuelled by the Mumbai attacks catches on, Indians must pause and take a breath. India and Pakistan - and the rest of the world - must work together to track down the terrorists who caused mayhem in Mumbai, attacked New York, London and Madrid in the past, and destroyed the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in September. The terrorists who killed my wife are connected by ideology to these enemies of civilization.

These militants did not arise from whole cloth. Pakistan was an ally of the West throughout the Cold War. The world worked to exploit religion against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan by empowering the most fanatic extremists as an instrument of destruction of a superpower. The strategy worked, but its legacy was the creation of an extremist militia with its own dynamic.

Pakistan continues to pay the price: the legacy of dictatorship, the fatigue of fanaticism, the dismemberment of civil society and the destruction of our democratic infrastructure. The resulting poverty continues to fuel the extremists and has created a culture of grievance and victimhood.

The challenge of confronting terrorists who have a vast support network is huge; Pakistan’s fledgling democracy needs help from the rest of the world. We are on the frontlines of the war on terrorism...

Terrorism is a regional as well as a global threat, and it needs to be battled collectively. We understand the domestic political considerations in India in the aftermath of Mumbai. Nevertheless, accusations of complicity on Pakistan’s part only complicate the already complex situation.

For India, Pakistan and the United States, the best response to the Mumbai carnage is to coordinate in counteracting the scourge of terrorism. The world must act to strengthen Pakistan’s economy and democracy, help us build civil society and provide us with the law enforcement and counterterrorism capacities that will enable us to fight the terrorists effectively.

[\(They want to destroy Pakistan, too, *International Herald Tribune*, 9 December 2008\)](#)

The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, visited both India and Pakistan following the attacks, warning India against taking actions that would create “unintended consequences or difficulties” while urging a “robust response” from Pakistan.

In terms of the UK Government’s reaction to the Mumbai attacks, responding to the debate on the Queen’s Speech in the House of Lords, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Lord Malloch-Brown, stated:

Already at this stage one has to acknowledge that there was clear involvement on the part of not—I repeat, not—the Pakistan Government but of groups based in Pakistan. That poses a challenge to the Pakistani authorities, civilian and military, to make sure that they fully co-operate with the Indians in the investigation of these acts, and if necessary in the turning over of suspects to meet justice in India’s courts. Many of us can recall the near-war situation that arose in 2002 when a similar terrorist incident was not followed by necessary co-operation between the two Governments.

(HL *Hansard*, 4 December 2008, col 139)

Speaking in the debate on the Queen’s Speech in the House of Commons six days later, the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, declared:

Let me talk at the outset about counter-terrorism, because the terrifying events in Mumbai a fortnight ago were a reminder that global interconnectedness brings not just shared economic risk, but shared security risk. People of all races and religions were targeted; British nationals were held captive; Indian communities in the UK were worried about family members’ safety. After the attacks, we dispatched a consular rapid deployment team to assist British nationals. We will continue to work with the Indian police and law enforcement agencies to investigate the crime and better secure that important country for the future...

I certainly agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the herding of staff and their family members from the Jewish centre in Mumbai into the heart of that centre and their killing was a completely atrocious event. I share with him the view that it is important that, whatever our religion, we condemn the killing of people of other religions. At the NATO Mediterranean meeting last week, it was striking to hear the French Foreign Minister explain to Arab colleagues that the two French people killed in Mumbai were both Muslim. That brought home to people the fact that at one level these were random attacks that killed people of all religions, as well as the fact that the targeting of the Jewish centre was particularly chilling.

(HC *Hansard*, 10 December 2008, cols 560–61)

In the aftermath of the attacks, a great deal has been written and said about the nature and possible implications of the violence inflicted on Mumbai. The following section of this Library Note aims to draw out some key themes. It does not attempt to provide an exhaustive examination of the topic; rather it seeks to open up a variety of perspectives on the attacks by highlighting some of the arguments put forward by commentators and observers.

Background information about India can be found in two House of Commons Library research papers: [A political introduction to India](#) (May 2007) and [An economic introduction to India](#) (May 2007). The Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s country profile of India is available [here](#).

2. Perspectives on the Mumbai attacks

As far as it is possible to summarise the tenor of comment articles reflecting on the Mumbai attacks, the extent to which they can be explained in domestic, regional or global terms has been a central theme. While some authors have highlighted the pertinence of internal Indian politics and regional tensions, others have placed the attacks in a global context, invoking comparison with attacks on New York, Madrid and London. The articles selected below largely address these themes. In conclusion, the final article selected reflects on the media coverage of the attacks.

The author Misha Glenny, writing in the *Guardian*, sought to counter the view that the attacks on Mumbai were orchestrated by al-Qaida and could therefore be seen as “another manifestation of the cultural clash between Islam and its religious competitors.” Instead, Glenny argued, the attacks on Mumbai “were not about global jihad”, but rather their origins were to be found “in the deterioration in relations between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai and India since the late 1980s, and in regional relations between India and Pakistan.” Glenny stated that the Indian government must work to prevent “any Hindu nationalist backlash against the Muslims of Mumbai” ([This was not global jihad - Its roots are far closer to home](#), *Guardian*, 1 December 2008).

Dileep Padgaonkar, former editor of the *Times of India* and current editor of the bimonthly magazine *India & Global Affairs*, focused on domestic Indian politics in a comment piece for the *Washington Post*:

After terrorist attacks in the past, the [Bharatiya Janata Party] has denounced the Congress party as being soft on terrorism in an effort to mobilize India’s substantial Muslim vote in its favor. The Congress, in turn, attacks the BJP and its affiliates for bashing Muslims in order to consolidate its core Hindu vote. Indians have a peculiar word to describe this state of affairs -- communalism, meaning a determined bid to exploit religious sentiments for electoral gain.

The effect of this competitive demagoguery has been disastrous on many counts.

([Blood in Mumbai](#), *Washington Post*, 28 November 2008)

Padgaonkar argued that the Indian state’s pursuit and treatment of terrorist suspects has led to India’s Muslims beginning “to lose faith in the Indian state, its institutions and its instruments” with the consequence that Muslim youths have become radicalized. Moreover, Padgaonkar claimed that as a result of the arrest of Hindus for alleged involvement in terrorist attacks, “the Hindus, like the Muslims, have started to question the credibility of the police and, by extension, the state.” The attacks on Mumbai would consolidate anxieties in both communities that “law enforcement cannot be trusted to bring the guilty to justice.” The Indian state must tackle terrorism vigorously “regardless of the suspects’ religion.” Padgaonkar also noted in his article the “pan-Islamist character of the attacks in Mumbai”:

At the Taj hotel, the terrorists asked for the numbers of the rooms occupied by foreign, especially American and British, guests. Another building they attacked housed Israeli guests. Overnight, Mumbai has been turned into a stage for ‘civilizations’ to clash without hindrance.

([Blood in Mumbai](#), *Washington Post*, 28 November 2008)

The author Sadanand Dhume, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, placed the attacks in the context of recent terrorist strikes across India:

Over the past four years, Islamist groups have struck in New Delhi, Jaipur, Bangalore and Ahmedabad, among other places. The death toll from terrorism - not counting at least 119 killed in Mumbai on Wednesday and Thursday - stands at over 4,000, which gives India the dubious distinction of suffering more casualties since 2004 than any country except Iraq.

([India's antiterror blunders](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 28 November 2008)

Dhume criticised India's efforts to counter terrorism, claiming that, "India's failure to protect its premier city offers a textbook example for fellow democracies on how not to deal with militant Islam." Many errors had been made and partisan politics had thwarted the national security effort. Dhume concluded:

In sum, the Indian approach to terrorism has been consistently haphazard and weak-kneed. When faced with fundamentalist demands, India's democratically elected leaders have regularly preferred caving to confrontation on a point of principle. The country's institutions and culture have abetted a widespread sense of Muslim separateness from the national mainstream. The country's diplomats and soldiers have failed to stabilize the neighborhood.

([India's antiterror blunders](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 28 November 2008)

The *Times'* chief foreign commentator, Bronwen Maddox, warned against the Mumbai attacks inflaming the dispute over the Kashmir border:

If India and Pakistan now ramp up hostilities, it will be an act of self-indulgence, on each side, that distracts them from fighting terrorism. India's assertion that "external elements" were to blame may well be upheld by evidence, but also distracts attention from the rise of radical religious groups within its own borders.

([We must not lose sight of the real enemy](#), *Times*, 1 December 2008)

The author William Dalrymple, writing in the *Observer*, specifically focused on regional tensions and the need to find a solution in Kashmir. Dalrymple placed the attacks in the context of Western policy in the region:

This probable Pakistani origin of the Mumbai attacks, and the links to Kashmir-focused jihadi groups, means that the horrific events have to be seen in the context of the wider disaster of Western policy in the region since 9/11. The abject failure of the Bush administration to woo the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan away from the Islamists and, instead, managing to convince many of them of the hostility of the West towards all Muslim aspirations, has now led to a gathering catastrophe in Afghanistan where the once-hated Taliban are now again at the gates of Kabul.

Meanwhile, the blowback from that Afghan conflict in Pakistan has meant that Asif Ali Zardari's government has now lost control of much of the North West Frontier Province, in addition to the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas, while religious and political extremism flourishes as never before.

([Mumbai atrocities highlight need for solution in Kashmir](#), *Observer*, 30 November 2008)

Dalrymple argued that much of the north of Pakistan “was slipping out of government control” and the country’s jihadi network was not being tackled effectively. Meanwhile, India, he claimed, “continues to make matters worse by its ill-treatment of the people of Kashmir, which has handed to the jihadis an entire generation of educated, angry middle-class Muslims.” The gunmen in Mumbai, Dalrymple suggested, “were not poor, madrasah-educated Pakistanis from the villages, brainwashed by mullahs, but angry and well-educated, middle-class kids furious at the gross injustice they perceive being done to Muslims by Israel, the US, the UK and India in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir respectively.” Dalrymple concluded:

In the months ahead, we are likely to see a security crackdown in India and huge pressure applied to Pakistan to match its pro-Indian and pro-Western rhetoric with real action against the country’s jihadi groups. But there is unlikely to be peace in South Asia until the demands of the Kashmiris are in some measure addressed and the swamp of grievance in Srinagar somehow drained. Until then, the Mumbai massacres may be a harbinger of more violence to come.

[\(Mumbai atrocities highlight need for solution in Kashmir, Observer, 30 November 2008\)](#)

David Aaronovitch, in the *Times*, reviewed some of the opinions that had been put forward to try and explain the attacks, arguing that the killing of the rabbi at Nariman House was the critical element in any understanding of the motives of the terrorists:

On the day after the attacks began the Indian writer, campaigner and serial explanatist, Arundhati Roy, lambasted her own country on *The World Tonight* on Radio 4, for its rural poverty and its fluctuating support for Hindu nationalism. These, she seemed to suggest, were root causes of the terror. Elsewhere, analysts have pointed to the 60-year-old Kashmiri crisis as fuelling the jihad. More exotically the writer Misha Glenny now suggests that organised crime in the Pakistani city of Karachi is “the operational key” to such attacks (he has just written a book about international organised crime), but that the origins of last week’s nightmare lie “in the deterioration in relations between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai and India”. Well, these things are bad. Kashmir is bad. Hindu communalism is bad.

Poverty is bad. You can see the reasons for warfare in Kashmir, for riots in Hyderabad and for Maoist uprisings in the deep rural areas of India. But why kill the rabbi? Why invade the small headquarters of a small outreach sect of a small religion, which far from being even a big symbol of anything, you would almost certainly need a detailed map and inside knowledge even to find?...

So the Chabad hostages in Nariman House aren’t any more dead than the others. But they do give the lie to explanetics. The only possible reason for going to such lengths to seek out a few Jews (as opposed to having a grand Columbine-type shoot-up in the big city) is ideology. Is because someone has told you, and you have accepted, that these people are your particular enemies.

[\(Psychotic terrorists in search of a grievance, Times, 2 December 2008\)](#)

Aaronovitch concluded: “The rabbi, in death, tells us this. There isn’t anything - whatever the explanatists say - we can concede to the zealots of Faridkot that will persuade such people, once radicalised, not to try to kill us.”

Writing in the *Spectator*, Stephen Schwartz and Irfan Al-Alawi from the Centre For Islamic Pluralism, refuted arguments that the Mumbai attacks could be explained by local or regional factors. Instead, they claimed, the attacks had to be viewed in a global context:

The usual suspects are declaring that the 'cause' of the Mumbai bombings was Kashmir or some other local grievance. But what happened in Mumbai was no more a local event than the 7 July 2005 attacks in London or the assault in Madrid on 11 March 2004. Pakistani propaganda about its claims in Kashmir is almost entirely phony rhetoric intended to justify the predatory instincts of the Pakistani army and intelligence bureaucrats. Pakistan insists that Kashmiri Muslims are oppressed by India, but in fact Indian Muslims live better than Pakistani Muslims and have demonstrated a better capacity for true Islamic thinking.

The attacks on Mumbai are part of a global problem, which is why a passive Western policy toward the crisis is not acceptable. It may appear comforting to bien-pensant representatives of the 'progressive' elite. But in reality it represents an attitude of suicidal and irresponsible disengagement from confrontation with a continuing threat. In Mumbai, as in London, Madrid and New York, but also in the Islamic cities of Iraq, Istanbul and Jakarta, and in places like Peshawar and Quetta in Pakistan, a wide network of Muslim fundamentalists continue their global offensive.

[\(The global force behind Mumbai's agony is in our midst](#), *Spectator*, 3 December 2008)

Dr Paul Cornish, Head, International Security Programme and Carrington Chair in International Security, Chatham House, considered the media's coverage of the attacks on Mumbai, arguing that the "saturation coverage" that the attacks received had played into the hands of the terrorists:

No matter how obscure, every detail of this multi-point, sustained attack was soon being pored over by terrorism experts, trying to fit the carnage in Mumbai into one template or another. So the speculative and often tendentious questioning began...

This is precisely how terrorism is meant to work. The terrorist's action must always be complemented by the target's reaction in order to complete the scene. How the attack is carried out, and what is done to whom, matters no more (and often rather less) than the way the attack is received, and the impact accorded to it. The impact has indeed been instant and extensive, reaching into the worlds of politics, business and even sport, and on all levels - internationally, regionally and nationally in India.

[\(Is this the age of celebrity terrorism?](#), Dr Paul Cornish, Chatham House website, 28 November 2008)

Cornish proposed that the reaction to the attacks may have accorded them more meaning than they deserved. Moreover, he argued:

The attack in Mumbai was obviously planned - but 'military-style planning' (whatever that means) is probably not necessary for the mass murder of unarmed and unsuspecting civilians going about their business in crowded railway stations and restaurants. This could also have been a plan which had a large gap where 'mission', 'cause' or 'vision statement' ought to have been. But no matter; the terrorists might have assumed, quite correctly as it happens, that the world's media and the terrorism analysis industry would very quickly fill in any gaps for them.

The character of modern terrorism is widely understood to have been shaped by a mid-nineteenth century idea known as the 'propaganda of the deed'; a strategy for political change in which the message or cause is contained within, and expressed by the violent act. In a novel twist, the Mumbai terrorists might have embarked on 'propaganda of the deed without the propaganda', in the confident expectation that the rationalisation for the attack - the 'narrative' - would be provided by politicians, the media and terrorism analysts. If so, then Mumbai could represent something rather different in the history of terrorism, and possibly something far more disturbing even than 'global jihad'. Perhaps we have come to the point where casually self-radicalised, sociopathic individuals can form a loose organisation, acquire sufficient weapons and equipment for a few thousand dollars, make a basic plan of action and indulge in a violent expression of their generalised disaffection and anomie. These individuals indulge in terrorism simply because they can, while their audience concocts a rationale on their behalf.

([Is this the age of celebrity terrorism?](#), Dr Paul Cornish, Chatham House website, 28 November 2008)

