


# Mumbai Attacks: The Likely Impact for Humanitarians

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**The attack in Mumbai that took place from 26-29 November 2008 is a spectacular example of the power of “low-tech” terrorism. Its impact, however, is much wider than India itself, and has implications for humanitarians working in the region.**

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All readers are therefore advised to act accordingly to their own capacity and the latest information

## Brief Description of the Attacks

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On 26 November, 2008, approximately 10 attackers debarked from an inflatable dinghy, broke into four groups, and begun a series of attacks on targets throughout Mumbai. The selection of the targets seemed to focus primarily on international or Western dominated venues. The operation comprised attacks by small arms fire, with the addition of one vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). At three locations, the Oberoi Hotel, the Taj Mahal Hotel and the Jewish Centre ay Nariman House, the situations developed into sieges.

By the time that order was restored on 29 November, 172 people had been killed (including 9 of the identified attackers) and over 250 persons had been wounded.

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## Strategic Meaning of the Attacks



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Mumbai is a key financial centre in India, as well as being the home to the successful Indian film industry (“Bollywood”). Mumbai is also well known for the heavy presence of organised crime, which is believed to have strong links with Pakistan through the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Both U.S. and Indian intelligence agencies have publicly blamed a Pakistani militant organisation, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), for perpetrating the attacks. The LeT have allegedly been involved in a large number of previous attacks, such as 2006 Mumbai Train bombings.

There is much speculation regarding the motive behind the attacks. It is too simple to ascribe a motive such as “spreading terror.” The inability of the current Indian government to prevent such attacks places it in a very difficult position. Already weak due to the waning popularity of the Congress party, the current Indian government must respond strongly to the attacks in order to retain credibility with the electorate. This response must de facto be aimed at Pakistan, increasing regional tensions.

Pakistan itself, also with a weak government, is in a precarious position. It must balance the need to respond to Indian provocations, with its commitments to the US, all while not provoking the ISI, a key LeT supporter.

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The Mumbai attack could be seen as a method to relieve pressure on both the Afghan and Pakistani branches of the Taliban. In order for the Indian government to retain support from the electorate, they must respond with a show of force. Any such show of force requires a further response from Pakistan. Pakistan's armed forces are stretched very thinly, and so any military units that move to the Indian border must de facto be taken from operations currently being conducted on the western border. This would have the effect of both relieving pressure on the Pakistani Taliban, as well as increasing cross-border freedom of movement for their brethren in Afghanistan. It is also possible that Indian and internal pressure on the weak Pakistani government could cause a political crisis that it is not strong enough to weather.

It is also possible that the attack by the LeT was undertaken without the knowledge or direction of any other organisation, for their own purposes. This could represent a loss of control over the LeT by the ISI. The LeT is dedicated to the annexation of the Kashmir by Pakistan, and the creation of independent Islamic states in what is now India, Bangladesh and greater Pakistan. This attack could represent an attempt on their part to further their goals by building support amongst Islamists, and widening the gap between Hindus and Muslims within India. This second possibility is less likely than that above.

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## Political Aftermath of the Attacks



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The LeT have denied any involvement in the attacks, but given their history and ongoing rhetoric, this is not very plausible.

India's response to the attack has been very restrained, likely at the request of the US administration. In response, President Zardari of Pakistan has been fairly conciliatory, although his real ability to respond has been constrained by powerful factions within the military. India's demand for the extradition of a number of persons potentially responsible for the attacks – including the leaders of the LeT, and Jaish e- Muhammed (JeM) and Karachi/Mumbai underworld figure Ibrahim Dawood, are very unlikely to be met.

It is in the interest of both the governments of Pakistan and India to respond to this attack in a measured way – however, both parties are under pressures to do otherwise. The Indian government must respond in a manner acceptable to its fickle electorate, for fear of losing power. President Zardari must please the powerful military and intelligence figures over whom he has little control.

To date, both parties in the conflict have managed to prevent it from worsening. It is clear, however, that any provocation by either side could unleash a greater crisis beyond the means of either government to truly control.

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## India's Next Move



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The Indian government's key aim is to demonstrate, to both Pakistan and its own citizens, that it is able to react effectively against anti-India militants operating with the support of Pakistan. The most likely response from India are further restrictions on trade, particularly along the recently opened Srinagar to Muzaffarabad route. Although these restrictions would have a strong symbolic impact, they would also have a limited economic impact on Pakistan. India is also likely to increase its activities, overt and covert, within Afghanistan as a means to directly counter the influence of the ISI within that country.

India may also choose to redeploy military forces into Kashmir, although this is unlikely to take place before February next year. This could be coupled with a redeployment of forces to other parts of the border, although this measure is less likely. The Indian government could also authorize ground or air strikes against militant training camps in Pakistan or the Kashmir, although this could create a backlash from Pakistan that would cause the crisis to spiral out of control. increase in Indian involvement in Afghanistan.

The more direct military options would become more likely should there be additional attacks against Indian interests.

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## External Influences

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### The United States

The US is driven by a number of factors to try and limit the conflict between India and Pakistan. The US has very likely exerted a large amount of pressure on India to reduce their response to the Mumbai attack, largely because of the likely affect on Pakistan, which is already a fragile state. The likely reduction in Pakistan's ability and willingness to continue operations against militants in the FATA and NWFP is also a factor effecting US actions in the matter. Although the US has close ties with India, it is unlikely that it would intervene on behalf of either party should their be military conflict between them – the US would almost certainly pressure both parties to cease hostilities.

### China

China, a key military supporter of Pakistan, is likely to view increased tensions in the region as an opportunity for further military sales and possibly to seek closer ties to the Pakistani government. Beyond these measures and possible diplomatic support, however, China is unlikely to intervene decisively on the part of Pakistan.

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## Impact for Humanitarians



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### Worldwide:

- as with any “successful” terrorist act, there is the real possibility of “copy cat” attacks following it. Given the limited resources needed to conduct a similar attack, this remains a possibility in many parts of the world.
- although India remains the key target for further LeT actions, similar attacks against Indian interests

### In India:

- there is likelihood of further LeT attacks on India in the near future, focusing on similar targets and methods as seen in the past. The cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore are likely most at risk due to their locations and the high impact of targeting them.
- the handling of the crisis will have a direct impact on the ability of the Congress party to win the next elections, and may lead to a party with a more stridently anti-Pakistan focus to be elected.
- tightened security measures across India are likely to be implemented, possibly leading to further issues with police brutality and corruption as already seen.
- the potential movements of troops, particularly if they are drawn from Assam to the Pakistani border, may have an impact on the level of internal insurgent/Maoist threats within India.

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### In Pakistan:

- the house arrest of the alleged LeT leader is likely to lead to retaliatory attacks by the LeT against the Pakistani government and other targets
- any reduction in troop strength in NWFP and the FATA will likely allow for increased operations by insurgents in those areas
- the overall reaction to this crisis by the current Pakistani government will have a direct effect on its ongoing viability
- access by international agencies to populations in rural areas where the LeT are popular may be reduced as their motives become suspect in the wake of heightened international interest in the group
- the current attacks on NATO resupply convoys are likely to continue or increase

### In Afghanistan:

- any reductions of Pakistani troops on their Western border may lead to an increase of insurgent activity along the Afghan side of the border
- increased Indian activity in Afghanistan may lead to a local proxy conflict with Pakistan
- both covert and overt Indian influence is likely to be used to ensure that a “friendly” candidate wins the 2009 Presidential elections

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## Security Indicators



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The following indicators should be monitored in order to track the evolution of this crisis, and its potential impact on humanitarians:

- further attacks in India, successful or not, that could be linked to the LeT or ISI
- attacks or threatened attacks against Indian interests worldwide
- major changes to the Indian internal security posture around potential targets
- increased Indian activity in Afghanistan
- movement of Indian military forces from Assam or Chinese border to western border
- major changes to the Indian military exercise being held December-January, such as the inclusion of additional troops or lengthening of the exercise into February
- changes to Indian or international naval deployments or other measures potentially affecting the movement of shipping from Karachi
- any major reductions of Pakistani troops on their Western border
- the perceived degree of Pakistani cooperation with investigations into the Mumbai attack
- the perceived efficiency of Pakistani measures against the LeT
- increases in anti-Indian rhetoric by Pakistan senior military officials or ISI
- the public release of detailed information linking the ISI to the LeT

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## Recommendations



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- all relief and development actors should consider whether their current security guidelines cover terrorist attacks using the methods seen in Mumbai, as there may be “copycat” attacks in other parts of the world
- particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, agencies should ensure that staff are trained in trauma first aid, and have access to trauma first aid kits at work, during travel, and at home.
- agencies whose profile may lead them to be targeted by Islamist groups, should ensure that their site security procedures are such to mitigate the risk from similar attacks. This would include controlling access at the main entrance, the creation of safe rooms, alternate exits, and the provision of trauma first aid kits and training.
- agencies should ensure that they are able to easily track their staff movements and account for them in case they are travelling in the area of a major incident.
- agencies should ensure that administrative measures for the notification of next-of-kin, for activating insurance coverage, and for medical evacuation are in place, known to key staff, and if possible, practiced before a crisis occurs.
- the ongoing response to the Mumbai attack should be monitored by agencies working in the region, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as this will have a direct effect on the security context in both of those regions
- further advice on responding to this development can be found on the Safer Access website, or by sending a query to [enquiries@saferaccess.org](mailto:enquiries@saferaccess.org).

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## About Safer Access

### A network of humanitarian safety expertise.



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Safer Access is a not-for-profit formed to help support and facilitate the provision of humanitarian and development aid. Our enabling approach is unique, and seeks to bring a fresh perspective on methods of reaching those in need.

We work to build “safer access,” by relief and development organisations, to people in need. Safer Access seeks to change our sector’s approach to issues of safety and security, by creating a focus on enabling activities that are both sustainable and in keeping with humanitarian principles. We achieve this through activities designed to strengthen the aid sector’s ability to safely deliver assistance – through programme support, capacity building, advocacy, and the provision of information and analysis.

Safer Access supports the open-source philosophy, and seeks to apply it to humanitarian access issues involving safety and security. Safer Access training documents and best practice are not regarded as proprietary material, and are intended to be shared widely and discussed within the humanitarian community as an open source resource. This philosophy, when applied to vital information and training, reflects our desire to ensure that our support reaches all of those that are in need.

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Should you have any questions regarding this report, or about what Safer Access can do to help you achieve your goals in difficult operating environments, contact us at [enquiries@saferaccess.org](mailto:enquiries@saferaccess.org) or visit our website at [www.saferaccess.org](http://www.saferaccess.org).

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