

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Threat to Australia

Introduction

Willie Brigitte is a French national currently under investigation by Australia and France for suspected involvement in terrorist activities. Following allegations that he once trained with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and knew people in Australia linked to the group, the Australian Government moved to proscribe the LeT by introducing the Criminal Code Amendment (Hamas and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba) Bill 2003. This Bill was passed and assented to on 7 November 2003.

The Attorney-General declared that the Government had received advice that 'Lashkar-e-Taiba has links with Australia, and therefore does pose a threat to Australia and Australian interests'.¹ Although the Attorney-General did not elaborate on the nature of the advice or the threat, the Indian High Commissioner to Australia also claimed India had intelligence reports linking the LeT with Australia.²

Background³

Translated literally as 'Army of the Pure/Righteous', Lashkar-e-Taiba (pronounced TOY-BA) is a radical Sunni Islamic group based in Pakistan which primarily operates in the disputed Jammu and Kashmir region. Founded in 1989, the LeT is said to be the militant wing of Markaz Dawa wal Irshad (MDI), a Pakistan-based centre for religious instruction, established in 1987. The LeT is reported to be a leading member of the International Islamic Front, which campaigns against the US and Israel.

The LeT's primary objective is to liberate Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir and make the region an Islamic state by incorporating it into Pakistan. It is also said to advocate action within and against countries with non-Islamic governments.



The Kashmir Region
(Source: Centre for Defence Information – CDI)

Activities and Tactics

The LeT first came to prominence in fighting against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s, reportedly with the assistance of the CIA and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) service. The CIA is said to have withdrawn its support following the Soviet withdrawal, but the ISI is widely believed to have continued relations with the LeT.⁴

It was in Afghanistan that the LeT is thought to have forged links with what was to become al-Qaeda.⁵ The LeT is reported to have first entered the Jammu and Kashmir region in 1993. It is said to be 'one of the three largest and best-trained groups fighting in Kashmir',⁶ and the most brutal—the murder of more than 100 people in a 24-hour period over 1–2 August 2000 in Jammu and Kashmir was attributed to the LeT.⁷

As well as allegedly conducting mass murders and suicide attacks, the LeT reportedly possesses a range of weapons, including grenades and mortars, with which it has also staged 'hit and run' style attacks. The LeT typically targets Indian civilians, politicians and the security forces, and has attacked police stations, airports, border outposts and public transport.

Some of the more infamous attacks for which the LeT has been held responsible include an attack on a group of Israeli tourists, an attack on Delhi's Red Fort in December 2000 (which at the time housed Indian army barracks), and an attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, allegedly with another Kashmiri group, Jaish-e-Mohammed (also proscribed in Australia). As recently as September 2003, LeT militants were said to have been planning to bomb Delhi's US embassy.⁸ Although the LeT may rail against those nations which

support India in the Kashmir conflict,⁹ the LeT is not known to have ever specifically targeted Australian interests. The LeT is, however, reported to be active in post-war Iraq,¹⁰ where Australian troops are currently deployed.

Membership and Leadership

The LeT's overall leader is generally regarded to be university professor Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, one of the LeT's original founders. Saeed's resignation as leader shortly after the LeT was banned by the US and Pakistan, and his appointment of Maulana Abdul Wahid Kashmiri as his successor, was seen as an attempt to create confusion, rather than as a genuine change in leadership.¹¹

Whilst the LeT's exact strength is unclear, it is estimated to comprise some 300 mainly Pakistani and Afghan members. David Hicks, one of two Australians detained by the US at Guantanamo Bay, is also alleged by the Australian Government to have trained with the LeT.¹² No further evidence for this allegation appears to be available.

Funding and Support

It is claimed that the LeT maintains links with Islamic militants in the Philippines, the Middle East and Chechnya, and that Osama bin Laden is

one of the LeT's primary financiers.¹³ Indian agencies have reportedly tracked LeT operatives to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia,¹⁴ and a senior al-Qaeda figure, Abu Zubaydah, was found in a LeT safehouse in March 2002.

The LeT is thought to be funded by the same networks of commercial enterprises that secretly fund al-Qaeda,¹⁵ and whilst the exact amount of funding available to the LeT is unknown, it is said to have raised £2 million in the UK in 2001 alone.¹⁶

Pakistani media reports suggest the LeT invests in legitimate businesses and assets such as real estate, in order to supplement its income.¹⁷

Current Status

Although still widely referred to as Lashkar-e-Taiba, the group actually re-organised and renamed itself in early 2002 shortly before being banned by the Pakistani Government, possibly in an attempt to circumvent the ban. It is now officially known as Jamaat-ad Dawa ('Party of Preachers').

Although it has been an offence in Australia since March 2002 to fund or resource the LeT, its recent proscription makes it an offence to also train with, recruit for, belong to or otherwise support the LeT. The LeT is also banned in Canada, the UK, the US, Pakistan and the EU, but has not been banned by the UN.¹⁸

It is claimed that until 11 September 2001, the US effectively ignored the LeT and its activities, and that it was largely due to India's insistence that the LeT had conducted a series of attacks against Indian civilians, that the US began pressuring the Pakistani Government to act. According to reports, 'that pressure intensified after the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament'.¹⁹

According to the Australian Government, 'the LeT is assessed to be preparing, planning, and fostering the conduct of terrorist acts ... with the intention of coercing, or influencing by intimidation the Government and people of India'.²⁰ Whilst this might be true, any implication that it also applies to Australia is not widely supported.

Australian academic, Dr Samina Yasmeen, has stated that although there is the potential for the LeT to establish itself in Australia, there is no evidence that it has so far done so.²¹ Similarly, Bashir Malik, former president of the Pakistan Community Association of Australia, is reported as saying that he

would be surprised if anybody associated with the LeT 'turned up' in Australia.²²

The executive director of the Australian Muslim Public Affairs Committee, Amir Butler, has stated that the 'LeT have never...expressed any animosity towards Australia...it is difficult to see the threat that a Kashmiri independence group poses to Australian security'.²³

Similarly, Clive Williams, a terrorism expert from the Australian National University, says whilst the LeT may be fundraising in Australia, its focus is on India and it does not pose any real threat to Australia.²⁴ He says the LeT 'would be unlikely to be interested itself in terrorist activities in Australia'.²⁵

Conclusion

There appears to be little argument that the LeT is a violent extremist group, implicated in various attacks, but it is not clear in what sense the LeT poses a threat to Australia and its interests. Australia indeed seems to be an unlikely location from which to wage a Kashmiri separatist battle.

It is possible that the LeT is acting on behalf of or in concert with al-Qaeda, as do many Islamic extremist groups, and although links with al-Qaeda might well justify banning the LeT in Australia, even the Government acknowledges that the LeT's real target appears to be India.

The proscription of the LeT reflects the Government's understandable and long-held desire to be able to proscribe entities independently from the UN process. However, it could be said that the availability of such a power carries with it the responsibility of justifying its use. Proscription is designed to outlaw entities deemed a threat to a nation's national security, but it could be argued that despite mounting media speculation over Brigitte's activities, the Government has never adequately articulated the threat posed by the LeT to Australia, or the need to proscribe it.

1. House of Representatives, *Debates*, 4 November 2003, p. 21910.
2. ABC Radio Australia, 7 November 2003 [Hhttp://www.abc.net.au/ra/asiapac/program/s/984882.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/ra/asiapac/program/s/984882.htm) (16 December 2003).
3. Sourced primarily from 'Lashkar-e-Tayyiba', *Jane's Terrorism & Insurgency Centre* (JTIC), [Hhttp://jtic.janes.com](http://jtic.janes.com) (5 November 2003) and US Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, p. 113.
4. e.g.: JTIC.
5. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, [Hhttp://www.sgc.gc.h](http://www.sgc.gc.h)

Hca/national_security/counter-terrorism/H

HEntities_e.asp#30 (13 February 2004).

6. US Department of State, op. cit.
7. International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), [Hhttp://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgdet.cfm?orgid=81H](http://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgdet.cfm?orgid=81H) (26 November 2003).
8. 'A Major Anti-terrorist Intelligence Operation', *Jane's Intelligence Digest – Intelligence Pointers*, 5 September 2003.
9. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 October 2003, p. 6.
10. *Courcy's Intelligence Review*, 4 December 2003.
11. JTIC, op. cit.
12. 'Capture of Australian by Northern Alliance', media release, Attorney-General (Australia), 12 December 2001.
13. JTIC, op. cit. and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, op. cit.
14. *India Today International*, 8 December 2003, p. 15.
15. JTIC, op. cit.
16. *India Today International*, op. cit.
17. cited in B. Raman, 3 May 2003, [Hhttp://www.saag.org/papers7/paper678.html](http://www.saag.org/papers7/paper678.html) (13 February 2004).
18. The UN only bans those entities it is satisfied have links with al-Qaeda and/or the Taliban. As Australia's current proscription powers only enable the proscription of entities already banned by the UN, a separate piece of legislation was required to proscribe the LeT.
19. *BBC News* online, 26 August 2003, [Hhttp://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3181925.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3181925.stm) (28 November 2003).
20. Attorney-General's Department (Aust.), [Hhttp://nationalsecurity.ag.gov.au/www/nationalsecurityHome.nsf/0/F8712E53751DBCA9CA256DDA00824828?OpenDocument](http://nationalsecurity.ag.gov.au/www/nationalsecurityHome.nsf/0/F8712E53751DBCA9CA256DDA00824828?OpenDocument) (28 November 2003).
21. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, op. cit.
22. *ibid.*
23. *Scoop*, 17 November 2003, [Hhttp://www.H_scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/HL0311/S00122.htm](http://www.H_scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/HL0311/S00122.htm) (28 November 2003).
24. ABC Radio Australia, op. cit.
25. *The Australian*, 5 November 2003, p. 13.

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