

FIRST LESSONS OF THE MUMBAI CARNAGE

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As these words are being written, on Friday morning, the situation in Mumbai remains extremely confused as operations are still underway, more than 42 hours after the beginning of one of the deadliest terrorist offensive of those past years. Some lessons can nonetheless be drawn from this unprecedented crisis.

1) The narrative of the events remains sketchy

- Late on Wednesday, November 26, terrorist commandos who apparently were using rubber dinghies from an Indian fishing boat hijacked several days ago, disembarked at several locations in the city.
- The first attacks started at about 4 pm GMT (between 8 pm and 9 pm in Mumbai). The first reports mentioned shooting near the **Oberoi-Trident** hotel and the **Taj Mahal** hotel.
- At 7 pm GMT the Indian police announced that “automatic weapon and grenade attacks” had been reported at 7 different locations.
- **In the middle of the evening, it appeared that several hit and run-type attacks had occurred against an hospital, a train station in the northern part of the city while, at three separate locations, the Oberoi-Trident and Taj Mahal hotels, and the Chabad Lubavitch Jewish center, hostage-takings were underway.**

2) The operation bears the mark of the Al Qaeda network ; it may have been conducted by homegrown terrorists but they most certainly received foreign support

- The “**Deccan Mujahideen**” is an unknown organization. This is most likely a cover name used for that specific operation that is designed to hide another organization (maybe **Lashkar-e-Taiba**).
- According to the Indian press, three terrorists who have been arrested have confessed that they were members of **Lashkar-e-Taiba** (“Army of the

Righteous”), a Pakistani Islamist organization that is very active in the Kashmir region but that also targets U.S. and Western interests as well as the Christian presence in Pakistan. **Lashkar-e-Taiba** is linked to **Al Qaeda** which uses safehouses provided by the Islamic organization in Pakistan to hide some of its leaders.

- Several other hints indicate that regardless of the terrorists’ identities, they are linked to the Al Qaeda network. **The simultaneous and coordinated attacks against several targets at remote locations, the number of people involved in the attacks, the age of the terrorists – who according to several reports, were between 20 and 25 years of age – , their determination and their willingness to cause the maximum of casualties are unequivocal.**
- Likewise, **the fact that a Jewish center was targeted – a group with local motives would not have done that – underscores that these attacked are part of the “global jihad.”**
- **It is possible that some of the attackers are not Indian or are Indian but born and raised abroad** (an identity card from **Mauritius**, where a large Indian community lives, has been found on one of the attackers’ body, agencies reported on Friday morning). The exact composition of the commando (nationalities, ages, geographical origins, “social profile”) will provide valuable information in order to assess the current Islamic threat in India.
- As soon as the crisis began, authorities mentioned Pakistan’s responsibility. It is likely that all or at least some of the attackers were trained in Pakistan or Afghanistan (as were two of the perpetrators of the July 7, 2005 attacks in London) because **such an operation requires lengthy planning and training, but it is quite unlikely that all the attackers were foreigners. The core of the attackers must be from India or at least people who knew Mumbai very well must have taken part in the planning of the operation.**

3) The operation may seem unprecedented but it could serve as an example for the future

- **Taken separately, several specificities of the Mumbai attacks have been previously witnessed somewhere** -- lengthy hostage-takings (in Beslan and Moscow, Russia) or simultaneous attacks (Casablanca in 2003, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, etc.), to name a few. As for the attacks designed to cause a maximum number of casualties, they are, as previously mentioned, one of the Al Qaeda network’s trademarks. Nonetheless, **this is the first time that all those characteristics are combined and, most notably, combined with high immediate lethality attacks (against an hospital and a train station) and hostage-taking leading to a siege of more than 40 hours** (at least 43 hours at the time these words are written).

- These attacks are clearly a textbook example that **could, it is to be expected, inspire several others. Those kinds of coordinated attacks, extremely difficult to handle for the authorities, could indeed occur in other countries where tourists and foreign nationals could be targeted**, such as in Indonesia, Turkey (coordinated attacks occurred several years ago) or in North Africa (Morocco or Tunisia).

4) **The attack was extremely sophisticated**

- An attack of this kind, in an overcrowded city such as Mumbai requires **months of location research and planning**; that could only have been conducted in a **friendly location** in order to avoid drawing attention (so, maybe in Pakistan).
- According to early reports, **fake uniforms and an ambulance or a police vehicle may have been used for the first attacks (including against the hospital), which again underscores the level of precision of the planning and the high tactical ability of the attackers.**
- It seems that the boat used to carry the terrorists near the coast was an Indian fishing boat that had been hijacked fifteen days ago off Pakistan. If this was to be confirmed it would reinforce the idea of the “Pakistani lead.”
- The number of terrorists involved will give an indication of the significance of the operation that some local media have called the “Indian 9-11.” **Nonetheless, given that there were at least 5 targets located several kilometres from one another, one can assess that there could be, at least between 20 and 30 attackers involved.**
- The selection of the targets was made in a rigorous and clever manner. By attacking a station and a hospital, the terrorists were targeting the population, ensuring a large number of casualties. By getting into two luxurious hotels, they were making sure that they could face British and American nationals, who appeared to have been prime targets, and they were putting the security forces in a nightmarish situation. Taking back the control of a hotel – the Taj Mahal and the Oberoi are very large with hundreds of rooms each – is quite tricky: one has to go room by room, search dozens of hallways and hundreds of installations (bathrooms, restrooms, kitchens etc.) that could be as much traps, and to sort out the terrorist from the hotel guests, and of course keep the collateral damage as low as possible. Lastly, by targeting a Jewish center, the attackers would win over a large part of the Islamic-Arabic networks that would otherwise have felt unconcerned by attacks that occurred far from their usual area of activity.