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Five Years On, Mumbai Terror Masterminds Still at Large

By Bruce Riedel

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Five years after the horrific terrorist attack, the leader of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Tayyiba hasn't been brought to justice—and chilling details of an American jihadi's role have emerged.

Five years ago, the city of Mumbai was attacked by Pakistani terrorists in the most important terror attack since 9/11. The 10 terrorists' tactics have been copied by others since—for example, just weeks ago in Nairobi. We know a great deal more today than ever about the attack, its planners, and the critical American hand in the plot.

Two fabulous five-star hotels were the main targets. The Oberoi and the Taj hotels were attacked by teams of terrorists from the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyiba group (LeT), along with the city's train station, a restaurant that catered to foreign visitors and the rich, a Chabad House for visiting Israeli and American Jews, and the city hospital. Between November 26 and 29, 164 people died and over 300 were injured by the 10 terrorists. Six Americans were among the victims. In India, the horror is known as 26/11 and the battle to kill the terrorists as Operation Black Tornado. For the terrorists and LeT, it was Operation Bombay.

LeT had carefully chosen the targets and meticulously researched them over several years. They received considerable assistance in doing so from two sources—the Pakistani intelligence service, called the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate or ISI, and al Qaeda. Each had its own

agenda for the operation. But the targets were the same—Indians, Americans, and Jews—the targets of the global jihad started by al Qaeda in the late 1990s. I pointed this out to President-elect Barack Obama and his transition team at the time in several briefings in my role as South Asia transition director after his election. The attack was intended to change dramatically the future of South Asia, perhaps even by provoking a war between the two nuclear powers rising in the subcontinent.

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Today, perhaps the most shocking element of the Mumbai attack was the role played by David Coleman Headley, an American citizen of Pakistani descent, in the intelligence collection that preceded the attack. Headley pleaded guilty in March 2010 to conspiracy to commit murder based on his role in the Mumbai attack. Headley was born Daood Sayed Gilani in Washington, D.C., in 1960. His Pakistani father worked for Voice of America. Headley got into trouble with the law as a youth and was arrested on drug charges. He became an asset of the DEA and was sent to spy on Pakistani drug dealers. In 2002, according to his guilty plea, he joined Lashkar-e-Tayyiba on a visit to Pakistan. Over the next three years, he says he traveled to Pakistan five times for training in weapons handling, intelligence collection, surveillance, clandestine operations, and other terrorist skills by both LeT and the ISI. He also developed contacts with al Qaeda.

Beginning in 2005, he said, he was given the task of traveling to India from the U.S. and conducting the surveillance for the Mumbai attacks. As a first step, he said, LeT told him to change his name to David Coleman Headley in Philadelphia, to hide his Pakistani identity when traveling abroad. Then he made five trips between 2005 and 2008 to India, each time stopping in Pakistan on the way back to get new instructions from LeT and the ISI and to report his surveillance results. He visited each of the targets and recorded their locations with GPS systems; he studied carefully the security around each and he became one of the masterminds of the plot.

In his guilty confession, Headley said the raid also was planned with active ISI involvement at every stage. At each of his meetings in Pakistan, he said he met with ISI officers as well as the LeT terror leaders. Sometimes the ISI gave him particular assignments separate from what the LeT asked; for example, tasking him with taking photos of an Indian nuclear facility near Mumbai. The ISI also provided him with money to help set up his cover story in Mumbai, including an initial \$25,000 in cash. Headley also said the ISI provided some of the training for the attackers, including from elite Pakistani naval commandoes. According to Headley, the ISI was especially pleased with the choice of the Jewish Chabad House as a target.

A fabulous new book, *The Siege: 68 Hours inside the Taj Hotel*, by Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy, adds a new wrinkle. Their investigations in Pakistan, India, and the U.S. led them to believe LeT and the ISI became suspicious that Headley was a double agent, still secretly giving information to the Americans. At the date for the attack came closer, Headley was frozen out of the plot so he could not reveal any details. The plotters also were worried about his three

wives, one of whom had reported his suspicious activity to the American Embassy in Islamabad. According to the book, LeT leader Hafez Saeed had to intervene personally at one point in Headley's complicated love life to keep the plot a secret.

Headley worked with al Qaeda after Mumbai on an even more ambitious plot to attack Copenhagen in 2009, probably during the Global Climate Change summit that year. A tip-off from British intelligence led to his arrest and subsequent conviction. The Pakistani mastermind of the Mumbai plot, LeT leader Hafiz Saeed, remains free in Pakistan, where he continues to be a darling of the ISI and regularly calls for more attacks on India and America. Five years after Mumbai, justice has yet to be served.