

# WebMemo



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## Terrorist Strike at Fault Lines in South Asia

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On July 11, terrorists attacked the transportation network in Mumbai, India, killing and wounding hundreds, possibly more than a thousand. A grenade attack against a bus earlier in the day killed five people in Kashmir and raised suspicions of a coordinated attack across the country. Though there was no initial claim of responsibility for either attack, it is very likely, given the recent history of the region, that Islamic terrorist groups are responsible. It appears unlikely that Pakistan had any direct or indirect involvement in these attacks. For the United States, the most important geopolitical concern arising from these events is to ensure the Pakistan-India border dialogue continues productively despite the attacks.

Before 9/11, Pakistan actively supported terrorist groups in Kashmir, claiming they were Kashmiri “freedom fighters.” As late as December 2001, terrorists attacked India’s parliament and killed seven people. Since then, President Musharraf has withdrawn his support from international terrorist groups operating in Pakistan and, presumably, shut down their operations. Nonetheless, India has remained deeply suspicious of Pakistan.

Since November 2003, a cease-fire has held between India and Pakistan, and diplomatic progress has also been steady. A year after the cease-fire, India felt safe enough to begin withdrawing troops from the border. In February 2005, New Delhi and Islamabad launched bus service across the cease-fire line; train service followed a year

later. In October 2005, India and Pakistan signed a security accord promising advance warning of ballistic missile tests, and they both committed to unilateral moratoriums on nuclear weapon tests. Although final resolution to the question of Kashmir seems distant, there appears to be little desire for a return to military confrontation.

The perception of a renewed terrorist campaign, however, could upset the delicate peace process. Indian police will investigate those responsible for the bombing, and if they suspect Pakistani involvement, the attacks could have the collateral damage of disrupting border dialogue and escalating tensions between two nuclear powers.

Fully comprehending the gravity of the situation, Pakistan immediately condemned the attacks in the strongest language and called them a “despicable act of terrorism.” Probably no other country has more to lose from renewed hostility than Pakistan. India is substantially larger and wealthier than Pakistan. The development of a nuclear weapon deterrent was extremely expensive, and Pakistan has no wish to engage in an arms race with its giant neighbor. Furthermore, American

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suspicion of Pakistani involvement with international terrorism would unravel all of Pakistan's efforts to reform its economy and garner American security assistance.

There is plenty of reason to suspect that this attack was the work of terrorist groups not associated with Pakistan. The style of multiple bombs is very reminiscent of the Madrid and London bombings, both of which were the work of al Qaeda affiliate organizations. Further, al Qaeda has been trying for many years to recruit operatives among the India Muslim population. This attack could mean they finally have a cell operating in India.

For American policymakers the most important priority will be to call for clear thinking in New Delhi and Islamabad to preserve the Pakistan-India border dialogue. Washington must act to head-off any escalation of tension or any war-of-words between the two capitals. Indian security forces are capable of tracking down the terrorists that perpetuated this attack. The United States should assist when asked and encourage Pakistan to share any information India requests that might lead to the capture and liquidation of this terrorist group.

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