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## Mumbai and the 21st Century “powder keg”: Pakistan, India and Afghanistan

*One hundred years ago, when the Twentieth Century was still in its infancy, a group of small but unstable nations known as the Balkans was known to many as a “powder keg” in view of its volatile mix of politics, religion and nationalistic aspirations. A part of Europe located between two decaying empires — the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire — the nations of the Balkans were aligned to larger powers, powerful allies who in turn had designs on them. On June 28, 1914, a terrorist act purportedly encouraged by Serbia occurred in Bosnia’s capital Sarajevo that resulted in the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, heirs to the crown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This terrorist act mobilized the nations of Europe and eventually the United States of America into action, launching much of the world into a century of war and conflict: World War I, World War II and the Cold War.*

*While we hope that history will not repeat itself, recent developments on the Asian Subcontinent point to the presence of another “powder keg,” composed of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. These three countries together have a population of almost 1.4 billion — almost one-fifth of the world’s population — and a significant land mass of 4.7 million square kilometers (1.8 million square miles). This new, 21st century powder keg is dangerously on the verge of detonating due to a malignant cocktail of religion, politics and nationalistic aspirations, and recent terrorist provocations are adding sparks to the smoldering embers. The November 28, 2008, terrorist attack on Mumbai, India was undoubtedly intended as a provocation to set off a larger conflagration in this volatile area of the world. Hopefully, this terrorist attack will not incite the same legacy of conflict and violence precipitated by the terrorists in Sarajevo. This issue of The Lipman Report® examines the players and dynamics of this growing powder keg, the details of the Mumbai attack and the impact this attack and state of affairs may have on the United States and the world.*

### **Roots of the Crisis: India and Pakistan**

The period following World War II marked the end of 200 years of British rule in India. In the interest of averting the escalating Hindu-Muslim violence and the challenges inherent in securing a united country, India was partitioned. A separate Pakistan would be a preferable alternative to the anarchy of communal

killings, and would hopefully bring peace to the region. The subcontinent was partitioned on August 15, 1947, and Pakistan came into existence. Pakistan cordoned off a section of India for the Muslims, who made up about 20 percent of India’s population.

The carnage that followed, however, was far more than anyone had anticipated. Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus who had once been peaceful neighbors became enemies overnight. A religious war ensued, with a mass exodus of millions of Sikhs and Hindus from Pakistan to India and an equal number of Muslims from India to Pakistan. The atrocities and violence committed during the tumultuous months following the 1947 partition cost the lives of as many as one million people. Today, more than six decades later, vivid recollections of these events of butchery and murder still haunt both sides of the border and continue to fan the flames of ethnic and religious hatred. Since independence, India and Pakistan have fought three wars and still face many unsolved issues.

The disputed territory of Kashmir is the main reason why India and Pakistan remain bitter enemies after more than 50 years of independence. In both 1949 and 1965, wars erupted over the status of this region in the far north of India. Over the last several decades, Kashmir has been gripped by bloody internal civil disputes that have, since their recent escalation in the late 1980s, claimed 40,000 to 60,000 lives. A series of massacres and incursions during this period has brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war on numerous occasions.

While Kashmir has remained the primary cause of the violence, India continues to blame cross-border terrorism by Islamic fanatics — purportedly supported by the Pakistan Inter Service Agency (ISI), Pakistan’s national intelligence agency — for the conflict. The bombings, ambushes, suicide attacks and further killings continued through the 90s, culminating in the December 2001 attack, when Islamic commandoes stormed the Indian Parliament building in New Delhi. This festering problem is still very much afloat, and underpinning the deadlock is the harsh reality: that a bullish stance on Kashmir is a vote winner for the beleaguered leaders of both Pakistan and India. With both countries now fully-fledged nuclear states, Kashmir has become one of the world’s most dangerous geo-political flashpoints.

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### **Mumbai: The events of November 26, 2008**

On Wednesday night, November 26, a group carried out a complex terrorist-style attack in Mumbai, the financial center of India. In addition to seizing two luxury hotels and a Jewish facility, the attackers carried out a series of random attacks throughout the city, using automatic weapons and hand grenades. Although the exact chain of events has not yet been brought to light, it appears that at least one group came to Mumbai from Karachi, Pakistan, via ship, then hijacked an Indian vessel and landed at an isolated beach. This group may have also joined operatives already deployed in Mumbai. The attacks were sophisticated and complex, and of markedly longer duration than previous terrorist-style operations in India. The attacking terrorists stunned authorities, not only with the advanced weaponry they were using, but with their comfort with modern technology. The terrorists navigated across the Arabian Sea to Mumbai from Karachi, Pakistan, with the help of a global positioning system handset. While in progress, they communicated using a satellite phone with Pakistani terrorists believed to have coordinated the attacks. They recognized their targets and knew the most direct routes to reach them in part because they had studied satellite photos from Google Earth. Throughout the three-day siege at two luxury hotels and a Jewish center, the Pakistani-based handlers communicated with the attackers using Internet phones that complicate efforts to trace and intercept calls. These handlers were apparently watching the attacks unfold live on television and informed the attackers of the movement of the security forces from news accounts, providing the gunmen with instructions and encouragement.

Armed with AK-47s, grenades and military-type explosives, the attackers carried out a logistically sophisticated and coordinated assault on the financial capital of India. At least two teams entered the city by watercraft, breaking into smaller groups as they made their way to the Taj Mahal hotel, the Oberoi-Trident hotel complex and the Nariman Chabad House, a Jewish center in the same area of Mumbai. These tactical teams dispersed across the city, attacking prominent sites where foreign VIPs were sure to be present. They infiltrated the hotels through back entrances and kitchens, thus enhancing the element of surprise as they opened fire on guests in the dining rooms and atria of the hotels.

The 10 terrorists separated into five two-man teams. The teams randomly killed people and held hostages in

Mumbai's most prestigious hotels, while also assaulting additional strategic sites in Mumbai, creating an overwhelming sense of chaos and confusion over the whole city. Among other sites that were attacked were Mumbai's main train station, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, as well as Cama Hospital, offices of the Times of India, restaurants, a theatre and bars frequented by foreigners. In some instances, those possessing American and British passports were singled out. Due to the attackers' excellent coordination, the multiple attacks took place nearly simultaneously, thus ensuring maximum confusion and tumult. The fact that so many attacks happened at once derailed effective police responses, explaining why some of the operations at the Nariman House and the hotels lasted more than 48 hours.

The 10 men who carried out these attacks were among 30 recruits selected for suicide missions, all of whom belonged to the Pakistani militant organization Lashkar-e-Taiba. Upon being selected by the Lashkar leaders in Pakistan, they were kept sequestered in a house for three months, and were provided highly specialized training, including marine combat skills. They were then divided into two man teams; each team assigned a different target, information they were forbidden from sharing with other teams. Each attacker carried a dozen grenades, a 9-millimeter handgun with two 18-round clips and an AK-47, seven to nine 30-round magazines and more than one hundred rounds of loose ammunition. Each terrorist also carried a 17.6-pound bomb.

The immediate response by the Mumbai and Indian police forces to these highly coordinated attacks was courageous and brave, but unquestionably pathetic in the face of overwhelming firepower. Lacking a sophisticated police force, proper equipment and effective crisis training, the responders arrived with dated, World War I-era weapons and no night vision goggles, while the local television coverage was irresponsibly, unintentionally assisting the terrorists. Additionally, a commando group in New Delhi, specially trained to respond to these types of attacks, encountered a nine-hour delay in arriving because of the lack of a designated plane. These colossal shortcomings in emergency response tragically heightened the impact of the attacks, which in the end carried a death toll of almost 200 lives.

The commando-style siege in Mumbai is raising new concerns in Western intelligence services, both about the

sophistication of the tactics used and the unsettling possibility that the operation was conducted with a possible al Qaeda connection. Since the attacks in Mumbai, al Qaeda Web sites and chatrooms have lit up with aspiring militants urging more such attacks at other targets around the globe.

#### **Pakistan: Lashkar-e-Taiba**

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT) is a Pakistani-based, radical Islamic group, an organization that has proven formidable owing to its close-knit discipline, aggressive tactics and ability to mobilize supporters. This group has waged a major terrorism campaign against India during the past 20 years with the goal of incorporating majority Muslim provinces in India — such as Kashmir — into Pakistan. Pakistan ceased supporting and eventually banned the activities of LT in view of Indian allegations that the Pakistan Inter Service Agency (ISI) was backing this insurgent group in a secret war against India. The leaders of LT, however, reconstituted the organization under the name Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JD). Designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government, JD representatives claim they operate as a charitable organization and political party with thousands of loyal supporters who enjoy close ties with the Pakistani government — and more ominously with al Qaeda. JD is headquartered in Lahore, Pakistan, a growing militant center of power, and is believed to run at least 10 terrorist training camps in border areas neighboring India and Afghanistan.

To add to the caldron, other Kashmiri Islamist militant groups that were under the command and control of the ISI several years ago have increased their autonomy and spread their network inside India. Pakistan has more or less admitted that its military-intelligence establishment has lost control of all of these groups. India has also alleged that the Pakistani security apparatus is conducting rogue operations that no longer answer to the state. The growing power of terrorist and militant groups could accelerate Pakistan's descent into chaos, which could in turn cause the biggest source of geo-strategic concern for not only this region, but for the rest of the world. In addition to its status as a nuclear power, Pakistan is an important player in the war on terrorism and if its authorities are unable to stem this surging tide of Islamic fundamentalism, terrible consequences could ensue.

Ethnically, religiously and territorially divided, Pakistan began as a nation in crisis. It was not until the military

intervened in the early days of parliamentary democracy and established itself as a guarantor of the state's stability that Pakistan was able to stand on its own. Given the current state of the military and the mounting stresses on the government, Pakistan is showing signs not only of a failed state, but of a ticking time bomb whose dangerous instability could engulf the region and the world in political and military turmoil.

#### **An Off-the-Shelf Plan?**

Fifteen years ago, eight individuals were arrested and later convicted of plotting an elaborate, multistage attack on key sites in New York City. The terrorists, who were linked to Osama bin Laden's then relatively new and overlooked group al Qaeda, planned to storm Manhattan armed with automatic rifles, grenades and improvised explosives. In multiple raids on key targets, they aimed to kill as many people as possible. The attack — that was thwarted by the FBI and came to be known as the "Landmarks" plot — was incredibly similar to the Mumbai attack. The plot was well organized, targeting prestigious hotels in the hope of killing prominent people, while simultaneously attacking the critical transportation infrastructure. The similarities in the two attack strategies and targets are evident. Mumbai and New York are both financial centers and home to major stock exchanges. In both cities, the terrorists aimed for high profile soft targets rather than military installations or government buildings. Both plans included peripheral targets to cause confusion and chaos. And in both plots the use of watercraft presented a distinctive tactical similarity; Mumbai is a peninsula and Manhattan an island. Considering that the terrorists launched their attack from Karachi, Pakistan, and keeping in mind the previous involvement of the ISI — which has reported connections with al Qaeda leaders in western Pakistan — it is very likely that al Qaeda at least provided the blueprints for this operation.

Ultimately, the biggest difference between the Landmarks plot and the Mumbai attack is that the Mumbai attack succeeded. The failure of the "Landmarks" plot probably provided key lessons to the planners of the Mumbai attack, who were able to carry out the attack without detection and with the full element of surprise against virtually unprotected targets and unprepared government agencies. Gauging by the success of the Mumbai incident, we can expect similar strategies and tactics in the future against unprepared targets.

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### Afghanistan

The third member of this “powder keg” is Afghanistan. Afghanistan is for all intents and purposes a failed state. The Taliban, a militant fundamentalist group, appears to be in the ascendancy while a thoroughly corrupt government, supported — just as the Taliban were — by the illegal drug trade, struggles to keep the country intact. Seven years after the rout of al Qaeda and the fall of the Taliban, the situation again appears dire. The Pakistani confrontation with India has resulted in Pakistan removing its troops from its northwestern border with Afghanistan to its eastern border with India. This is not helpful for the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. The main supply route for the coalition troops struggling in landlocked Afghanistan is through the Khyber Pass located in this area. Al Qaeda has set up camp in the western provinces of Pakistan and is assisting the Taliban in the battle with the coalition forces. These areas, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the Northwest Frontier Province, have effectively turned into enclaves for al Qaeda and the Taliban. Additionally, the Taliban said they would back the Pakistan Army by deploying hundreds of suicide bombers in the case of any military action with India. The Mumbai incident illustrates the interconnectedness of events in this volatile area of the world and demonstrates unequivocally how the consequences adversely affect the war on terrorism.

### The War on Terror Has Not Gone Away

The success of the Mumbai operation, coupled with current economic turmoil, has heightened the short-term risk of a terrorist attack as radical groups probe for weakening border protections and new gaps in defenses. The deepening global financial crisis could weaken fragile governments in the world’s most dangerous areas and undermine the ability of the United States and its allies to respond to a new wave of security threats; it could threaten the survival of friendly regimes from Pakistan to the Middle East while forcing western nations to cut spending on defense, intelligence and foreign aid. This is of particular concern regarding Pakistan because this is a state already struggling with violent insurgencies and widespread poverty. A prolonged economic crisis could trigger a period of widespread unrest that could strengthen the hand of extremists and threaten Pakistan’s democratically elected government with grave consequences not only for the region, but for the entire planet in view of its nuclear arsenal. The current financial crisis has given al Qaeda an opening. Senior al Qaeda

leaders are elated by the West’s economic troubles, which they regard as a vindication of their efforts and a sign of the superpower’s weakness.

*It is clear that 2009 will bring measurable changing of the guard to Washington while America is undergoing a shift in national priorities. The economic crisis has rechanneled our collective anxieties and overall focus. While the attacks of 9/11 will never be forgotten, the bankruptcies, collapsing 401(k)s, mortgage foreclosures and bailouts and are now at the forefront of the American psyche. America may be swapping the war on terror for the one waged to save its worsening economy. Meanwhile, other countries around the globe continue an active war on terrorism. India, following the tragedy of Mumbai, and Belgium, which recently charged six terrorists from the Belgium branch of al Qaeda with a suicide plot, are stepping up their own counterterrorism and prosecution efforts. Britain recently convicted a British doctor of Iraqi descent for the attack on Glasgow airport and the attempt to detonate two bombs in London’s West End, sentencing him to a harsh multi-decade prison term. Germany is prosecuting a man accused of funding a terrorist camp and encouraging others to join al Qaeda. Meanwhile, in America there is talk about repealing the Patriot Act even while global terrorism has not disappeared. Mumbai was attacked because it was a vulnerable target and this is not the time to lapse into a complacency that might expose America to a similar fate. Furthermore, if the military confrontation between India and Pakistan erupts in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, multinational corporations could face a number of new threats from militant groups, beyond the traditional security problems. Even while facing economic challenges, we need to stay focused on the bigger picture, and remember that we are living in a crisis age of ongoing terrorist threat coupled with the possession of nuclear weapons by unstable states. **The time for urgency is now®.***



The Lipman Report Editors