

Analysis: Mumbai Train Bombings of 2006

India accuses Kashmiri-backed terrorists of attacking its financial capital

Summary

- On July 11, 2006 a series of seven bombs exploded along the Western Suburban Railway in Mumbai on India's west coast, killing over 200 people and injuring over 700
- This rail-way is the primary link between downtown Mumbai and its suburban areas
- Attackers placed the bombs in the trains' first class compartments
- Seven explosions occurred within an eleven-minute period during the evening rush hour. Police found and defused an eighth bomb at the Borivili station
- According to Indian police sources, the bombs consisted of pressure cookers filled with ammonium nitrate, RDX (a base commonly used in military explosives), and petroleum hydrocarbon oil. This same mixture was used in the bombing of the western Indian town of Malegoan in September 2006
- India's National Bomb Data Centre concluded that a cell phone was used to trigger the explosives
- Lashkar-e-Qahhar, a group which claims connections to Lakshar-e-Toiba (LET) and al-Qaeda, claimed responsibility for the attacks
- The Kashmiri terrorist group LET denied responsibility, as did al-Qaeda, though the latter did claim that the attacks were a result of Indian oppression of its Muslim minority
- In December 2006, Indian police filed charges stemming from the bombings against 28 members of LET and the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). Fifteen suspects are still at large. Most suspects have links to Pakistan, including alleged ringleader Azam Cheema, a Pakistani national



The Search for the Bombers

- Initially, allegations of responsibility fell on LET, SIMI, and Pakistan's Intelligence Service ISI
- Militant groups LET and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) released statements describing the attacks as barbaric and inhuman. Though the groups have been said to be backing off of direct attacks in India, they have still been accused of providing intelligence and support to other groups, like SIMI
- Indian authorities rounded up members of SIMI, which is banned in India; charges were not immediately announced against any of those arrested
- Abdul Karim Tunda, an infamous Indian terrorist, was arrested in Kenya after the attacks. He was wanted for involvement in almost three dozen bomb attacks and other acts of terrorism in India, and was one of 20 individuals that India had asked Pakistan to extradite after the 2001 attack on India's Parliament

A History of Violence

- India and Pakistan have been rivals since they achieved independence almost 60 years ago, when the countries were partitioned from British India
- The two countries were released from the British colonial empire in 1947, and split into Muslim-dominated Pakistan and India, which is heavily Hindu, but ideologically secular
- Despite separation, there remains roughly the same amount of Muslims in India as in the whole of Pakistan
- The two countries recently fought in the Kargill Conflict in 1999, over the disputed territory of Kashmir; India and Pakistan have battled over Kashmir since the partition
- The bombings created tension between the government and Muslims in India. Mumbai, a city of 20 million, has 4 million Muslims. Many felt unfairly targeted after the bombings
- The terrorist group LET is the military wing of the Pakistan-based religious organization Markaz-ud-Dawa-wal-Irshad (MDI), an anti-U.S. missionary organization founded in 1989
- LET's main objective is to engage in jihad to restore Islam all over India, starting with Kashmir and Jammu. LET is notorious for its use of suicide attacks and outright massacres of unarmed Hindus and Sikhs in Kashmir
- LET was also accused of endorsing an attack on India's parliament building in December of 2001, as well as at the Red Fort, a popular tourist attraction and historical location (see <http://www.indiaforvisitors.com/states/delhi/redfort.htm>)



Pakistan refused to cooperate with India over the handover of many Islamic militants



Law Enforcement Response

- Authorities shut down the train system for the 4 hours following the attacks
- Police defused an additional bomb at a train station that had already been targeted
- Security procedures on the railway have changed. Formerly, the system had been quite relaxed; after the bombings, non-passengers could no longer stand on railway platforms
- Additionally, authorities set up metal detectors and CCTV networks for 24-hour monitoring of stations on the network

- Since the new measures have been put in place, some potential terrorist attacks have been prevented. For example, on January 21, 2007, police arrested four people with about six kilograms of explosives near the Andheri rail station in Mumbai

Implications for Law Enforcement

- Surface transportation systems are the preferred target for terrorist attacks worldwide, amounting to almost half of all terror attacks
- Periods of heavy usage are usually exploited in these attacks
- Another example of multiple, near-simultaneous attacks; 11 minute time differential in attack sequence might have allowed for employment of mitigating procedures (e.g., evacuating the system)
- Transit security requires multiple and redundant layers of defense; see Hard Won Lessons: Transit Security at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/scr_05.pdf
- CCTV assists investigations after the fact, and acts as a deterrent of traditional crime, since the perpetrator fears being captured. However, it may unwittingly provide a boost to a suicide attack in that it captures the act on film, thus enhancing the terror effect. Also, unlike ordinary criminals, suicide bombers have no fear of a temporal consequences
- Technologies are being developed that will alert human operators in real time when pre-determined, suspicious events are captured on CCTV, which would allow closer inspection/deployment of assets
- Law enforcement investigation after the fact should be designed to reassure, avoid intimidating, and prevent a backlash against the general Muslim population—such over reaching responses are a likely objective of the suicide operation

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