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Global Jihad and its Local Specificities: How do we understand Islamist Terrorism in India?

By 265646

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## Introduction

On September 11, 2001, the United States was attacked by members of Al-Qaeda. Commanded by Mohammad Atta, 19 terrorists hijacked passenger planes and struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004).

Media sources and scholars alike depict the events of that day as a moment in which the threat of Islamist terrorism took center stage (Enders and Sandler 2005). In many ways, 9/11 was unprecedented. It saw more casualties than any previous terrorist attack and made apparent the consequences of people willing to sacrifice themselves for a larger cause (Hoffman 2002).

Inspired by a desire to evaluate the relevance of this moment to South Asia, this paper is ultimately concerned with **how we can best understand Islamist terrorism in India in a post-9/11 context**. For now, 'Islamist terrorism' signifies an act of terror which gains legitimacy from a political ideology based in Islam.

While the events of 9/11 have not themselves caused transformations in patterns of terrorism, there has been a significant amount of discourse, shaped by what happened that day and the subsequent 'global war on terror', that has come to dominate the way in which Islamist terrorism is understood (Roy 2009). This dominant discourse that privileges the American experience tends to see Islamist terrorists as an external security threat, outside the realm of modernity but connected by a particular transnational ideology (Jones 2009).

India has hardly been exempt from the reach of this discourse. The 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, for example, have been repeatedly referred to as 'India's 9/11', by both the media and middle-class residents of Mumbai who actually experienced them (Devji 2011; Ganguly and Kapur 2010; Roy 2009). Indian policy makers also appear to be operating on the basis of an

understanding of Islamist terrorism consistent with the dominant American discourse. For example, the 2010 Ministry of Defence Strategic Report highlights internal and external security threats, and whereas Maoist insurgent groups are the primary internal threat, Islamist terrorism is described almost exclusively as an external threat (Ministry of Defence 2010). Yet India has had a much longer history of conflict along religious and ethnic lines (Bhoumik 2004). To what extent then is it useful, or maybe even harmful, to understand the Indian experience with Islamist terrorism using a primarily American discourse? To what extent, if at all, do the events of 9/11 indicate a shift in patterns of Islamist terrorism in India? While these questions are at the heart of this paper, directly answering them is beyond its scope. What I am most interested in is identifying the best approach to begin to answer them—*the approach that will allow us to understand the idiosyncrasies of Islamist terrorism in India in a time in which terrorism itself has been subject to the forces of globalization.*

The majority of current academic literature which attempts to provide a framework for understanding Islamist terrorism in India after 9/11 takes two main approaches. First, there is a set of scholarship, guided by what I will call the ‘state-based approach’, which argues that Islamist terrorists in India must be understood in relation to the Indian state and its marginalization of Muslims (Williams 2011; Ahmad 2009a; Ahmad 2009b; Fair 2010). Second, there are scholars who look beyond the Indian state, the majority of whom describe Islamist terrorism in India as a function of South Asian geopolitics and the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan. These scholars adopt a ‘transnational approach’ and see Islamist terrorism as an external threat (Chellany 2001; Mann 2001; Krondstat 2003). Both approaches have certain advantages but also tend to be limited in different ways. While the state-based

approach offers conclusions that are not representative of the majority of Islamist terrorist attacks in India, the transnational approach incorrectly assumes that Islamist terrorism in India is homogenous. It should be noted that while the two schools of thought do not have to be mutually exclusive, scholars have tended to take just one approach in isolation. In this paper, I will argue that in order to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary Islamist terrorism in India, it is necessary to take a multi-scalar approach that incorporates both the Indian state and its domestic politics, as well as the global and transnational forces that influence terrorist organizations.

This paper is organized into six chapters. The next chapter will discuss my methodology and elaborate on my understanding of Islamist terrorism. The second chapter will provide an overview of the benefits and limitations of the approaches to Islamist terrorism included in this paper. The third chapter will discuss the state-based approach in detail while my fourth chapter will analyze the transnational approach. My fifth chapter will use Kashmir as a case study to demonstrate why a multi-scalar approach is necessary, and how it can help explain Islamist terrorism in Kashmir over time. My sixth chapter will explore some ways of constructing a multi-scalar approach. Finally, I will conclude.

## **1. Methodology**

### Definitions

In the introduction I provided a brief definition of Islamist terrorism as ‘an act of terror which gains legitimacy from a political ideology based in Islam’. While this definition is still pertinent to the analysis in this paper, it is necessary to unpack the term ‘Islamist terrorism’ and reveal its nuances. In this section, I will first discuss understandings of ‘terrorism’, followed by

understandings of ‘Islamism’. I will then offer a working, umbrella definition that can bring together the various meanings and serve as a guide for the remainder of this paper. At the outset, there are two challenges to providing a definition that are worth mentioning. We must first consider that the meaning of terrorism is frequently contested (Rapoport 2006). Conversely, much of the literature on terrorism discusses the topic without defining it at all. This paper has run into both challenges. Therefore, while this section will attempt to provide a general definition of ‘Islamist terrorism’, in reality it is important to retain a more flexible understanding of the term.

According to the GTD, terrorism is ‘the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation’ (START 2011). The RDWTI states that terrorism includes ‘violence or the threat of violence, calculated to create fear and alarm, intended to coerce certain actions’, and that ‘the motive must include a political objective, and generally directed against civilian targets’ (RDWTI 2008). The two databases then both agree that terrorism includes violence or force, or the threat of it, although they differ in that the RDWTI definition is based on a solely political objective while the GTD includes other possible ends. The definitions of these databases are not far off from dominant understandings of terrorism in academia. For example, Louise Richardson (1999: 209), an eminent scholar in terrorism studies, states that terrorism is ‘... politically motivated violence directed against non-combatant or symbolic targets which is designed to communicate a message to a broader audience’. As previously mentioned, one challenge with defining terrorism for the purpose of this paper is that most of the authors included do not themselves define it. Working with the definitions of the databases, as well as Richardson’s, we

can try to provide an umbrella definition by establishing the least-common-denominator of three. Therefore, terrorism can be defined as *the threatened or actual use of force and violence for a political objective*.

The next relevant term is Islamism. According to Olivier Roy (1994), Islamism is a political ideology which derives its legitimacy from Islam and aims to create an Islamic state. Ahmad (2009a: 5) takes Roy's (1994) definition further and states that Islamism is also about '... the notion of purity and the constant maintaining of boundary between itself and its "other"'. Mozaffari (2007) states that Islamists see the world as problematic:

*The world is also considered repressive because non-Muslims occupy what the Muslims consider to be Muslim territory (e.g. Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya) or because Muslims live under severe repression from their own (anti-Islamic governments). (Mozaffari 2007: 23)*

The alternative to this repressive world is a caliphate (Mozaffari 2007).

Despite the shared features of Islamism, it is important to acknowledge that it is also ideologically diverse. There are numerous sub-groups within Islam (Mozaffari 2007), and Islamists in India have at least three different ideological origins (Haqqani 2006). Additionally, Islamists might at times share a conceptual framework but their course of action is very much shaped by local and cultural specificities (Ayoob 2004). I point out the heterogeneity of Islamism in order to demonstrate that in practice understandings of the term are much less rigid and indeed, contested. For the purpose of constructing parameters of discussion in this paper, however, it is necessary to establish a working definition. Thus, borrowing from Roy (1994), Ahmad (2009a), and Mozaffari (2007), I will define Islamism as *a political ideology which advocates a pure Islam and strives for the establishment of a Muslim state*.

Consequently, Islamist terrorism can be seen as *the threatened or actual use of force in order to advocate a 'pure' Islam and establish a Muslim state*. This definition is only a starting point and actual conceptual nuances will become apparent in the remainder of the paper, requiring a reevaluation of this definition in different contexts.

### Methodology

In trying to identify the best approach for understanding Islamist terrorism in India, I began by surveying existing secondary literature. I also used empirical data from two databases in order to test the representativeness of the claims made in the literature. The question I am mainly interested in is how to best understand Islamist terrorism in India in a post-9/11 context, so it is necessary to study its form over a broad sweep of time. The databases are crucial to this effort as they provide an aggregate picture of attacks over time and space. Empirical data based on the number, timing, and location of attacks, as well as the types of groups committing them, has rarely been used in the Indian context. Not only does this type of data then offer a new lens through which to study Islamist terrorism in India, but it also allows for an understanding of patterns and transformations on an all-India level.

The empirical data in this paper comes from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI). The GTD is a project of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and responses to Terrorism (START) and is based on open-source information (START 2011). The GTD includes information on both successful and unsuccessful attacks from 1970-2010, and as a result I have referred to information from the database as 'attack attempts' instead of just attacks. The GTD also has significantly more information about Kashmir than the RDWTI, and therefore chapter six of this



paper will have data exclusive from just the GTD. The RDWTI is a product of the RAND Corporation and includes information on attacks that took place between 1968 and 2008. The RDWTI began as a project 1972 for a U.S. government body tasked with combating terrorism.

After exporting information for all the terrorist attacks in India for the entire time span allowed by each database, I eliminated groups that clearly had non-Islamist goals (e.g. Maoist and separatist groups). However, this process was at times challenging. In the case of Kashmir especially, the lines between organizations with different motivations are very blurry (Swami 2003). Nevertheless, after eliminating non-Islamist groups, I conducted internet searches on websites like South Asian Terrorism Portal and the GTD to determine if the remaining organizations were classified with terms such as ‘religious’, or if they were connected to known Islamist organizations like Hizbul Mujahideen (HuM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). If either of these criteria were met, I would assume the organization to be an Islamist one. Built into this process is the assumption that organizations that work together tend to share some ideological connection. Although there might be instances where this assumption is not true, even a slight glance at attacks where multiple perpetrators are involved suggests that in most cases groups that act together share a common goal (START 2011). Not all groups had information available pertaining to their objective and I excluded cases in which perpetrators were just listed as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Muslim militants’ because the motivations of their attack couldn’t be discerned.

Of course, this empirical data, like the other types of evidence and epistemologies included in this paper, is subject to limitations which are discussed in the following chapter. In this sense, it is worth stating that the data is not being privileged over other ways of knowing about terrorism, but that it simply acts as a means to evaluate the consistency of epistemologies

of Islamist terrorism in India with both its trends and heterogeneity. Finally, the Kashmir conflict is presented as an example of why the state-based and transnational approaches cannot be used in isolation.

## **2. Overview of Approaches to Islamist Terrorism in India**

In this chapter, my objective is to briefly outline the two main approaches to understanding Islamist terrorism in India, as well as their advantages and disadvantages as they pertain to the scope of analysis. Subsequent chapters will expand on these overviews to outline the implications of these approaches with regard to their conclusions. The term ‘approach’ as it is used in this paper does not refer to a particular research methodology (e.g. case study, discourse analysis), but rather to a paradigmatic framework. An ‘approach’, in this context, establishes particular conceptual parameters and understands Islamist terrorism within this lens. Each approach also tends to have a certain level of analysis.

Scholars who take the state-based approach view Islamist terrorism in India in relation to the Indian state. Their level of analysis tends to be much smaller as their studies rely on the examples of particular terrorist organizations. These small-scale studies are advantageous as they provide a more nuanced understanding of Islamist terrorism. Additionally, they can contextualize the rhetoric of ‘global jihad’ and ‘the global war on terror’ to explain its relevance (and often lack thereof) to India. The primary disadvantage of the state-based approach is that the claims it makes, based on the examples it uses, tend not to be representative of Islamist terrorism in India as whole. While studies that are not representative can still be informative, it is a limitation when

considering that the goal of this paper is to identify the best approach to understanding Islamist terrorism in India as a whole.

The transnational approach mainly uses “large-n” studies, focusing on broader trends instead of specific examples. Scholars who pursue this approach look beyond the Indian state for explanations of terrorism, and often at the relationship between India and Pakistan. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many advantages of the transnational approach are disadvantages of the small-scale state-based approach, and vice versa. The transnational approach is much more useful for understanding the majority of Islamist terrorism in India but it often does so using the post-9/11 discourse, and consequently is not poised to identify the ways in which the Indian context is idiosyncratic.

A third key component of this paper is not an approach, but a type of evidence, which is incorporated into subsequent chapters. As indicated in my methodology section, I have used empirical data from the GTD and the RDWTI. This type of data has rarely been applied to the study of Islamist terrorism in India, and therefore offers a unique perspective but is also subject to numerous limitations. The GTD collected information about attack attempts from 1990-1997 as they were occurring, but collected information retrospectively for attack attempts between 1998 and 2007. Therefore, evidence of a greater number of attacks from 1990-1997 compared to 1998-2007 could partly be due to data collection errors as certain publications are no longer around. Additionally, the GTD has a category in its datasets called ‘guncertain,’ which allows the user to differentiate between an attack in which a perpetrator is unconfirmed but suspected and an attack in which the perpetrator has been verified by a non-government analyst. In analyzing the data, I did not differentiate between the two categories as a key feature of Islamist

terrorist organizations is that they tend not to claim responsibility for an attack (Devji 2005). And while the GTD does attempt to verify its information, my inclusion of both categories of attacks does pose a problem because the number of actual confirmed attacks attributed to each organization could be different.

A second major limitation of this data is that I had to use my own judgment in determining whether an act of terrorism was specifically an act of *Islamist* terrorism. Given all the assumptions I made through the process described in the previous methodology chapter, it is very possible that someone else would have slightly different numbers than the ones stated in this paper. However, the groups which make up the majority of discussion in the paper, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), the Indian Mujahideen (IM), are viewed as Islamist terrorist organizations by the scholars included in this paper.

### **3. Islamist Terrorism and the Indian State: the State-based Approach**

On December 6, 1992, the state of Uttar Pradesh was the site of one of the most significant moments of religious conflict in India's history. Approximately 200,000 people were demonstrating in Ayodhya when 'Hindu nationalist militants climbed a sixteenth century mosque, the Babri Masjid, and with pick hammers, pipes and sticks, battered the sacred structure to the ground' (Bacchetta 200: 255)

On the anniversary of the mosque demolition, Jalees Ansari, a former resident of Uttar Pradesh and a graduate of Maratha College at Nagpara (Swami 2003), set off serial bomb blasts in Jaipur in retaliation (The Times of India 2012). Ansari, who has only recently been convicted for his involvement in the Jaipur bombing, has already been serving life in prison for taking part

in bombings in Mumbai (The Times of India 2012). Not originally a follower of radical Islam, Ansari felt discriminated against on the basis of his religion while attending Maratha College.

Other instances of communal violence in India also shifted his beliefs:

*Although Ansari claimed to have been a “secular-minded person”, the massacre of Muslims during the Bhiwandi riots of 1985 transformed him completely. (Swami 2003: 80).*

Ansari’s story of radicalization problematizes the predominant post-9/11 terrorism discourse. Not only did Ansari join jihad after having lived and studied in India, but he also joined on the basis of the nature of domestic politics *within* India. Indeed, Ansari’s narrative supports the framework taken by scholars who argue that the Indian Islamist terrorism has to be understood as a response to the Indian state. The aim of this chapter is two-fold: first, it will demonstrate understandings of Islamist terrorism in India that are derived from the state-based approach and its key arguments.; second, it will analyze the advantages and limitations of the state-based approach.

Philippa Williams (2011) argues that the emphasis on 9/11 in the Indian context has ignored the fact that the majority of Muslim-Hindu relations in the country are peaceful. Additionally, when there was been violence, it has been a response to the state (Williams 2011). She furthers that religion is a ‘marker of difference’ in India because it corresponds to socioeconomic and political marginalization (Williams 2011). Irfan Ahmad (2009b: 33) also agrees that ‘...Islamist radicalisation should be seen as a political phenomenon ... that ... cannot be divorced from the practices and role of the State’. Ahmad (2009a) argues that the Indian state and its transformations are crucial to understanding the radicalization of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). SIMI, originally a moderate, educational organization, began to

advocate jihad in response to the activities of Hindutva and its Ayodhya campaign of the 1980s (Ahmad 2009a). During this time there was a significant amount of violence and rioting that resulted in the death of many Muslims, in addition to rhetoric and slogans that alienated the Muslim community (Ahmad 2009a). Indeed, a key component of Hindutva has been the portrayal of Muslims as the enemy:

*'The Muslim' as an object of insecurity in the Hindutva discourse inhabits the levels of the personal, local, national, and international. 'The Muslim' is discursively constructed as a site of fear, fantasy, distrust, anger, envy, and hatred, and thus generating desires of emulation, abjection and/or extermination. (Anand 2005: 207)*

The impact of Hindutva, and its heightened and conflict-ridden presence leading up to the mosque demolition, played a significant role in the radicalization of SIMI. The leader of SIMI at Aligarh Muslim University Student Union at the time, did not just see Indian Muslims as the victims but Islam itself as being 'under attack' (2009a: 173). Struggles abroad in places like Palestine were equally not seen as nationalist ones but as an attack on Islam (Ahmad 2009a). While SIMI did protest international events before, politics and jihad were not priorities until the rise of Hindutva (Ahmad 2009a). It is also telling that the first clear Islamist terrorist attack outside of Kashmir was the 1993 Mumbai blasts (Devji 2011), a year after the mosque demolition.

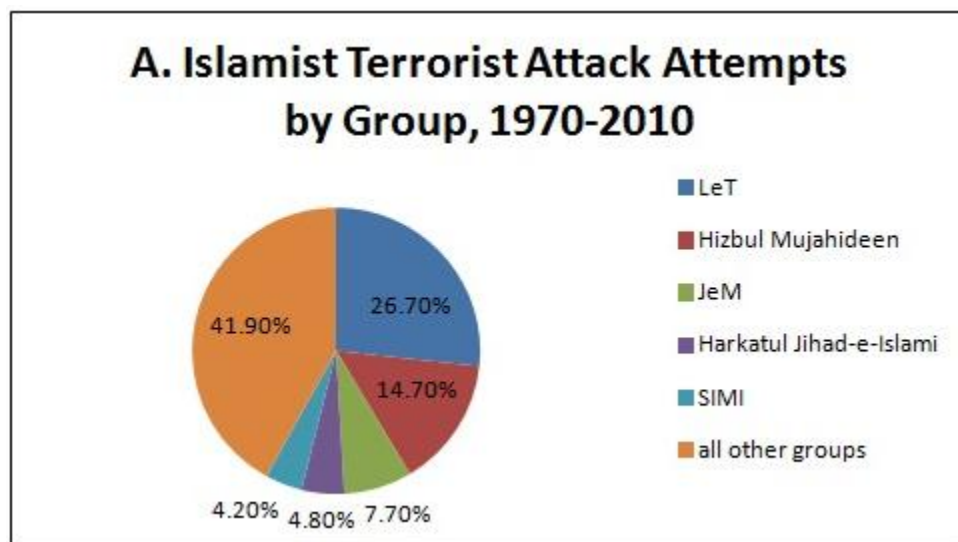
Fair (2010) also supports Ahmad's and William's analysis, arguing that Islamist terrorism in India is mostly a domestic phenomenon, although her study more exclusively looks at the nature of SIMI and the Indian Mujahideen (IM), instead of making claims about how we can understand Islamist terrorism as a whole. In addition to issues of communal violence, IM's motivations for terror, Fair argues, also have to do with a general socioeconomic marginalization of Indian Muslims:

*IM, in its manifestos, seeks to cultivate support among members of India's large Muslim population that harbour, to varying degrees, grievances regarding access to public—  
an—private-sector jobs, development, educational opportunities, the rising tide of Hindu  
nationalism, and anti-Muslim violence, among other issues.(Fair 2010: 112)*

She acknowledges operational linkages between SIMI, IM, and international terrorist organizations, but states that jihad in India is ultimately domestic because these organizations need the support of local people to exist. This claim might be somewhat problematic because it conflates passive support with active support for Jihad, but what we see in Fair's analysis is the assertion that Islamist terrorism is intertwined with the Indian state and its treatment of Muslims.

Thus at the heart of the state-based approach is the idea that the Indian state, owing in part to the activities of the right-wing Hindu nationalist movement, has marginalized Indian Muslims. A second argument of the state-based approach is that Indian Muslims are radicalized on the basis of grievances they have about a lower socioeconomic status. This approach is useful because it can situate Islamist terrorism in India in its longer history of religious conflict. The very framework of the approach, which places the Indian state at the center, also demonstrates the ways in which the Indian context challenges the dominant post-9/11 discourse that portrays Islamist terrorism as a global phenomenon. But can we understand all of Islamist terrorism in India in this way?

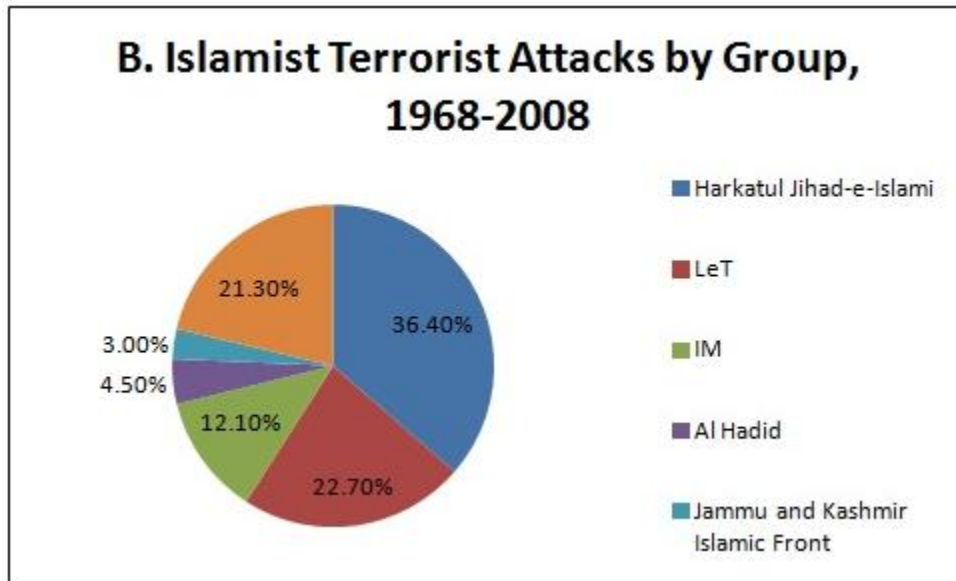
An analysis of the empirical evidence on attack data in India over time indicates significant limitations to applying the state-based approach more broadly. Chart A shows the five Islamist terrorist groups which have been responsible for the most attack attempts according to the GTD. Although SIMI is on this list, it has only been involved in 13 attack attempts, or 4.2% of the total (START 2011).



START 2011

Data from the RDWTI on the total number of attacks is shown in Chart B. SIMI is not among the five groups responsible for the most attacks, and actually is only listed for one attack in the database (RDWTI 2008). The IM, which has been involved in 3.2% of attack attempts according to the GTD (START 2011), is among the five most significant groups and has been responsible for 12.1% of attacks according to the DWTI (RDWTI 2008). The discrepancy in the number of total attacks could be due to the databases' different methodologies and understandings of terrorism. Nevertheless, it is clear that the terrorist groups which very clearly did respond to the events of the Indian state, SIMI and the IM, cannot explain the entirety of Islamist terrorism in India.





RDWTI 2008

The two groups that have been involved in the most attack attempts according to the GTD , HuM and LeT (START 2011), as well the two groups that have committed the most attacks according to the RDWTI, LeT and Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami (RDWTI 2008), are based in Pakistan (Sreedhar and Manish 2003). LeT, is under the umbrella of Markaz Dawal-ul-Irsahd (MDI), a group with many members who fought the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan (Sreedhar and Manish 2003). Both LeT and Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami also have financial and other operational ties with Pakistan (Sreedhar and Manish 2003). Thus, the groups responsible for the most attacks according to both databases do not fall within the explanations of the state-based approach, as they originated outside of India.

In addition to the lack of representativeness, the state-based approach is also problematic because despite being a response to discourse that homogenizes Islamist terrorism and its aims, it curiously homogenizes ‘Indian Muslims’. They are discussed as a singular entity that experiences a singular Indian state in the same way. In reality, of course, Muslims in India also

relate to the Indian state and Indian society upon the basis of several other markers of identity such as caste, class, and gender (Alam 2003). These cleavages within “the” Muslim community are hardly acknowledged by scholars taking the state-based approach, yet are important because talking about Muslims as a singular category is not without normative implications. As with the Hindu right movement, upper-caste and upper-class Muslims in India have tended to emphasize religious identities and speak of a singular Muslim community as a political tactic (Alam 2003). The state-based approach, in doing the same, might be conflating the politics of religious identity with the lived experiences of Muslims in India.

Thus, the state-based approach, while being able to highlight the uniqueness of the Indian experience with Islamist terrorism, presents significant limitations. It is unable to explain the majority of Islamist terrorist attacks in India, which are committed by groups lacking a personal relationship to the Indian state. The state-based approach also problematically assumes that Indian Muslims experience the Indian state in the same way, not acknowledging divisions within the Muslim community.

#### **4. Islamist Terrorism and the International Arena: the Transnational Approach**

On November 26, 2008, ten terrorists from Pakistan came by sea to Mumbai and orchestrated a terrorist attack in which over 172 people died over the course of 60 hours (Rabasa et al. 2009). The attack took place in the Indian cultural center of Mumbai but targets of the attack included American and British citizens, as well as the Jewish Chabad center (Rabasa et. al 2009). Although hardly the first instance of Islamist terrorism on Indian soil, the event has repeatedly been referred to as ‘India’s 9/11’ (Rabasa et al. 2009). The use of this label could be

partly be due to the magnitude of the attacks, as well as the fact that the attackers are not Indian by nationality. Indeed, while Jalees Ansari was radicalized on the basis of very local reasons, it is curious that the perpetrators of the most high-profile terrorist attacks in India have still been non-Indians (Neyazi 2009). This trend is in stark contrast with countries in the West, where homegrown terrorists committed the recent London and Madrid Islamist terrorist attacks (Neyazi 2009).

This feature of high-profile attacks in India, along with many others, has led scholars to argue that Islamist terrorism in India needs to be understood by looking outside of India's borders (Chellany 2001; Mann 2001). In this chapter, I will outline the arguments of the transnational framework, as well as discuss its advantages and limitations. Using terms like "cross-border terrorism," transnational studies tend to focus on ideological and operational linkages between groups in India and groups elsewhere, especially those based in Pakistan.

Brahma Chellany (2001) argues that Afghan war veterans have been responsible for many of the terrorist attacks in the 1990s and that there are instances of attacks happening in India before similar attacks are carried out against the West. He furthers that terrorism in India and the rest of South Asia can be understood as a historical product of the Cold War era:

*The spread of militancy and terrorism in southern Asia is linked to the Afghan war of the 1980s and the U.S. and Saudi funnelling of arms to the anti-Soviet guerrillas through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. (Chellany 2001: 96)*

Chellany's point regarding Pakistan's ISI is an especially significant theme relating Islamist terrorism in India to Pakistan. Poonam Mann (2001) views the ISI and its support of terrorist groups over the years as the key source of terrorism within India. Indeed, Pakistan has previously been involved with the training and aiding of Sikh separatists as early as the 1970s (Mann 2001).

Created in 1948, the objectives the ISI would take on 10 years later are still maintained today: ‘...(a) to safeguard Pakistan’s interests, (b) to monitor political opposition, and (c) to sustain military rule in Pakistan’ (Gregory 2007: 1014). When America decided to support Afghan rebels after the Soviet invasion, it used Pakistan’s ISI, giving the intelligence agency full-reign over how the war would be fought, as well as control over rebels and weapons, consequently allowing it to shape events in Afghanistan (Gregory 2007):

*The willingness of the CIA to agree to these terms, at least for the early years of the war, enabled the ISI to hijack U.S. money and arms for its own purposes in Afghanistan and for Pakistan interests more broadly. (2007: 1016).*

More specifically, these interests manifested themselves through support for pro-Pakistan groups among the rebels, especially those practicing Sunni Islam. The ISI also began training young students to help fight and according to Gregory (2007), ‘this is the moment at which Pakistan began to promote the idea of pan-Islamic jihad for its own geostrategic interests’ (2007: 1017). This practice by the ISI not only marginalized the secular rebel forces in Afghanistan (a pattern seen again in the case of Kashmir), but also eventually led to the training of key members of Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Taliban. Many of these links between Pakistan and international terrorist organizations still exist. For example, after 2001, many AQ terrorists shifted to Pakistani cities of Karachi and Peshawar (Kronstadt 2003).

Thus, not only has Pakistan’s ISI been responsible for terrorism in India, but it also has links to transnational terrorist groups like AQ. Actual direct links between AQ and terrorism in India appear to be limited. Evidence that Islamist terrorist organizations find India ideologically significant is more apparent. Osama bin Laden and other key members of AQ have made many

statements against the country (Riedel 2008), and Kashmir and Palestine are seen as symbolic battlegrounds (Rapoport 2006).

The transnational approach uses the international arena as its level of analysis. Although this approach is consistent with the dominant post-9/11 discourse that portrays Islamist terrorism in India as an external threat, it does differ by linking jihad with the geopolitics of South Asia. As mentioned earlier, the transnational approach provides a better framework for explaining the groups that most frequently attack, as these groups do indeed have international origins. The transnational approach also appears to have the advantage of explaining the recent counterterrorism behaviour of the Indian government, which suggests that it too views Islamist terrorism as an external threat. After the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, for example, India started increasing its international cooperation efforts with regard to counterterrorism strategies (Roy-Chaudhury 2003). The perpetrators of the attack are believed to be from Pakistan and the two countries were nearly at the brink of war as a result (Roy-Chaudhury 2003).

At this point it is important to note that while disengaged from domestic politics within India, the transnational approach, like the state-based approach, is not apolitical. Discourse has a productive role, and creates certain 'truths' about a subject through the way in which it discusses it (Carabine 2001); the discourse pertaining to terrorism is no different. Jones (2009) writes about how the Indian government has adopted American discourse by defining the enemy terrorist as outside the realm of modernity and yet connected to particular places from where terrorism originates. In doing so, India is able to justify more aggressive counterterrorism policies (Jones 2009). For example, India undertook construction of a fence on its border with the predominantly Muslim Bangladesh (Jones 2009). While Jones (2009) views this use of the

discourse by the Indian government as linked to the normative implications of the ‘global war on terror’, Ashis Nandy (2003) notes a much longer history of the import of Western discourse of terrorism. He argues that historically, terrorism was not part of mainstream politics in India. Insurgencies in places like Nagaland, for example, were understood as local conflicts (Nandy 2003). But once terrorism came to the forefront, we see ‘..the import of concepts, styles of management, and technologies of counter-terrorism from countries which Indians see as ‘advanced’, democratic polities’ (Nandy 2003: 135). On the one hand, therefore, the transnational approach to study of Islamist terrorism in India is helpful because it is consistent with the dominant policy perspective of the Indian state. However, for this same reason, the transnational approach is also problematic because it cannot disentangle the political use of terrorist discourse through this framework from realities of the Indian experience.

Among the biggest realities left out of the transnational approach is that Islamist terrorism in India is quite heterogeneous. Indeed, one major limitation of the transnational approach is that it assumes Islamist terrorism in India to be homogenous, which simply is not the case for at least three reasons. First, groups engaging in Islamist terrorism in India hold a range of ideological positions. SIMI was the only group to march in Delhi in celebration of the Iranian revolution, which saw the rise of a Shia leader Iran (Ahmad 2005). Other Islamist organizations in India, predominantly Sunni, did not support the revolution due to its ideological tilt (Ahmad 2005). Additionally, groups like LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which while being very much outside the realm of domestic Indian politics, are also outside the realm of global Islamist ideology which demands a caliphate. These groups have the objective of fragmenting South Asia into separate states:

*Whatever its genealogy, however, the Lashkar's utopia, with its nostalgia for the colonial past, is worlds removed from the Islamic emirates and universal caliphates that serve as models among many of its peers. (Devji 2011: 288)*

This heterogeneity in the ideology of Islamist terrorist organizations operating in India suggests that there is merit to studying them on a smaller scale, and limits to making broad generalizations. The transnational approach rarely differentiates between terrorist organizations on the basis of ideology as nation states, and not the groups themselves, are the focus of its analysis.

Second, the diversity in the goals and actions of these terrorist organizations indicates that they have a degree of autonomy not accounted for by theories which describe them as puppets of Pakistan. This autonomy, as well as the relationship between the ISI and terrorist groups, has changed over time. Ganguly and Kapur (2010) describe Islamist terrorism in India as a 'sorcerer's apprentice' problem: while Pakistan might be responsible for the birth of jihad, it no longer has the same control over it. For example, the Taliban now has aspirations of gaining power within Pakistan. Though Pakistan would benefit from Taliban elements being powerful in Afghanistan, Pakistani government forces have been fighting the Taliban within their borders (e.g. South Waziristan). The lack of control of the Pakistani government over terrorist organizations operating within its borders brings into question the value of thinking of Islamist terrorism as just a function of South Asian geopolitics.

Third, empirical evidence suggests a broad spatial distribution of attacks over time. According to both data sets, the most attack attempts (outside of Kashmir) have taken place in New Delhi and Mumbai (START 2011), which is not surprising considering that the two are major cities and high-profile targets. There also appear to be more attack attempts in some

places, such as Tripura and Karnataka, than others (START 2011). This distribution could be due to a number of factors, and analyzing how targets are selected is beyond the scope of this paper. However, what the distribution does suggest is that Islamist terrorism in India has a spatial, and perhaps local, element. The fact that Islamist terrorism is experienced to different degrees in different places could partly be explained by domestic factors and most certainly is not explained by large-scale transnational approaches.

Thus, the transnational approach cannot account for the diversity of Islamist terrorism in India. However, it does have some explanatory power: operational linkages between Islamist terrorist groups exist, as does historically, at least, a connection between the groups and Pakistan's ISI. Additionally, although groups like LeT, which have been responsible for a significant number of attacks, have ideological dissimilarities from other Islamist organizations, their origins in Pakistan suggest that the transnational approach is much better equipped to understand them than the state-based approach. The transnational approach is in the opposite position of the state-based approach: it can account for much of Islamist terrorism in India but ignores its diversity. The state-based approach, by contrast, creates a framework that is not helpful to explain the vast majority of Islamist terrorism in India, but is much more telling of the idiosyncrasies of Islamist terrorism in India. While the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, in practice we tend to see a focus on just one or the other. Consequently, there are major gaps in the terrorism literature in terms of being able to highlight *how* more global trends *interact* with local realities on the ground. What is necessary, then, is a multi-scalar approach that combines the merits of the transnational and state approach, and links them together. Indeed, the Kashmir conflict cannot be understood without it.



## 5. Kashmir: an Argument for the Multi-scalar approach

My central argument in this chapter will be that the militancy in Kashmir is best understood through both levels of analysis discussed above: the relationship of the terrorists to the Indian state and the ways in which terrorists operate on a transnational level. In demonstrating how both levels of analysis are relevant, this chapter will also begin to explore one way of constructing such a multi-scalar approach that will be further elaborated upon in subsequent portions of the paper. The chapter will be organized as follows: first, I explain the relevance of Kashmir to Islamist terrorism in India as a whole; second, I will provide a brief overview of the militancy; and third, I will apply the state-based and transnational approaches to the Kashmir conflict to demonstrate their limitations.

### Relevance of Kashmir

The point of using Kashmir here is not to suggest that it is representative of Islamist terrorism in India as a whole. Rather, the use of Kashmir is two-fold. First, as the place which accounts for approximately 72% of attack attempts of Islamist terrorism in India (START 2011), it is worth understanding on its own merit. Second, Kashmir is increasingly becoming intertwined with terrorism in other parts of India, by virtue of the groups currently controlling the conflict and their broader ambitions (Swami 2003). Thus, being able to study Kashmir through the best approach gets us a long way toward understanding much of Islamist terrorism in India.

### Overview of Conflict

Kashmir has been a source of tension between India and Pakistan at least since partition (Varshney 1991), as well as the reason for two of their three wars (Bhatt 2007). India and Pakistan's battle over Kashmir is linked to their fundamentally divergent ideas of nationhood

(Bhatt 2007). Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League and founder of Pakistan, argued that India and Pakistan should be two nations on the basis of religion (Bhatt 2007). His two-nation theory suggests that Kashmir, as a Muslim-majority area, is rightfully part of Pakistan. By contrast, India's ideal nation is a secular democracy, and for India, having Kashmir would affirm its own model of statehood (Bhatt 2007).

The insurgency, which began in 1989 against this backdrop of a struggle between two nations, was the result of both long-term precipitous factors as well as more proximate causes (Ganguly 1997). The long-term factors were increasing political mobilization and institutional failure which no longer made a political solution viable (Ganguly 1997). When Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah's Jammu and Kashmir National Conference took over, it had popular support but was not particularly democratic. The Conference's ability to govern was based on the personality of Abdullah, who was also the party's primary decision-maker (Ganguly 1997). The Indian government, for its part, was not concerned about the lack of democracy in Kashmir as long as its leaders didn't pursue secession (Ganguly 1997). There were only four elections in Kashmir in 54 years, three of which were tampered with in some way (Bhatt 2007). Despite the lack of democracy, however, economic development took place in Kashmir, consequently increasing political demands among citizens (Ganguly 1997).

While the failure of democratic institutions at the same time as political mobilization was already making Kashmir volatile (Ganguly 1997), the biggest proximate cause of the insurgency was the failure of the 1987 elections (Varshney 1991). The Congress-National Alliance won a significant majority of the seats even though it did not even get half of the popular vote (Ganguly

1997). The election demonstrated to Kashmiris that state was no longer a feasible means of expressing their frustration. By 1989, the situation had turned violent (Behera 2006).

Led mostly by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), the insurgency at this point sought an independent and unified Kashmir (Behera 2006). Before proceeding, it is important to slightly expand our understanding of Islamism. Initially, a component of the definition of Islamism was that it sought to establish an Islamic state. Of course, relative to other Islamist organizations, JKLF stands apart from this goal as a more secular group which wanted an independent Kashmir (Behera 2006). However, in the case of Kashmir, this delineation of an organization as 'secular' proves far more difficult, as there are significant ideological continuities between different groups (Swami 2003). Even the JKLF was involved in the expulsion of the Pandit minority (Swami 2003) and in this way is more than just a separatist organization. For the remainder of the paper, therefore, we will classify the JKLF rather loosely as an Islamist terrorist organization.

The general populous in Kashmir valley supported the JKLF as an extension of Kashmiri identity, and being able to fight was seen as a form of honor (Behera 2006). These young militants also had the support of Pakistan with regard to training and financial assistance (Varshney 1991). Even years later, Pakistan has retained its hand in the conflict as approximately three quarters of the groups fighting in Kashmir are funded by the ISI and other Pakistani organizations (Jamwal 2003). However, the JKLF stopped being the dominant group in the 1990s because it was marginalized by the ISI in favor of other, more radical terrorist organizations:

*Where Pakistan was concerned, the "Kashmiri card" had served its purpose and, if allowed to reach its logical conclusion, might back-fire, especially since the JKLF's goal*

*was “independence and re-unification of the divided Kashmir and not accession to Pakistan.” (Behera 2006: 151)*

One of the most prominent groups to rise after the decline of JKLF was Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) (Behera 2006). HuM and several other right-wing Islamist groups changed the discourse of the Kashmir struggle from one of secession to one of accession with Pakistan. Their strategy followed the “Afghan model” (2006: 154)—they intended to make holding on to Kashmir expensive for India, and did so by calling for jihad. For example, a popular HuM slogan translates as ‘It is neither a guerrilla war nor a national war: it is a holy war’ (2006: 154).

Not only did HuM and the groups that followed it change the rhetoric behind the struggle, but in so doing, they also lost the local support that was such a big part of the initial stages of the movement (Behera 2006). Consequently, these more extremist groups struggled to radicalize significant numbers of Kashmiris, causing Pakistan to increase the number of foreign terrorists (Behera 2006). Whereas until about 1996, the terrorists taking part in the insurgency were mostly ethnically Kashmir (Swami 2003), as of 2002, an estimated fifth of the militants were foreign, about 90 percent of whom were Pakistani (Trehan 2002). Moreover, of the many active groups in Kashmir, only three are operating in Kashmir exclusively<sup>1</sup>--the vast majority are also operating elsewhere (Haleem 2004). Some of the largest terrorist organizations in the region are based out of Pakistan and simultaneously pursue objectives that are global in scope (Roy-Chaudhary 2003):

*In (the militants) world-view, the armed struggle in Kashmir is but one stage of a wider, indeed global, jihad. Kashmir is not a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, not even a clash between cultures, but nothing less than a war between two different and mutually opposed ideologies: Islam and kufr (disbelief). (Behera 2006: 157).*

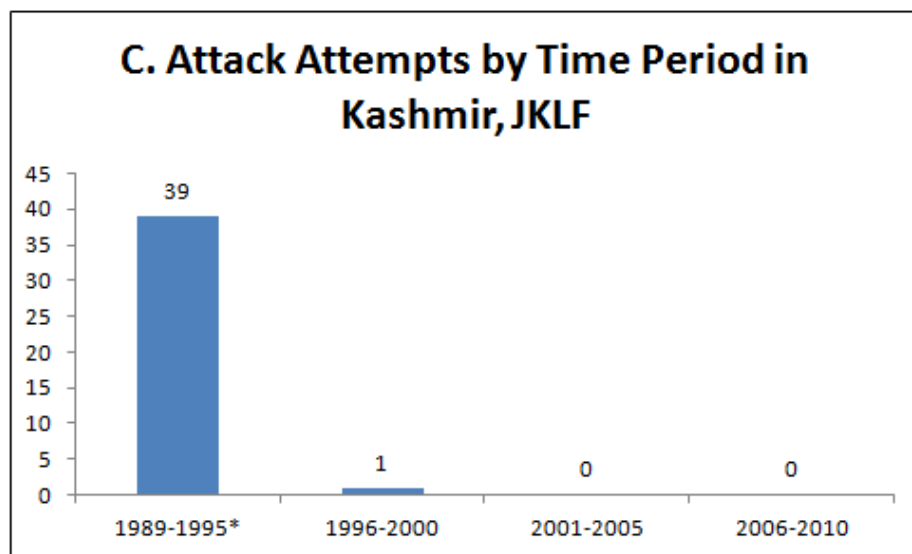
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<sup>1</sup> These groups are the JKLF, Harkat-ul-Ansar, and Al-Faran.

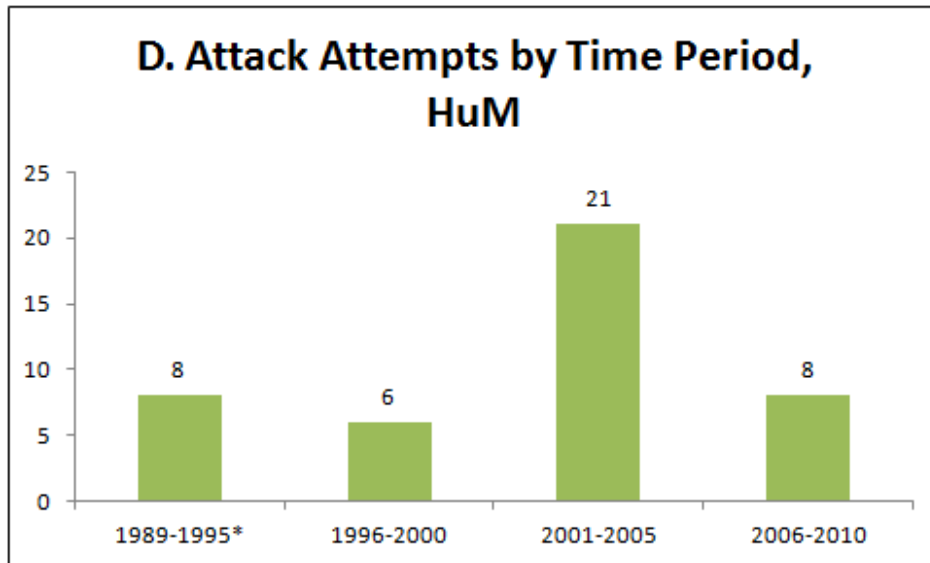
In addition to the more global goals of the organizations now dominating the violence in Kashmir, the conflict also has an international dimension because of the symbolic significance of Kashmir to groups like AQ (Rapoport 2006).

### Kashmir through the state-based approach

The application of the state-based approach to the Kashmir conflict would point out the radicalization of the JKLF as a response to the inability of the Indian state to address Kashmiri needs. Indeed, an explanation of why terrorism in Kashmir began when it did is intimately intertwined with the failure of the Indian state, both on a long term and with regard to the 1987 elections. Additionally, the tremendous amount of popular support for the terrorists among Kashmiris must be taken into account, and cannot be explained by analyzing the conflict on a transnational level. Data from the GTD supports the validity of the state-based approach in the initial stages of the conflict—the groups attacking most frequently were those in which ethnic Kashmiris fought and were otherwise supported (Behera 2006). A comparison of Chart C and Chart D shows that JKLF was much more dominant in the initial years of the conflict than HuM.



START 2011



START 2011

However, the state-based approach begins to fall short in explaining the most recent iteration of the conflict, which is increasingly being led by radical Islamist organizations with little local support (Behera 2006). Chart C, for example, indicates a significant decline in attack attempts by the JKLF after 1995, and HuM starts to increase its attack attempts by 2000 (see Chart D). Although these are only two organizations, analyses of other organizations reveal the same pattern: more radical groups wanting Kashmiri accession with Pakistan have been the biggest perpetrators of violence in the region in recent years. Additionally, it is unclear how the foreign terrorists, as citizens of Pakistan and other countries, relate to the politics of the Indian state and its failures in Kashmir. Thus, the state-based approach is useful for explaining the origins of the conflict, but cannot explain how it has transformed since.

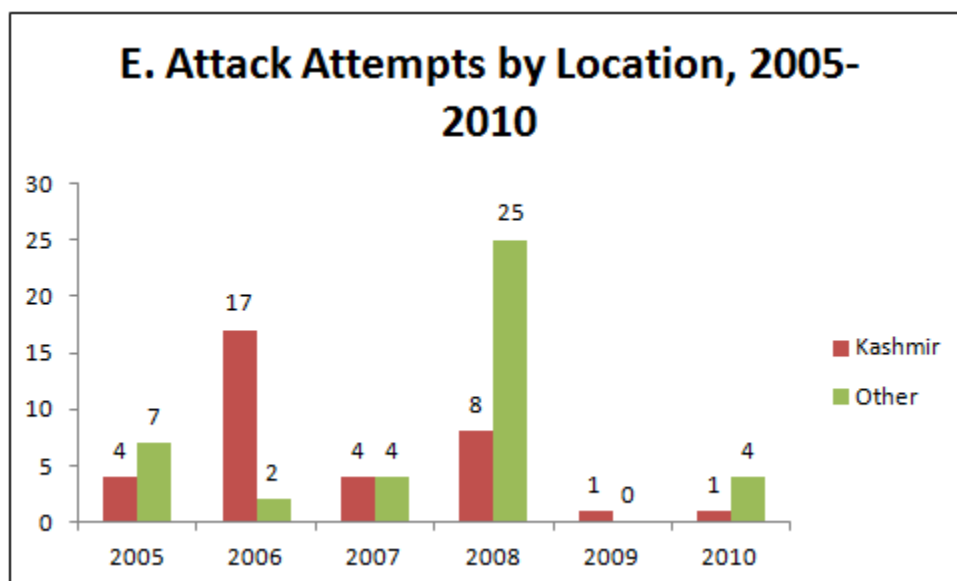
#### Kashmir through the transnational approach

Two aspects of the conflict lend support to the use of the transnational approach: first, the shift in the types of groups attacking, as described above, and second, the fact that Kashmir is

becoming increasingly interconnected with Islamist terrorism outside of India. This latter point is facilitated by virtue of the fact that groups like HuM and LeT have much broader, non-local goals:

*As the jihad in Jammu and Kashmir has progressed, the notion of this conflict as a first battle in the war for the defense of Islam throughout India has been increasingly translated into action' (Swami 2003: 79).*

Evidence from the GTD supports Swami's finding. Although some Kashmiri terrorist groups have made attack attempts in Bombay as early as 1990, the general number of average annual attack attempts outside Kashmir has been increasing significantly at the same time that the number of average annual attack attempts within Kashmir has been decreasing<sup>2</sup> (See Chart E) (START 2011).



START 2011

<sup>2</sup> The exception to this trend appears to be 2009, when there was one attack attempt in Kashmir and zero attack attempts elsewhere (START 2011).

Thus, to describe the violence in Kashmir as it is today, the transnational approach is much more useful: the biggest perpetrators of terrorism have little in common with native Kashmiris and hold ambitions which extend far beyond Kashmir's borders. However, it is difficult to explain how the insurgency had such tremendous support in its initial stages without the state-based approach. Thus, each approach is well-suited for a particular period of time.

#### The argument for the multi-scalar approach

The statement that the Kashmir conflict started as a domestic struggle and became more international is hardly a new one. But it does demonstrate the number of different forces that can act upon Islamist terrorism in India. The Kashmir conflict has always had both domestic and international dimensions, yet during certain moments one or the other is more dominant. Consequently, neither the state-based nor the transnational approach alone can explain patterns of terrorism in the region. Although, as previously stated, Kashmir is not representative of Islamist terrorism in India as whole, it accounts for the overwhelming majority of all instances of Islamist terrorism in India. Additionally, scholars who look beyond the state tend to focus on Kashmir while those who use the Indian state as their level of analysis write about particular organizations like SIMI. However, it is becoming more apparent that the Kashmir conflict has extended its borders and has to be understood alongside changes happening in the rest of India.

By extrapolating from the case of Kashmir to look at Islamist terrorism in India as a whole, we can learn one more lesson. Time can act as one way to link the state-based approach to the transnational one. This point will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter.



## 6. Bridging the Gap: Beginning to Think on a Multi-scalar Level

The example of the Kashmir conflict demonstrates the limitations of taking each of the two approaches in isolation. The state-based approach is useful for explaining particular aspects of Islamist terrorism in India, such as the radicalization of the more ‘indigenous’ groups like SIMI and the IM. However, in only being able to account for a very small piece of the terrorist attacks that have taken place, its explanatory power is limited. The transnational approach to studying terrorism, unsurprisingly, has the opposite problem. It can explain much of the nature of contemporary Islamist terrorism and indeed the majority of attacks as a whole. However, the large-scale framework cannot account for the diversity in Islamist terrorism in India.

At this point we could just conclude that Islamist terrorism in India is simply both: it is caused by both domestic and international forces. It is both local and global. While this is likely true, the conclusion is very limiting. In order to construct the most effective counterterrorism policies, what is required is an understanding of *how* Islamist terrorism in India is shaped by these different factors. And in order to answer the question of ‘how’, it is necessary to connect these two approaches. My aim in this chapter is to explore some ways of constructing a multi-scalar approach to understanding Islamist terrorism in India.

As was previously stated, the argument made in the earlier chapter offers one mean of bridging connecting the transnational approach and the state-based approach. The approach that was best-suited to explaining the conflict in Kashmir changed over time. If we take the implications of the state-based approach and the transnational-approach without being confined by their framework and levels of analysis, it becomes possible to make a conceptual shift to thinking of domestic and transnational approaches as ‘influences’ instead. One way of

constructing a multi-scalar approach, therefore, is to identify which sphere of influence, the domestic or the international, is more dominant at a particular moment of time. Indeed, empirical data from the GTD and the RDWTI suggests that there is significant variation in the number of terrorist attacks across time. Equally, the diversity in the spatial distribution of attacks suggests that a second-way of constructing a multi-scalar approach would be to identify which sphere of influence is more dominant in a particular location. Taking into account the temporal and spatial geographies of Islamist terrorism in India would not only allow for the construction of a multi-scalar approach, but would also bring an entirely new perspective to the literature. Indeed, both the literature in the state-based approach and the transnational approach tends to be quite static: they do not engage with transformations in the nature of Islamist terrorism in India.

Additionally, the gap between the state-based and transnational approach can be reduced by allowing one to inform the other. The first step, as discussed before, is to abandon these approaches as analytical frameworks and to think of them as co-existing spheres of influence. However, if we maintain that the state-based approach has the advantage of looking at the smaller-scale while the transnational approach has the advantage of painting a broader picture, we can still use both together. For example, by first looking at Islamist terrorism on a more aggregate level and identifying particular trends, either with regard to the groups attacking, the locations of the attack, or the timings of the attack, it is possible to identify particular clusters of attacks (the most prominent groups, or years with the most attacks, etc.) and then try to establish the more local specificities of those clusters. Conversely, it would be possible to take the small-scale studies of groups like SIMI and place them in a broader context. For example, SIMI might have radicalized after the events at Ayodhya but since radicalizing, how does it function

operationally? How does SIMI relate the training and funding network of other Islamist terrorist organizations?

So while one method of constructing a multi-scalar approach is to identify whether the domestic or transnational is more relevant at particular times and in particular spaces, the other is to use the domestic approach to inform the transnational (and vice versa). There are likely also several other ways to link these different levels of analysis. The crucial point is to abandon each approach as a bounded framework and instead to think of them as factors which interact with one another.

## **Conclusion**

Islamist terrorism in India has been understood through two main approaches. The state-based approach explains the radicalization of SIMI and the IM as a consequence of the failure of the Indian state to protect Muslims. By contrast, the transnational approach hardly focuses on domestic politics within India and instead explains Islamist terrorism as a function of the conflict between India and Pakistan. While the state-based approach explains what is idiosyncratic about Islamist terrorism in India, the transnational approach demonstrates the ways in which most of Islamist terrorism in India is shaped by forces outside its borders. Each approach also tends to talk about a different aspect of terrorism: the state-based approach focuses on radicalization while the transnational approach mostly looks at how terrorist organizations function on an operational level. Although the two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, quite problematically, scholars tend to use just one in their analysis. Consequently, few studies are

able to paint an accurate picture of the fact that Islamist terrorism in India is simultaneously shaped by events outside and inside its borders. Devji (2011) elaborates:

*On the one hand there is the Lashkar-e-Taiba, for which the India-Pakistan border has become inconsequential, not least because its bi-national politics have been distorted by the Afghan war. The Kashmir issue has therefore been subordinated to a wider struggle, while becoming marginalised within the arena of Hindu-Muslim strife elsewhere in India. On the other hand there is the Indian Mujahideen, whose nationalist militancy targets not the state but a Hindu middle class, which is attacked in its urban habitations without any political demand being made of it (2011: 289).*

In order to fully understand Islamist terrorism in India, therefore, it is necessary to adopt a multi-scalar approach that can determine how these two dimensions co-exist and interact.

By applying each approach to the case of the Kashmir conflict, it becomes apparent that while the state-based approach can explain how it began, the transnational approach is better suited to explain terrorism in the region today. In this way, the Kashmir case also demonstrates one way of constructing a multi-scalar approach – through the use of time. Indeed, the empirical data in this paper revealed both broad trends and diversity in terrorist attacks and organizations over time and space.

Ultimately, being able to understand Islamist terrorism in India in a more nuanced way will have significant implications for counter-terrorism policy. Currently the Indian government operates by analyzing Islamist terrorism through the transnational approach which, as has been discussed, has significant limitations. On a practical level, these limitations are especially worrisome as counter-terrorism policies based on a transnational understanding of Islamist terrorism do little to curb the radicalization of Indian Muslims or stop the activities of SIMI and the IM. Yet, by beginning to bring together the different scholarly frameworks, the multi-scalar approach will put policy makers and academics alike in the best position to understand the true

nature of the Islamist threat in India—to contextualize its nuances and idiosyncrasies against the backdrop of “global jihad”.

Word Ct: 9,663

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