



World

Experts at odds on origin of well-drilled militant group

Mark Dodd

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GLOBAL terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna has expressed scepticism at the conventional wisdom that says the Mumbai attackers were ``mainstream'' Lashkar-e-Toiba.

Speaking on the ABC's 7.30 Report on Monday night, the Singapore-based Professor Gunaratna said: ``It is possible that some members of the attack team were from Lashkar-e-Toiba, but, once again, (the) mainstream Lashkar-e-Toiba organisation is very well controlled by the Pakistan Government.

``LET as an institution could not have staged this attack because Pakistan would be implicated in any LET attack,'' Professor Gunaratna said.

But others are less inclined to dismiss LET involvement.

Alan Behm, a respected Australian commentator on defence and national security issues, said only al-Qa'ida or LET were capable of providing the sort of advanced military skills shown by the Mumbai attackers.

``They knew how to set off a bomb without killing themselves -- which is easier said than done -- and they knew how to use automatic weapons without wasting a lot of ammunition,'' Mr Behm told The Australian.

``So the first thing you've got to say is, they (the terrorists) were pretty well trained.

``Secondly, they were almost certainly Pakistani or trained in Pakistan.

``We already know the one who survived and has been captured is Pakistani and I tend to believe that.

``The third thing is: who could provide training of that quality? That is a really important question."

The only groups capable of providing such high-level military training were either al-Qa'ida based in the lawless northwest frontier region or LET, which has most of its support in Pakistan's south, Mr Behm said. The singling out of US and British passport holders was not accidental.

``That was all about Afghanistan, and one of the motivating factors here is that the Americans and the Brits have the highest profile in Afghanistan and India is quite a big player there," Mr Behm said.

Ajmal Amir Kamal, the only terrorist arrested so far by Mumbai police, claims he received 12 months of training in LET camps in Pakistan's Punjab region.

The Times of India quoted Kamal, 21, as saying he was one of 24 men who received training, of whom 10 were later handpicked for the terrorist attacks.

In the bloody mayhem that followed, at least 188 people were killed, including 21 foreigners, and more than 300 were injured.

All the experts agree on one thing. Whoever the terrorists are, they succeeded in triggering a dangerous escalation of tensions between two nuclear-armed neighbours.

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