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Kashmiri rebels on offensive jihad

Book by terrorist explains why areas outside Kashmir are now targets as well

By For The Straits Times, Muhammad Haniff Hassan

THE perpetrators of the recent bombings of the Mumbai train system that killed 182 civilians have not been officially identified by the Indian authorities. Until due process takes place, the identity of the attackers will remain a subject of speculation.

However, previous blasts in India have been linked to separatist groups from Kashmir. This is a new development that has surprised many observers because bomb attacks outside Kashmir by the separatist groups began only in 1993, although the armed struggle for Kashmiri independence started much earlier.

What triggered such a shift? What caused the separatist groups to take the offensive beyond Kashmir and increasingly deep inside India?

Some insights could be gained from a book entitled *The Army Of Madinah In Kashmir* (Maktabah Al-Ansaar, Birmingham, 1999). The book was written by Esa Al-Hindi, whose real name is Dhiren Barot. He was alleged to be a leader of an Al-Qaeda cell in Britain. Some reports also mentioned him as Al-Qaeda's cell leader in Europe.

Along with other suspects, he was arrested on Aug 3, 2004 in Willesden, London, by British police and charged with conspiracy to murder. He was also charged for possession of a reconnaissance plan of buildings in various cities in the United States. He had two notebooks with information on explosives, poisons, chemicals and related matters, which were likely to be useful to a person preparing for an act of terrorism. He was alleged to be the ringleader of the cell plotting an attack on Heathrow International Airport in London.

The book reflects the author's personal experience fighting jihad in Kashmir through guerilla activity. It provides readers with a description of the situation in Kashmir under the occupation of Indian forces and the author's analysis of the situation. It also aims to instil in readers the virtue of armed jihad and encourages them to join it.

It is not known how much influence the book has on groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Jihad-Al-Islami, which are fighting for Kashmiri independence and have a record of conducting bombings in India. However, opinions expressed in the book provide insights that could partially explain the shift in the theatre of operations of the pro-independence Kashmiri groups.

Al-Hindi is of the view that armed jihad by Muslims today in areas like Kashmir is largely defensive in nature. Muslims are only reacting to the situation and the manoeuvres of their enemies. Such defensive jihad has caused a high number of casualties among the mujahideen, the most special group among the ummah.

Al-Hindi argues for a need to move from defensive to offensive jihad, so that the tables can be turned and Muslims can gain the initiative in achieving their objectives. He likens offensive jihad to a 'flanking operation' in military combat. This can be achieved by bringing armed jihad operations into the enemy's territory. The objective is to create big problems to destabilise and force the enemy to turn away from Muslim territories.

Since Kashmiri independence is viewed as an Islamic cause to regain lost Muslim territories, Al-Hindi is of

the view that local Muslims living in India should be co-opted. They are seen as key players for a successful offensive jihad because they understand the language, culture, area and practices of the enemy whom they coexist with. They can be recruited and won over to engage in or support various attacks inside India.

Propaganda is viewed as a necessary means of jihad for Al-Hindi. He suggests launching a propaganda campaign as part of the offensive jihad on India. One important aspect of propaganda is to cause communal conflicts, such as those between Hindus and Sikhs or between Muslims and non-Muslims inside India.

Al-Hindi views countries that invade a Muslim land as enemies of Islam and those that support an invasion of a Muslim land as interfering in the affairs of Muslim states. The book identifies five specific countries as enemies: India, because of its occupation of Kashmir and the atrocities committed by Indian security forces against the Kashmiris; the Pakistani government, for being a puppet of America; the US, for supporting the Indian government with millions of dollars of 'emergency aid' and 'being the tip of the spear against Al-Islam in modern times'; Russia, for being the 'mentor' for India; and finally Israel, for providing training for the Indian army.

The idea of offensive jihad is a critical development in the Kashmiri struggle. It not only widens the theatre of operations into India, but potentially also into other countries that are seen as collaborators with the Indian government at the expense of the Kashmiri cause. This also explains attacks planned by Al-Hindi against targets in the US.

Al-Hindi's ideas have ideological, strategic and operational dimensions. They mean that offensive jihad could go beyond a given zone of conflict, that targeting civilians is permissible, and that there could be propaganda campaigns to undermine India's social stability. All these are issues that need to be addressed to provide long-lasting peace and security in India specifically, and the sub-continent in general.

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