

Brief Report on Mumbai blasts: 26-28 November 2008

The Incident

On 26-27 November 2008, several militants, armed with AK-47 rifles, grenades and low-intensity bombs¹ carried out coordinated attacks on several key sites within India's financial hub, Mumbai.² Ten simultaneous attacks targeting the Taj Hotel, the Oberoi Trident Hotel, Café Leopold, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) railway station and the Cama Hospital, occurred. So far 174 people have been reported killed while 294-300 have been injured.³

The first wave of attacks started at 9:30 pm IST, when three militants started shooting at guests at Café Leopold, indiscriminately. Café Leopold is an upscale Mumbai restaurant which after the attacks was covered with bullet holes and blood.⁴

The Taj Hotel was the second target on the list. Between 10:15 pm IST and 10:30 pm IST, militants commenced shooting at paramilitary forces and police outside the hotel.⁵ There are alleged reports of two gunmen in the Taj hotel taking 15 hostages, including seven foreigners. The hostage situation at the Taj Hotel, which ended only on Thursday afternoon and most of the guests and staff were evacuated from the hotel. The perpetrators specifically targeted British and American nationals. Amongst the 2000 that are stranded in police barricade inside the hotel, there are European lawmakers from a European Union delegation.⁶

At about 10:30 pm, IST, 26 November 2008, two militants armed with AK-47 rifles entered the passenger hall of CST where they opened fire and threw grenades, resulting in 10 fatalities⁷. At the Oberoi Trident Hotel, two militants have been reported to be holed up within the Hotel. There are several guests and staff stranded in the hotel as well. There are reports of new firing there and the Army has entered the hotel to counter-attack the militants.⁸

There were also reports of firing at the J.W. Marriot Hotel in Juhu.⁹

¹ Mumbai terror attack roundup: Here is what happened. *IBN*. <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/mumbai-terror-attack-roundup-here-is-what-happened/79162-3-single.html> . 27/11/08

² Scores killed in Mumbai rampage, *CNN*, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/11/26/india.attacks/index.html>, 27/11/08

³ *Opcit.* Mumbai terror attack roundup: Here is what happened. *IBN*.

⁴ Mumbai nightmare: Here is what happened. *IBN*. <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/mumbai-nightmare-here-is-what-happened/79162-3.html>. 27/11/08

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Terror attacks in Mumbai; 80 dead; over 900 injured. *The Times of India* http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Terrorists_strike_Mumbai_80_dead_many_hurt/articleshow/3761410.cms. 27/11/08

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Terror Non- stop: 87 killed in Mumbai attacks. *CNN-IBN* <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/terror-nonstop-87-killed-in-mumbai-attacks/79122-3.html>. 27/11/08

Successively, two bomb blasts also occurred in the north Mumbai residential suburb, Vile Parle and in Mazegaon respectively. Police officials say that an unspecified number of people have been injured by these blasts.¹⁰ In Vile Parle, 5 people were killed by a bomb blast targeting a taxi.

In the second wave of attacks, at Mumbai's Cama Hospital, militants took several patients as hostages. Latest reports indicate that the police have successfully flushed out the militants at the hospital. Meanwhile, there was firing near Metro cinema, barely one kilometer away from CST.¹¹

Location of the Blasts in Mumbai:¹²

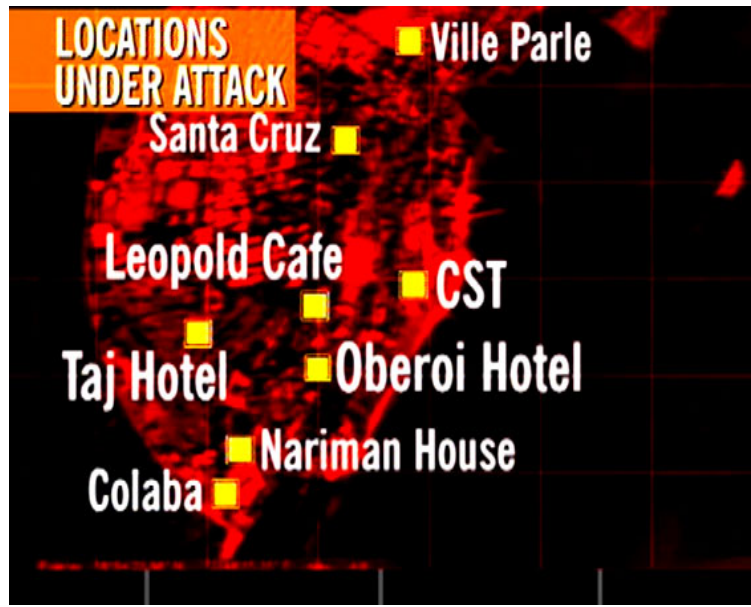


Source: *New York Times*

¹⁰ *Op cit.* Mumbai terror attack roundup: Here is what happened. *IBN*

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/mumbaiblastimage.htm/>



Public and International Reactions

A United Nations (UN) spokesman has said that UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has condemned the “rash shootings and blasts in Mumbai...”¹³ Ban feels that no grievance or cause can be a justification for these attacks against civilians. He calls for the militants to be brought to justice immediately. Additionally, he sends his deepest sympathies to the victims’ families and “...expresses his solidarity with the people and government of India”¹⁴.

The government of the United States has also expressed its condemnation. The US President-Elect Barack Obama stated that he “...strongly condemns today's terrorist attacks in Mumbai, and his thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families and the people of India”.¹⁵ Further Obama urged the United States to continue to strengthen its partnerships with India and other nations worldwide in the efforts to eliminate terrorist networks. He further added that America stands united with India, which has a democracy that is much more resilient than the detestable ideology of the perpetrators¹⁶.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brow has stated that these “...outrageous attacks in Mumbai will be met with a vigorous response”. He has also sent a message to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that the UK stands strongly with the Indian government and will offer “necessary help”. He further says that immediate effort is being undertaken to provide protection to British citizens in the region¹⁷.

¹³ World Leaders condemn horrific attacks in Mumbai, *CNN*.
<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/11/26/mumbai.officialsreaction/index.html?iref=mpstoryview>. 27/11/08

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

Who May Be Responsible?

Within a few hours into the attack, a previously unknown organization calling itself the Deccan Mujahideen sent an email to news organizations claiming responsibility for the attacks.¹⁸ However, there are some severe doubts regarding the existence of Deccan Mujahideen and it is believed that they likely to be linked to the Indian Mujahideen. This is because the email sent out by the Deccan Mujahideen is apparently very similar to the ones sent out by the Indian Mujahideen group in earlier attacks.

On September 14 2008, the Indian Mujahideen, which had claimed the responsibility for the serial terror blasts in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Jaipur, accused Mumbai Police's Anti-Terrorism Squad of harassing Muslims in an email it sent to news organizations. The Indian Mujahideen, believed to be a front strike unit of the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), specifically mentioned in their email that they were closely watching the ATS.¹⁹ The contents of this email are strikingly similar to those of the email sent by the Deccan Mujahideen.

A militant, claiming to belong to Deccan Mujahideen spoke to a News Channel called India TV. He identified himself as 'Sahadullah' and said he hailed from the Indian city of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. He then went on to make allegations concerning perceived injustice to Muslims in India. He added that hostages inside Taj and Oberoi (also known as Trident) Hotels would only be freed when all 'mujahideens' or Islamic Holy warriors that were being held in Indian prisons were released. "Release all the mujahideens, and Muslims living in India should not be troubled," were his exact words.²⁰ The militant then abruptly terminated the call.²¹

Journalists from India TV noted that though Sahadullah claimed to belong to Hyderabad he did not sound like he was from Hyderabad from the tone and tenor of his voice.²² Survivors and eyewitnesses have claimed that the militants were speaking to each other in Hindi and Urdu.

Further, a British national who escaped from the Taj Hotel commented that the militants looked very young and were probably in the age group of 20 -25 years. He also added that they were dressed in causal clothing namely, in T-shirts and jeans and were very aggressive in their behavior. Earlier today, photographs of a suspected militant with an AK-47 were released. The suspected militant comes across as an average youngster. He

¹⁸ "Terror attacks in Mumbai; 80 dead, over 900 injured." The Times of India, 27/11/2008
http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Terrorists_strike_Mumbai_80_dead_300_hurt/articleshow/3761410.cms

¹⁹ "Indian Mujahideen threatens to target Mumbai" India Today, 14/09/2008
http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?option=com_content&issueid=71&task=view&id=15328§ionid=4&Itemid=1

²⁰ "Mumbai gunmen battle army, foreigners held hostage" Reuters, 27/11/2008,
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP355003.htm>

²¹ "Terrorist Speaks to India TV over phone, claims to belong to Deccan Mujahideen.", India Tv, 27/11/2008 <http://www.indiatvnews.com/common.aspx?path=19/213>

²² ibid

was dressed in a black T-shirt and jeans, and was carrying blue rucksack over his left shoulder.²³ His picture is attached at the end of the report.

A Pakistani Connection?

There is much speculation concerning a possible Pakistan connection with the attacks. Three militants that have been captured and interrogated confessed that they belong to Pakistan-backed militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). According to the interrogation of the militants, a merchant ship carrying at least one group of LeT operatives embarked from Karachi early Wednesday. They eventually arrived in Mumbai on a small boat, dividing up into small teams to launch attacks on various sites. Each militant was provided with weapons suspected to have been produced in a Pakistani ordnance factor, including eight to ten grenades and an AK-47 assault rifle alongside two magazines per person.²⁴

Other TV channels named a gunman held by authorities as Abu Ismail, said to be a Punjabi-speaking youth from Pakistan. A satellite phone recovered from two dead terrorists reportedly showed calls made to Karachi before and after the attacks commenced.²⁵ Further, interrogation of captured militant Azam Amir Kasab revealed that the group of young men was residents of Faridkot, in Multan, southern Punjab, Pakistan.

According to strategic affairs analyst, K Subrahmanyam, "the equipment, training and sophistication of their planning would tend to indicate a Pakistani link"²⁶. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has not ruled out a Pakistan link, saying that India will not tolerate any attacks launched from their territory²⁷.

Lashkar-e-Taiba has denied any involvement with the attacks. Pakistan Intelligent Services have also been accused as those responsible²⁸ although Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has condemned the attacks²⁹. Further, LeT operations generally does not involve the use of grenades or hostage-taking. Also, if LeT militants were involved it is unlikely that they would allow themselves to be arrested or taken captive.

Hint of Al Qaeda?

²³ "Terrorists were young men in jeans: Eyewitness" NDTV, 27/11/2008, <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20080074296>

²⁴ The Pakistan Militants held in Mumbai, *Reuters*, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Three_Pakistani_militants_held_in_Mumbai_Reports/articleshow/3767631.cms?TOI_latestnews, 28/11/08

²⁵ "Mumbai terror attacks: Who could be behind them?", *The Guardian*, 28/11/2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/27/mumbai-terror-attacks-india8>

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ Attributes Suggest Outside Help, *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/27/AR2008112702177.html>, 28/11/08

²⁹ Mumbai attacks sadden Pakistanis, *New Kerala*, <http://www.newkerala.com/topstory-fullnews-52535.html>, 28/11/08

A number of analysts believe that the tactical and operational planning of the Mumbai attacks indicates signs of Al Qaeda mainly because of the foreign (specifically American, British, Canadian and Jewish) and soft targets chosen and the ability to simultaneously strike at a number of targets. In one particular incident revealed recently, two Turkish citizens, along with three Caucasians were held hostage in the Oberoi hotel since Wednesday, 26 November 2008. However, the militants released the Turkish citizens on the basis that they were Muslims while they shot the three Caucasians.³⁰

At the same time it can be argued that as Al Qaeda (AQ) and its franchise groups maybe losing ground in Muslim majority flashpoints like Indonesia or Iraq, they may seem to be shifting focus on countries like India where a certain section of the Muslim minority population perceive themselves to be discriminated against by the Indian government and thus provides a fertile ground for radical Islamist indoctrination.

However, there were no suicide bombings or suicide attacks and the explosives used were just grenades, and not sophisticated IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). Although the targets may hint at a possible AQ link, there is an absence of concrete evidence to prove that there is any connection of Al Qaeda to the Mumbai attacks.

Implications

As has been the case in militant attacks in India for the past two to three years, the targets were mainly soft targets viz. hotels, commuter trains, cinema halls, popular tourist places like cafes and restaurants. The choice of targets seems to be three-fold. One is to inflict maximum casualty, not just focused on security personnel, but also on ordinary civilians and foreign tourists.

As in the case of the Ahmedabad blasts, the militants targeted a hospital (in this case, the Cama Hospital) in Mumbai where the injured were taken increasing the number of fatalities drastically. For perhaps the first time, there is an inclination that the target may not have been completely intended to be local as foreign tourists were targeted, tourist-prone areas were hit and there was news that the militants were specifically looking for hotel guests with British or American passports.³¹ The Jewish community has also been affected by the blasts. The hostage taking of the Jewish rabbi in a residential complex-Nariman House also seems to indicate that the focus may have been a shift from the 'near' enemy to the 'far' enemy.

The second intention is to target the Indian economy and hence the choice of India's financial capital Mumbai. With the whole world being hit by the financial crisis at present, this incident will weaken the resilience of the Indian economy and directly undermine investors' confidence in the Indian economy.

³⁰ "Turkish couple let off by terrorists for being Muslims", Times of India, 28/11/2008, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Turkish_couple_let_off_by_terrorists_for_being_Muslims/articleshow/3766609.cms

³¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/3528187/British-hostages-seized-in-India-terror-attacks-that-kill-at-least-80.html>

The third intention of the attacks is to send out a message to the Indian government and security apparatus that they pose a serious threat and intend to bring out a change in policy. The fact that the militants managed to kill three high-ranking police officials- Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) chief Hemant Karakare who was leading the Malegaon bomb blast probe, the Additional Commissioner Ashok Kamte and encounter specialist Vijay Salaskar³² as well as holding off Indian Army security personnel and National Security Guard Commandos for over 48 hours indicates excellent training and planning on the part of the militants.

Pictures from the Blast Sites³³

ATS chief killed in the frontline



The hijacked police car



The young militant caught on camera outside Café Leopold



³² *Opcit.* Mumbai nightmare: Here is what happened 27/11/08

³³ http://ibnlive.in.com/photogallery/1117-3.html#view_start