

United against the wrong enemy

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Pakistan has made a modest start against the likely culprits of the Mumbai killings. But fulminating against India is more fun

IF PAKISTAN'S leaders had ever united against Islamist militancy as they have against India over the past three weeks, their country would not be the violent mess that it is. Ever since India alleged, with subsequent corroboration from America and Britain, that Pakistani terrorists carried out last month's mass murder in Mumbai, the country's politicians, generals and fire-breathing journalists have been declaring themselves ready for war—if that's what India chooses.

India's government, despite huge pressure from its own bellicose media, has been more restrained. It has said it does not intend to attack its neighbour. But it has demanded that Pakistan dismantle an anti-Indian militant group, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), that has carried out numerous atrocities in India, apparently including the outrage on Mumbai. It has so far relied on diplomacy, particularly through America and Britain, to make this point.

But India is frustrated. Pakistan has taken some steps against Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JUD), an Islamist charity that is a front for LET, which was formally banned by Pakistan, under American pressure, in 2002. But it is not clear at this stage how far they go. On December 11th, a day after the UN Security Council banned JUD, Pakistan said it had also banned it. It has since arrested the group's leaders, including Hafiz Saeed, a professor of engineering, who founded LET and JUD in the 1980s. It has also arrested many JUD activists, sealed scores of the charity's offices and stopped publication of at least six JUD newspapers.

Initially, it also said it would take over the group's many hospitals and schools—allegedly including over 170 schools in Punjab province alone. But it has since seemed to backtrack on this. According to one minister, the government will set up a new charity to run these services. According to a senior official in Punjab, some of JUD's facilities may be left in the same Islamist hands.

They may include a vast jihadist citadel that JUD operates in Muridke, a town close to the Indian border (its entrance is shown in our picture). It contains two schools, for 1,000 children, an Islamic college and a hospital that sees 100 outpatients a day. The campus's manager, a courteous Islamist called Abu Ehsan, said 66 local villages depend on the services it provides, and he trusted that the government would not disrupt them. Shortly after JUD was banned, local police turned up on the campus. But they soon left and Mr Ehsan said he had heard no more from them.

So, for now at least, the schools at Muridke remain free to teach what Mr Saeed has preached for two decades: *jihad* against Hindu India, especially to drive it from the

contested region of Kashmir. It was for this purpose that LET was founded, with support from the army's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI). For two decades, as the army's proxy, it has waged an insurgency in Indian-held Kashmir that has cost over 40,000 lives. Though the ISI appears to have cut back its ties to LET since it was banned, its armouries and military training camps in Pakistan-held Kashmir have remained in place.

The bearded and purposeful men who patrol the campus in Muridke with pyjama trousers hitched halfway up their shins might be graduates of these camps. They have an imposing bearing not usually acquired during teacher training. On the campus, a 12-year-old boarding student, Hamza Nazir, says he likes his school, "because we get Islamic education and we learn how to deal with our enemies." Asked to elucidate, he offers an Urdu proverb: "A hint's enough for a wise man."

Foolishly, then, many Pakistanis, including some of the country's most senior officials, are claiming that JUD is being victimised. "No JUD office is recruiting people for *jihad*," says one of those responsible for closing the group down. Many also say they fear a violent backlash. Others fret that it will be difficult to make a case against JUD's detained leaders, even if India supplies Pakistan with the evidence of their responsibility for the Mumbai attacks that it claims to have. These are legitimate worries. Yet, especially to Indian ears, they are starting to sound like familiar excuses.

In the current spirit of nationalism, it is hard to avoid an impression that many Pakistanis are relieved to be unified against the one enemy they can all agree on, India. By contrast, many remain deeply sceptical about their need to tackle terrorism and a Taliban insurgency at home, despite over 50 suicide bomb blasts in Pakistan last year. To explain these conflicts—though it is a stretch—it has become increasingly fashionable in Pakistan to blame them on India. The army seems convinced that India is supporting the Taliban. This makes Pakistanis especially loth to crack down on LET, historically at least their trustiest weapon against India.

This is worrying. So far, Pakistan should consider itself fortunate to have received such gentle handling after Mumbai. In the event of another catastrophic attack, India might be less cautious. Even as it is, great damage has been done. Pakistan really cannot afford anything less than peace with its neighbour. Facing a long war on its north-western border, it cannot keep up its decades-old readiness on the eastern one. Moreover for its moribund economy to grow, it needs urgently to improve trade and investment relations with India.

Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan's commercially minded president, seemed to recognise this. He had been trying to coax life back into the once successful but now stagnant diplomatic effort to normalise relations between the two countries. But on December 14th India's prime minister, Manmohan Singh, suggested that so long as Pakistan's vicious sometime proxies remain unchecked, this will be impossible.