

Organized Crime, Intelligence and Terror: The D-Company's Role in the Mumbai Attacks

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What do you call a "devout Muslim" who exerts considerable control over South Asia's heroin, gambling, prostitution and smuggling rackets? Why an intelligence asset, of course!

When Lashkar-e-Taiba ("Army of the Pure"-LET) militants slaughtered nearly 200 people in Mumbai during the November 26 siege in India's financial capital, one name stood out among a list of 20 fugitives the Indian government has demanded Pakistan extradite as a key suspect responsible for providing funds and logistical support to the Kashmir-based terrorist outfit.

Enter Dawood Ibrahim, the enigmatic Mafia don of Mumbai's D-Company whose far-flung organized crime empire stretches from Dubai through Pakistan to India and beyond. If anyone knows where the proverbial "bodies are buried," that man may very well be Ibrahim. Wanted by Interpol and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Ibrahim commutes between palatial homes in Dubai and Karachi where he enjoys the protection afforded by "friends in high places."

According to a report in [Asia Times Online](#), "Ibrahim is...suspected of orchestrating the November 26 Mumbai terrorist strikes through a businessman in Saudi Arabia said to be his frontman." The Indian-born drug kingpin has been identified by journalists and investigators as a long-time asset of both the CIA and Pakistan's notorious Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI).

Asia Times Online investigative journalist Raja Murthy was told by Lahore-based journalist Amir Mir that "Dawood's underworld connects and business ventures are extensive. And he sublets his name in Pakistan, Thailand, South Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates, among other countries, to franchises in the fields of drug trafficking and gambling dens."

Karachi-based reporter Ghulam Hasnain described to Murthy why Ibrahim was amongst ISI's most valued assets: "Dawood is Pakistan's number one espionage operative. His men in Mumbai help him get whatever information he needs for Pakistan. Rumor has it that sometimes his men in Karachi accompany Pakistani intelligence agents to the airports to scan arriving passengers and identify RAW [Indian Research and Analysis Wing] agents."

And what does this "number one espionage operative" get in return? According to Hasnain, "His home is a palatial house spread over 6,000 square yards, boasting a pool, tennis courts, snooker room and a private, hi-tech gym. He wears designer clothes, drives top-of-

the-line Mercedes and luxurious four-wheel drives, sports a half-a-million rupee Patek Phillipe wristwatch, and showers money on starlets and prostitutes.”

Pakistan’s shadowy military intelligence bureau, with organizational and operational linkages to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the CIA and Britain’s MI6 has long been suspected of funding planetary-wide terrorist operations and nuclear smuggling in part, through “black money” derived from the drugs trade and other rackets. Despite this sordid history, the ISI and their organized crime-linked assets have long been viewed by Washington as allies in America’s so-called “war on terror.”

While American “counterterrorism officials” are now calling for the heads of Ibrahim, his associate Tiger Memon and former ISI Director, retired Lieutenant General Hamid Gul, described by the usual unnamed sources as-what else!-“rogue elements,” the United States and their NATO partners have made liberal use of these jokers in a score of destabilization ops that span continents.

Indeed, after the Afghanistan operation during the 1980s, the CIA and ISI worked together in a score of global hot spots. From Bosnia to Chechnya and beyond, wherever the dirty work needed doing, a wide pool of disposable intelligence assets under cover of “Islamic fundamentalism” were ready, willing and able to fill the breach.

It should be noted that characters such as Dawood Ibrahim and others of his ilk have as much in common with Islam as former New York crime boss, the late, though unlamented, John Gotti did with Christianity.

Destabilization and Covert Ops in South Asia

Before his execution at the hands of the Taliban, Najibullah, Afghanistan’s last socialist president told an American reporter:

We have a common task-Afghanistan, the USA and the civilised world-to launch a joint struggle against fundamentalism. If fundamentalism comes to Afghanistan, war will continue for many years. Afghanistan will turn into a centre of world smuggling for narcotic drugs. Afghanistan will be turned into a centre for terrorism. (Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Afghanistan, Al Qa’ida and the Holy War*, London: Pluto Press, 2003, p. 4)

Little did the former president know, this was precisely the fate chosen for his country by the ISI and their American partners in crime over at Langley.

Though now on the outs with Washington, Hamid Gul was a staunch U.S. ally during the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad when the CIA made liberal use of billions of taxpayer dollars to fund the so-called mujahedin or “holy warriors” in a successful bid to bring down Kabul’s socialist government.

During the war, U.S. and Pakistani intelligence assets linked to organized crime gangs and various smuggling rackets quickly learned the value of Afghanistan’s number one cash crop, poppy. By the time the first phase of the war ended in 1989 with the withdrawal of Soviet combat troops, heroin production had morphed into a multibillion dollar industry along Asia’s Golden Crescent, one that provided a limitless source of black funds-and hardened combat veterans-to enterprising intelligence agencies.

Occupying a prominent place in the spider's web, the D-Company certainly fit the bill. India's 1990s economic "reforms" bit hard into Ibrahim's former "cash crop"-gold smuggling. As the globalized market, rather than bureaucratic Indian regulations gobbled-up D-Company profits, Ibrahim's gang turned to another profitable source of income: the global drugs trade. As investigative journalist Misha Glenny points out, Ibrahim,

took the obvious plunge and started trafficking in drugs, chiefly in heroin bound for the European market and mandrax for South Africa. And in Dawood's part of the world, if you want to guarantee the success of a narcotics business, there is only one organization you need to cozy up to-the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Pakistan's secret service. (McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, p. 135)

Ibrahim followed in the footsteps of a long line of CIA-ISI "best friends forever." As Alfred W. McCoy documented in his landmark study, *The Politics of Heroin*, another darling of dodgy intelligence agencies, the pathological killer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who made his mark in the 1970s by throwing acid into the faces of Afghan university women, became the chief beneficiary of CIA largesse. McCoy writes,

...over the next decade, [the CIA] gave more than half its covert aid to Hekmatyar's guerrillas. It was, as the U.S. Congress would find a decade later, a dismal decision. Unlike the later resistance leaders who commanded strong popular followings inside Afghanistan, Hekmatyar led a guerrilla force that was a creature of the Pakistan military. After the CIA built his Hezbi-i Islami into the largest guerrilla force, Hekmatyar would prove himself brutal and corrupt. Not only did he command the largest guerrilla army, but Hekmatyar would use it-with the full support of ISI and the tacit tolerance of the CIA-to become Afghanistan's leading drug lord. (*The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991, pp. 449-450)

It would be a travesty however, to claim that Pakistan alone was responsible for launching Ibrahim along the path of international terrorism. India's own neofascist movement, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteers Organization-RSS), aligned with the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are intent on constructing a "pure" Hindu state purged of "alien" Muslims. As Indian socialist analysts [point out](#),

It is no coincidence that the flourishing of fascism has accompanied the establishment of the neoliberal regime at the centre. The India to which neoliberalism has given birth, with one-fifth engaged in consumer excess as never before and four-fifths in deep misery, can only with difficulty persist alongside the maintenance of civil rights, democracy and periodic elections. If the fundamental social question, imperialist capitalism vs. socialism, were ever to be put at the centre of things, the continued existence of the landlord-big business regime that has ruled since independence would be in danger, and a truly explosive situation result. ("The Christian Pogrom in Orissa and the Growing Threat of Hindutva Fascism," *Analytical Monthly Review*, February 22, 2008)

This was tragically driven-home with a vengeance in the early 1990s. Indeed, the rise of Indian fascism coincides precisely with the rise of neoliberal globalization. As "market reforms" plunged tens of millions into abject poverty, the ruling elite cast about for

scapegoats and, like European Jews in prewar Germany, the Muslim community became targets of religious intolerance and communalist fanaticism.

In 1992, during a 150,000 strong demonstration organized by Indian fascists, rampaging gangs destroyed the Babri Mosque in the city of Ayodhya. In the rioting that followed in a score of cities some 2,000 largely Muslim Indian citizens were murdered by Hindu supremacist mobs. Ibrahim, though nominally a Muslim, was greatly angered by the Mumbai pogrom and vowed revenge. It wasn't long in coming.

On March 12, 1993, a series of explosions wracked Mumbai in coordinated attacks believed to have been organized by the D-Company working in tandem with ISI who, like their nominal enemies in New Delhi, had their own communalist agenda. The largest blast occurred at the Mumbai Stock Exchange when a half-ton of military grade RDX was detonated in the underground parking garage and killed more than 50 people. By the time the smoke cleared, nearly 300 people lay dead and hundreds more wounded.

According to a 2002 [report](#) in *India Abroad*, Ibrahim organized the blasts "under pressure from the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan."

The ISI, which controlled the shipping routes from the Gulf to India's west coast, demanded that the mafia transport weapons and explosives into India in return for the use of Pakistani waters, the sources said quoting official information.

The Mumbai underworld's financial interests were under pressure as gold prices had crashed and the smuggling routes between the Gulf nations and the western coast of India had come under ISI control. ("ISI pressured Dawood to carry out Mumbai blasts," *India Abroad*, December 22, 2002)

It wouldn't be the first time nor the last that the dapper Mafia don would do ISI's bidding.

ISI: the Enforcement Arm of Pakistan's "Military Inc."

Hamid Gul's history as a beneficiary of state largesse in the form of plum contracts and other dodgy schemes that benefitted his family goes back decades. Nor is his hostility to civilian rule. As Pakistani scholar and investigative journalist Ayesha Siddiqa writes, Gul's maneuvering against Benazir Bhutto's first government, led to her ouster in 1990 through a "soft coup" engineered by the general and other top army officials.

Benazir Bhutto...replaced the head of the ISI, Lt. General Hameed Gul, with a general of her choice, Major-General Shamsul Rehman Kallu. This did not make her popular with the army, and hence the organization retaliated. Reportedly, the higher echelons of the army, who were extremely unhappy with her attempts to curb their power by interfering in internal matters, used the ISI to remove her from power. The army chief, General Aslam Beg, and the head of the ISI, Lt. General Asad Durrani, obtained a slush fund of approximately Rs 60 million (US\$1.03 million) from a private bank, and used to execute the plan for Bhutto's removal. The money was given to the ISI to destabilize the civilian government. (*Military, Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007, p. 91)

And what “private bank” pray tell, did the coup plotters reach out to in order to remove Bhutto from power? Why none other than Agha Hasan Abedi’s Bank of Credit and Commerce International ([BCCI](#)) of course! BCCI, a corrupt financial institution that stole billions from their depositors was a long time “friend” of both ISI and CIA in their dirty dealings—from drug money laundering to arms trafficking—that spanned continents, from the covert war in Afghanistan to the Iran-Contra affair.

Days after the 2007 Karachi bombings that greeted her return to Pakistan, and just two months before her assassination in Rawalpindi, Benazir Bhutto accused Gul and Intelligence Bureau (IB) Chief Ijaz Shah, among others, as the masterminds behind the savage attacks that left more than 140 people dead and 450 injured. After her assassination, although al-Qaeda commander Mustafa Abu al-Yazid claimed responsibility for her murder, reportedly on orders from al-Qaeda’s number two man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bhutto’s followers believe the plans for her assassination came from senior ISI officials formerly in the retinue of America’s “friend,” the dictator General Zia ul-Haq.

Since his 1989 “retirement” from ISI, Gul has been an outspoken proponent of utilizing proxies such as LET as witting or unwitting assets in Pakistan’s conflict with India over Kashmir—and as a supporter of the Taliban and another “former” group of U.S. intelligence assets, al-Qaeda. According to [The Washington Post](#),

Gul, 71, has acknowledged that he once was a member of a group of retired ISI officers, Pakistani scientists and others that was suspected by the United States of giving material support to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Gul said the organization, Ummah Tameer-e-Nau, was formed by a group of Pakistani businessmen to aid war-ravaged industries in Afghanistan.

The U.S. Treasury Department declared Ummah Tameer-e-Nau a terrorist group after a search of the group’s offices in the Afghan capital, Kabul, unearthed documents referencing plans to kidnap a U.S. diplomat and outlining basic physics related to nuclear weapons. (Candace Rondeaux, “Former Pakistani Official Denies Links to Lashkar,” *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2008, A12)

But what Gul (and *The Washington Post*) will not, *cannot*, reveal is that Ummah Tameer-e-Nau was also intimately connected—as was Dawood Ibrahim’s D-Company—to the illicit nuclear smuggling ring of Pakistani scientist A. Q. Khan. Allegedly run to ground after overwhelming evidence surfaced linking Khan and Pakistan’s military government to the underground trade in nuclear technology and know-how, nuclear smuggling is the proverbial third rail of the Pakistani—and American—defense establishments.

Operating for decades with a wink and a nod from Washington and London, Khan was quietly released from house arrest in April according to a [report](#) by the *McClatchy Washington Bureau*. This despite the fact that international investigators found electronic blueprints for an advanced nuclear weapon on computers belonging to Khan’s smuggling network. According to [The New York Times](#),

the latest design found on Khan network computers in Switzerland, Bangkok and several other cities around the world is half the size and twice the power of the Chinese weapon, with far more modern electronics, the investigators say. The design is in electronic form, they said, making it easy to copy—and they have no idea how many copies of it are now in circulation. (David E. Sanger,

“Nuclear Ring Reportedly Had Advanced Weapon Design,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 2008)

This closely tracks [allegations](#) made by whistleblower Sibel Edmonds earlier this year to *The Sunday Times* that a U.S. government official “warned a Turkish member of the [Khan] network that they should not deal with a company called Brewster Jennings because it was a CIA front company investigating the nuclear black market. The official’s warning came two years before Brewster Jennings was publicly outed when one of its staff, Valerie Plame, was revealed to be a CIA agent in a case that became a cause celebre in the US.”

Gul however, has a different take on Washington’s newly-minted animus towards him and told the press on Monday, “I was quite a darling of theirs at the time. I don’t know what this is about. It looks like they have a habit of betraying their friends.”

While true as far it goes, Gul’s disingenuousness is a cynical façade meant to conceal ISI’s murderous policies. In an obvious appeal to dubious Western constituencies Gul declared, “I simply fail to understand what all the hullabaloo is about. It’s simply because I speak loudly about the fact that 9/11 was a bloody hoax,” he told the *Post*. “It was an inside job.”

Mumbai: “Round Up the Usual Suspects!”

Though there is convincing evidence linking the D-Company to the Mumbai attacks, each new “revelation” by Indian and American authorities tend to erase Ibrahim from the picture. This subtle though noticeable reframing of the equation follows a predictable and well-known pattern. Independent press outlets such as *Asia Times Online* however, apparently haven’t gotten the memo. According to investigative journalist Raja Murthy:

The Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists set sail from Karachi to Mumbai in the ship MV Alpha, allegedly an Ibrahim-owned vessel. After being warned of Indian navy patrols along the Indian coast, the LET terrorists hijacked an Indian fishing trawler, Kuber, and murdered its crew except for the navigator, Amarsinh Solanki.

The terrorists slit Solanki’s throat five nautical miles off the Indian coast—the Indian Navy found his body aboard the abandoned trawler with his hands tied behind his back. Later, they linked up with an Ibrahim gang member in Mumbai who provided them motorized inflatable rubber dinghies in which they landed ashore after 9pm on November 26. Within 30 minutes, they struck pre-determined targets in South Mumbai starting with the Leopold Cafe in Colaba. (“India Wants its ‘Osama’ Back,” *Asia Times Online*, December 9, 2008)

These attacks however, didn’t come out of the blue. According to numerous reports, Mumbai police were given “solid information” from India’s Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) that Mumbai was on a list of cities to be targeted by terrorists. *India Abroad* [reports](#) that

The first alert was sounded in February 2008 following the interrogation of a terrorist arrested in connection with the fidayeen (suicide) attack at the Central Reserve Police Force camp at Rampur, Uttar Pradesh. During the interrogation, the arrested terrorist had confessed that the Lashkar-e-Tayiba had planned on attacking Mumbai. He had specifically mentioned the Taj Mahal hotel during his interrogation.

Then came the various intercepts by both the IB and RAW, which both agencies claim had passed on to the Mumbai police. The first intercept of a satellite phone conversation was three months before the Mumbai attack. The conversation suggested that the next attack would be a hotel at Mumbai. The conversation also suggested that it would be better to take the sea route as it was safer. The final intercept was made on November 18, which was eight days before the attack. (Vicky Nanjappa, "Time & again, Mumbai cops had been warned: IB," *India Abroad*, December 4, 2008)

This report was echoed by *The New York Times*, which [claimed](#),

Two senior American officials said Tuesday that the United States had warned India in mid-October of possible terrorist attacks against "touristy areas frequented by Westerners" in Mumbai, but that the information was not specific. Nonetheless, the officials said, the warning echoed other general alerts this year by India's intelligence agency, raising questions about the adequacy of India's counterterrorism measures. (Eric Schmitt, Somini Sengupta and Jane Perlez, "U.S. and India See Link to Militants in Pakistan," *The New York Times*, December 3, 2008)

Despite these suspicions, Indian authorities insist that the terrorists had no "local support" in carrying out the attacks. According to a [report](#) in the *Economic Times* however, "the don is ensconced safely in his plush bungalow in Karachi. Sources in security agencies told TOI [*Times of India*] on Wednesday that it is business as usual for Dawood. ... Mohammed Ali, who is the king of the docks and a key person of the Dawood gang, is continuing his operations with impunity. Even after the November 26 terror attacks his smuggling racket remains unchecked."

And *Express India* [reported](#) November 29 that "Ajmal Amin, the only militant arrested during the operation, told interrogators that the dozen ultras who sailed from Karachi had come to Sasool dock from where they were taken first to Cuff Parade and later to Gateway of India in boats arranged by a front man of Dawood, who runs several custom clearing houses in Mumbai, the sources claimed."

Meanwhile, the *Associated Press* [reported](#) December 9, that the head of Russia's federal anti-narcotics agency, Viktor Ivanov, said that Ibrahim had helped the gunmen. "The information that has been received indicates that the well-known drug trafficker Dawood Ibrahim provided his logistics network for the preparation and implementation of the attacks."

But Ibrahim wasn't always the *bête noire* of U.S. intelligence agencies. According to Yoichi Shimatsu, a former editor of *The Japan Times*, during the CIA's Afghan campaign of the 1980s, Ibrahim "personally assisted" U.S. deep cover operations by diverting money from U.S.-owned gambling casinos operating in Kathmandu, Nepal. Shimatsu, commenting on India's demand for Ibrahim's extradition for his role in the Mumbai attacks [wrote](#),

Washington and London both agreed with India's legal claim and removed the longstanding "official protection" accorded for his past services to Western intelligence agencies. U.S. diplomats, however, could never allow Dawood's return. He simply knows too much about America's darker secrets in South Asia and the Gulf, disclosure of which could scuttle U.S.-India relations. Dawood was whisked away in late June to a safe house in Quetta, near the

tribal area of Waziristan, and then he disappeared, probably back to the Middle East. (“Did a Criminal Mastermind Stage the Mumbai Nightmare?,” AlterNet, November 28, 2008)

But as time passes both India and the United States are downplaying Ibrahim’s role while elevating that of alleged LET commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, reportedly captured by Pakistani authorities during a raid on a training camp and now in custody. Allegations of an international whitewash of the affair are now being leveled by journalists. Jeffrey R. Hammond [comments](#), “The recent promotion of Lakhvi to ‘mastermind’ of the attacks while Ibrahim’s name disappears from media reports would seem to lend credence to Shimatsu’s assertion.”

On Friday, according to a *New York Times* [report](#), Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the founder of LET, was detained in Lahore on Thursday by “Pakistani authorities.”

Despite the appearance of Pakistani resolve, the detention of Mr. Saeed was orchestrated by the government in a way to minimize what many here expect to be an angry reaction from the public, and from a broad spectrum of Islamic militant groups sympathetic to Lashkar-e-Taiba. (Jane Perlez and Salman Masood, “Pakistan Detains Founder of Group Suspected in Mumbai Attacks,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2008)

Saeed, briefly detained in 2002 after an earlier “crackdown” on militant outfits, became the leader of the Islamic charity, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, which is a recruiting arm for the LET.

Meanwhile, according to the *Times*, “There was still uncertainty on Thursday about whether Maulana Masood Azhar, the leader of Jaish-e-Muhammad, another militant group, had been placed under house arrest, and whether the Lashkar commander suspected of running the Mumbai operation, Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi, had been arrested.”

So much for arresting Mumbai’s alleged “masterminds.” Sounds more like Captain Renaud’s quip in *Casablanca*: “Round up the usual suspects!”

Indeed, a deal earlier this year to have Pakistan hand Ibrahim over to Indian authorities was scotched by the CIA. The Agency, fearful that too many dirty little secrets would come to light, including the criminal activities of high-level CIA personnel, nixed the proposal. According to this reading, the Mumbai attacks were a backlash for the proposed double-cross of Ibrahim and that any future arrangements along these lines would have serious consequences.

Why would India seek to downgrade Ibrahim’s role? Hammond comments,

But while Lakhvi, Muzammil, and Hafiz Saeed have continued to be named in connection with last month’s attacks in Mumbai, the name of Dawood Ibrahim seems to be either disappearing altogether or his originally designated role as the accused mastermind of the attacks being credited now instead to Lakhvi in media accounts.

Whether this is a deliberate effort to downplay Ibrahim’s role in the attacks so as not to have to force Pakistan to turn him over because of embarrassing revelations pertaining to the CIA’s involvement with known terrorists and drug

traffickers that development could possibly produce isn't certain. But what is certain is that the CIA has had a long history of involvement with such characters and that the US has a track record of attempting to keep information about the nature of such involvement in the dark or to cover it up once it reaches the light of public scrutiny. (Jeffrey R. Hammond, "Role of Alleged CIA Asset in Mumbai Attacks Being Downplayed," Foreign Policy Journal, December 10, 2008)

And so it goes, on and on... Meanwhile, business as usual will continue and the bodies pile up. Which just goes to show, as investigative journalist [Daniel Hopsicker](#) has reminded us on more than one occasion: "Being *connected* means never having to say your sorry."

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