Mumbai 2008: The city of Dreams turned into Warzone

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Sixteen years ago, the night of November 26, 2008, completely changed the lively city of Mumbai into a horrifying warzone. A series of well-organized and vicious attacks carried out by a Pakistan-based terrorist organization, Lashkar-e-Taiba, plummeted the city of dreams into immense fear. On November 26, 2008, a series of systematically planned terrorist attacks were executed across various places in Mumbai. These attacks were also known as the 26/11 attacks. Hundreds of innocent people were killed, and significant parts of the city were destroyed. 10 well-trained members of Lashkar-e-Taiba took over the Taj Palace Hotel, Chabad House, Oberoi Trident Hotel, Leopold Cafe, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) and killed over 164 people, while more than 300 were left severely injured (Arif & Gupta, 2010). The Mumbai terrorist attack is one of the deadliest attacks in Indian history. The terrorists took over varied parts of the city, and this series of dreadful events lasted for about 60 hours.

The ten members of Lashkar-e-Taiba came from Karachi on a Pakistani cargo ship, and later, they hijacked an Indian boat called Kuber. The terrorists killed all the crew members except the captain of the ship, who was killed later when they reached the city. They used Kuber as the medium to enter Mumbai by sea route. Upon reaching Mumbai, they split into three groups of two members and a group of four members. Two of the terrorists targeted Mumbai's major railway station, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST), and killed about 60 people in the open firing, using AK-47s as well as bombs (Javaid & Kamal, 2013). This duo then turned to Cama Hospital, where they mercilessly killed old patients, women, and children. One of the terrorists was killed in the encounter with Mumbai police. At the same time, another one known by the name Amir Ajmal Kasab was captured alive.

Another small group of attackers took over the Nariman House, a Jewish community center. It was also known as Chabad House. Attackers killed about eight people in the Nariman House. The Jewish Rabi and his six-month pregnant wife were among the ones who were killed there (Javaid & Kamal, 2013). Rabi's little child was the only one who survived because his Indian nanny took him to a safe place. Lashkar-e-Taiba targeted Nariman house because it was considered as the symbol of Jewish presence in India and Jews were the community that Lashkar considered vindictive. By attacking Nariman House, they wanted to bring Palestine's issue with Israel. Later, they were gunned down by the Indian national security forces.

The third duo of terrorists moved towards the Trident-Oberoi hotel, where they carried out the blood bath for about two days, murdering 35 people in total before being shot and killed by the Anti-terrorism Squad (Javaid & Kamal, 2013). The four-man group went on to invade the Taj Palace Hotel. Before getting into the hotel, the group momentarily entered Leopold Café, an eating point famous among foreigners, where they rained bullets left and right for about 10-15 minutes, killing ten people. The heavily armed attackers held the guests in the hotel hostage and engaged in the crossfire with Indian national security forces. The blockade at the Taj Hotel ended after 60 hours when the national security force killed all four attackers. The attackers ended up killing 36 guests, out of which 9 were foreign nationals. Lashkar-e-Taiba targeted these two hotels because they were the most elite hotels in Mumbai. They aimed to damage India's economy by targeting these luxurious hotels. Also, they wanted to spread a message to the world that India is not a safe place for tourists since these hotels were often the top choice for foreign visitors and business professionals visiting Mumbai (Javaid & Kamal, 2013).

According to the investigations carried out by various agencies, the systematic planning and precision with which these attacks were executed shows that they had support from some of the well-trained agencies of Pakistan. Although Pakistan never agreed to any sort of involvement in these deadly attacks. During the ongoing gundown with Indian forces, nine out of ten attackers were killed, whereas one of them was captured alive. He was identified as Amir Ajmal Kasab, a Pakistani citizen. Ajmal Kasab was sentenced to death in 2012, exactly 4 years after the attacks (Javaid & Kamal, 2013). During his trial, Kasab confessed to being a member of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a terrorist organization based out of Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba is one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world (Fair, 2011). Hafiz Saeed, a professor at the Lahore University of Engineering and Technology, founded Lashkar-e-Taiba. At the university, he came across people who shared the same ideologies, and these people joined the movement without any hesitation (Abbas Zaidi, 2009). Lashkar appeared as an international terrorist group when they carried out a series of horrifying attacks in the economic hub of India, Mumbai. In those attacks, about 164 people lost their lives, including several foreign visitors (Shaikh, 2012). Kasab also revealed that the mastermind behind planning the Mumbai attacks was Zaki-Ur-Lakhvi, one of the senior members of Lashkar-e-Taiba and the supreme commander for the Kashmiri theatre.

Further investigations revealed that David Headley, a Pakistani-American, was the one who visited Mumbai and searched for targets for the attack (Shaikh, 2012). The ten attackers who carried out the Mumbai attacks were recruited as well as trained by Lashkar in the remote areas of Azad Kashmir. They were rigorously trained to handle firearms. During investigations, Indian intelligence agencies found out that the attackers were in direct communication with the planners in Pakistan (Fair, 2011).

The motives behind carrying out these attacks were obvious. Lashkar wanted to sabotage the improved relations between India and Pakistan. Both countries tried to improve their tense relationship (Arif & Gupta, 2010). They wanted to create extreme fear and panic among the Indian people as well as the tourists who were visiting India. Lashkar was also aiming to spread Islamic extremist ideology in India.

This series of Mumbai attacks resulted in a total of 173 deaths, including Indian citizens, foreign visitors as well as nine terrorists. Over 300 people were seriously injured and were left with lifelong trauma. Landmarks such as the Taj Hotel and Oberoi Hotel were seriously damaged due to the bombing and gun firing (Arif & Gupta, 2010). The beautiful city was turned into debris. Attacks also hurt the tourism sector, causing economic loss. Monetary loss is something that can be dealt with, but the trauma that this unfortunate event has caused every Indian is something that people are still dealing with. This series of events gained a lot of attention from the media worldwide because there were a considerable number of foreign nationals who lost their lives in this series of events. It also complicated India's diplomatic relations with a lot of countries.

The Mumbai attacks worstened the already tense relationship India and Pakistan. Both countries pulled out from any sort of engagement with each other. For example, during that time, the Indian Cricket team was supposed to go to Pakistan for a cricket tournament, but due to this unfortunate event, the Indian cricket board backed off (Arif & Gupta, 2010). Both countries deployed their forces on the border as a reaction to the possibility of the war. The main reason behind doing so was that India and Pakistan's relationship was already not so great, and this series of attacks by a Pakistani terrorist organization added fuel to the fire. These attacks also raised questions about India's border security measures. Post 26/11, border supervision was increased both on land and at sea. Different sorts of approaches were employed to improve the surveillance. New technology and advanced equipment were utilized to monitor every activity at the borders (Arif & Gupta, 2010).

Terrorism is an act that involves the use of systematic violence to spread a message to the public. The message could be about a political change or government policies (Corrado & Cohen, 2000). Mumbai attacks were acts of terrorism because these were purely motivated by the political goals of Lashkar-e-Taiba to advance jihadism (Shaikh, 2012). The targets of terrorism are never random, and they are always selected according to the motives of the organization carrying out the attack. In the case of the Mumbai attacks, Lashkar selected the city of Mumbai because it was considered the economic hub of India, and by targeting Mumbai, they wanted to hurt India's economy by killing their tourism since Mumbai was one of the most visited places by the foreign nationals. They wanted to convey a message to the whole world that India is not a safe place. According to Corrado and Cohen, the intention behind a terrorist attack is to create extreme terror among the crowds distinct from the primary target. The Lashkar militants carried out these attacks to spread terror among the people, and they killed hundreds of people using firearms as well as bombs (Arif & Gupta, 2010).

The November 26, 2008, Mumbai attacks can be labeled as religiously motivated anti-State terrorism. Religiously motivated Anti-state terrorism is a type of terrorism in which individuals carrying out violence are motivated by religious ideologies, and their goal is to diminish a state (Martin, 2021). Here, in this case, Lashkar-e-Taiba attacked various institutions in Mumbai to undermine the Indian government without any involvement from the Pakistani government. They targeted places like the Taj Hotel, Leopold café, and Oberoi Hotel because they believed that these places were influenced by Western culture and were symbols of contemporary (India Javaid & Kamal, 2013). The motive behind attacking Nariman House was to spread fear among the whole Jewish community as revenge for what was happening with Jews in Israel and Palestine because Nariman House was a prominent Jewish outreach center in Mumbai. Also, one of the primary motives of Lashkar behind carrying out these deadly attacks was to advance jihadism in India. They wanted to free Kashmir, a disputed territory between India and Pakistan, and establish it as an Islamic state (Riedel, 2009).

The 2008 Mumbai attacks tore apart the city of Mumbai. The city once known as the Economic hub of India was turned into a graveyard with hundreds of causalities. Numerous families were shattered. This cruel act of violence cost the innocent civilian population their lives. These attacks were an eye-opener not only for India but for the whole world that terrorism is a universal threat and it needs collective efforts. Although several efforts have been made to combat these kinds of deadly incidents, the fear of terrorism remains a critical matter of concern to date. It is very important to address the root cause that promotes jihadism or extremism. What happened in Mumbai could happen anywhere. The world can only be turned into a safe space with joint initiatives (Svensson, 2013). As we remember the ones whom we lost during these horrifying attacks, let us pledge to create a world more peaceful and compassionate place so that these kinds of disasters can be prevented from happening in the future and thousands of lives can be saved.

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