The 2008 Mumbai Terror Attacks: (Re-) constructing Indian (Counter-) Terrorism

Åshild Kolås

International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

On 26 November 2008, six years after the Bali bombings of October 2002, Mumbai was placed firmly on the 'terrorism map' of the global North when international broadcast media screened breaking news of 'terror attacks' and hostage situations, involving 'Western' hotel guests and Israeli staff of a Jewish religious centre. Major news channels such as CNN reported that 'Westerners' were the 'targets of the terrorists'.[1] Later it became clear that the majority of the 174 people killed were Indian nationals, many of them gunned down in and around Victoria Terminus station within the first minutes of the attacks. Among the casualties were 26 foreign nationals, fourteen members of the security forces, and nine 'terrorists'.

Dubbed by Indian mainstream media as 'India's 9/11', the Mumbai attacks added a new 'global' dimension to the framing of India's own 'war on terror', as well as the 'terrorist threat' perceptions of India's general public. Even as the smoke was still rising from the domed roof of the landmark Taj Mahal hotel, the Indian reading and viewing public were engaged in vigorous online commentary, discussing a number of issues: who the 'terrorists' were and why they attacked; how to assess India's counter-terrorism strategies and capabilities; as well as who to blame for such a massive 'failure' in public security provision, whether it was the government, state police, national security forces or intelligence agencies.

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[1] 6.03 minutes of CNN coverage can be viewed online at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IZUK7AHvg4&feature=related.
The 'Mumbai Dossier' (containing evidence gathered by Indian investigators) lists the names of 26 foreigners killed in the attacks, including citizens of Israel, the United States, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, Mauritius, Mexico, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The complete 69-page 'Mumbai Dossier' can be accessed online at: http://www.hindu.com/nic/dossier.htm.

With the quick identification of the perpetrators as Pakistanis, regional stability was at stake. Security analysts were soon discussing the potential consequences of the Mumbai attacks for the relationship between the two neighbors, highlighting the fact that both countries have nuclear arsenals. The role of Pakistan in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) came up for renewed scrutiny, as did the complex relationships between non-state as well as state actors, including not only India and Pakistan, but also Afghanistan, the United States and its allies. Commenting on the implications of the Mumbai attacks on US-India relations, American security analysts called for a strengthening of counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries, especially on intelligence sharing and 'lessons learned' from US Homeland security efforts (Markey 2008, see also Curtis 2008).

A number of researchers of political violence, securitisation and the War on Terror (WOT) have focused post-9/11 specifically on the discursive framing of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Their studies have investigated 'securitising speech acts' (inspired by the Copenhagen School of IR; see Buzan et. al. 1997) and the narratives produced by the media, civil society, politicians and lawmakers, and in some cases by militant organisations and 'terrorists' themselves. The discursive framing of the GWOT by the Bush administration has received much of this scholarly attention (see for instance Wibben 2002, Collins and Glover 2002, Stern 2006, Abrahamsen 2005, Croft 2006, Jackson 2006). This paper deploys a similar discursive approach to the framing of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks and their aftermath, and to the ensuing debates about Indian counter-terrorism strategies.

In my attempt to capture 'indigenous' Indian perspectives on the Mumbai attacks I follow a discursive approach which goes beyond textual analysis to include audio-visual imagery as a key aspect of the social construction of 'terrorism', utilising concepts such as 'scripting' (Pin-

Fat and Stern 2005), 'visualising' (Shepherd 2008), 'screening' (Dodds 2008), 'witnessing' (Tracy 2005) and 'spectacle' (Boal et.al. 2004). As highlighted by anthropologists Schmidt and Schröder (2001, pp. 8-9), violence, following cultural models, needs to be imagined in order to be carried out, producing unique experiences that are culturally mediated. Representations of violence are thus a part of the 'cultural repertoire' of societies, forming an important resource for the perception (or imagination) and legitimization of future violence. The tangible results (for instance dead bodies or the relocation of people) are 'empirical facts' that can be reconstructed from historical records, but as 'facts' they are malleable in discourse (Schmidt and Schröder 2001).

The Mumbai attacks illustrate that 'facts' ... In order to produce 'news stories' that catch the imagination of readers and viewers, media workers (such as reporters and editors) must take cultural and narrative repertoires into consideration as they 'script' (and 'screen') acts of violence. However, the 'news product' is not the end point, 'news' is also consumed....

The notion that 'truth' is presented in 'live' TV images is another relevant question. Scripting is in fact also involved in the production of so-called 'live' news broadcasts, which have all the more truth-making power thanks to the illusion that viewers are 'witnessing' real events as they 'unfold'. How media representations of 'truth' or 'reality' play out in the real consequences for lived experience…

As understood by Schmidt and Schröder (2001), violence can be interpreted as an instrumentally rational strategy of bargaining for power, but it can also be seen as a form of symbolic action that conveys cultural meanings particularly about the meaning of power and

legitimacy. Violence is the realization of power, in the sense of both staging and enactment of power. Violence is thus both imaginary and practice. The violent imaginary is communicated through narratives (which keep the memory of former conflicts and past violence alive in stories about past glory, or loss and injustice), performances (public rituals in which antagonism is staged and images of violence enacted, such as in 'war ceremonies') and finally inscriptions (visual displays of antagonism, such as images on banners or murals, or TV images) (Schmidt and Schröder 2001).

The 2008 Mumbai attacks can likewise be understood as violence that was not merely 'practiced' but also in a very important sense 'imagined', in the way they were 'staged' by those who planned them, 'scripted' by the print and broadcast media, and 'witnessed' by viewers, some of whom were commenting actively on the events in online discussions, and relaying audio-visual images on websites such as YouTube. This highlights the 'performative quality of violence', as described by Schmidt and Schröder (2001, pp. 5-6):

> Violence without an audience will still leave people dead, but is socially meaningless. Violent acts are efficient because of their staging of power and legitimacy, probably even more so than due to their actual physical results.

The Mumbai attacks were outstanding not only in terms of their ability to create a 'spectacle' that attracted a very large audience, but also in that some of the 'backstage' of its performance was made available to the public. This was through the release of seven hours of taped phone calls between the assailants in Mumbai and their long-distance 'handlers' or 'controllers', which were intercepted by Indian intelligence. These tapes, and their usage as raw materials for further inscriptions, offer a unique glimpse into the actual staging (and scripting) of a 'terror attack'. Dan Reed, maker of the documentary 'Terror in Mumbai' (for Channel 4

Dispatches) even reflects on his own reading of the transcripts: 'it dawned on me that the raid on Mumbai was a brilliantly devised piece of horrific terrorist show business'.[2]

As I watched in real-time the 24-hour live broadcasting of the Mumbai 'spectacle' by Indian TV news channels, the very powerful TV images left me with a sense of witnessing the surreal. This was highlighted by the obvious insecurity expressed by reporters posted on the streets outside the hotels, and their anchors in the studios frantically trying to carry out their work in the midst of near total chaos.[3] Viewers were presented with live images of the burning Taj Mahal Hotel, heavily armed commandoes in the streets, repeatedly interrupted by CCTV still shots of 'terrorists' entering Mumbai's central railway station, , footage of hostages waving from hotel windows, as well as 'terrorists' firing from a high-jacked police vehicle into a crowd of reporters and onlookers. These images were all exceptionally powerful in bringing the drama of terrorism home to viewers. The ultimate in 'reality TV' was reached when India TV anchors received a phone call from Imran Babar, later identified as one of the 'terrorists' holding up the Jewish centre, Nariman House.[4] The phone conversation which followed was broadcast live, lasting more than seven minutes during which the caller explains the grievances of Muslims in India, referring among other to the 1993 demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya and the persecution of Indian

[2] Dan Reed, 'exclusive commentary on the making of 'Terror in Mumbai', online at: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/articles/terror-in-mumbai. In addition to the documentary 'Terror in Mumbai', screened by the British Channel 4, an Indian TV channel, Headlines Today, has also used excerpts of the phone conversations between the assailants and their 'Pakistani handlers' in a production on the so-called 'Terror tapes'. A selection of clips from the Headlines today broadcast can be viewed online at: http://indiatoday.intoday.in/index.php?option=com_magazine&opt=section&videoid=30514&sectionid=86&secid=42&ptype=video.
[3] For an account of a reporter's experience, see Meena Menon, 'Stranger than fiction', *Himal*, January 2009, available online: http://www.himalmag.com/Stranger-than-fiction_nw2755.html
[4] 7.27 minutes of the interview can be viewed online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhO6rynb1C8&feature=related

Muslims in Kashmir and elsewhere, including the 'unpunished' killing of 3,000 people in Gujarat.[5]

The surreal (or perhaps hyper-real) drama of the Mumbai attacks produced a strong sense of immediacy and urgency in the policy debates that followed. The fate of some of the 'main characters' of the real-life (and death) Mumbai drama were crucial to these debates, especially the killing of three prominent officers of the Maharashtra police, including the leader of the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) Hemant Karkare, his deputy Ashok Kamte, and well-known 'encounter specialist'[6] Vijay Salaskar. Despite the fact that the three senior police officers were lauded as heroes and their bravery was widely acknowledged, massive criticism was soon directed at the Maharashtra police, national commando forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs, intelligence agencies, and above all the politicians. Facing the consequences of public outrage over security failures, India's Home Minister Shivraj Patil resigned within a few days of the attacks, as did Maharashtra State Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and Deputy Chief Minister R.R. Patil.[7]

A 'storyline' of the Mumbai attacks

The November 2008 Mumbai attacks were by no means the first 'acts of terrorism' perpetrated on Indian soil, or even in India's financial capital Mumbai. As defined by major news agencies, more than 800 people have been killed in two dozen 'terrorist attacks' across India since mid-2006 alone (see Curtis 2008, p.4 for an overview). In July 2006, 180 people were killed in seven bomb explosions in trains and railway stations in Mumbai. Only two

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[5] The caller at one point states that the 'terrorist' acts he is involved in are a response to acts of 'terrorism' perpetrated by the Indian state.
[6] The term 'encounter specialist' has been coined and used widely by the Indian media, although it is not a formal title of the Indian police services.
[7] Rama Lakshmi, 'More Indian Officials Quit in Aftermath of Attacks', Washington Post Foreign Service, 1 December 2008, online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/01/AR2008120100940.html?sid=ST2008113002693.

months later, in September 2006, 30 people were killed in bombings at a mosque in Malegaon, also in the state of Maharashtra. On 18 February 2007, 68 passengers on the Samjhota Express train service between New Delhi and Lahore (Pakistan) were killed due to fires that broke out after twin bomb explosions. Following these incidents, a series of bomb attacks were carried out in Indian cities during 2007 and 2008. Bombings following a fairly regular pattern targeted Hyderabad, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi and Guwahati. In most cases bombs were planted in crowded public places such as markets, and often Islamic militants were the suspected perpetrators, following messages claiming credit being received from the 'Indian Mujahideen'. According to Indian intelligence, 'Indian Mujahideen' is 'a loose network of Islamic organizations' that allegedly includes 'the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), certain individuals from the state of Uttar Pradesh with alleged links with the Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI), and the terror cartel of Aftab Ansari' (Goswami 2009).

The Mumbai attacks of November 2008, however, were very different from the previous string of bombing incidents, as they involved a veritable 'siege' of the city for several days, and a corresponding 'siege' of worldwide media coverage and public attention. From the perspective of the media, the news value, the potential for capturing the imagination of viewers and readers, could not have been much greater. The attacks hit the heart of Mumbai and affected the common public, - the man and woman in the street. The victims were killed completely at random by indiscriminate firing of automatic weapons and grenades, not only at top-end hotels but also key public places such as the central railway station. In addition to the 'common interest' there was also the temporality of the events, created by the prolonged hostage situations. After the 'story' of the attacks had captured the attention of readers and

viewers, the media could let their audiences 'stay tuned' as the drama unfolded over an extended period of time.

According to the 'Mumbai Dossier'[8] compiled by Indian police, the attacks were carried out by a team of ten assailants, out of which the only survivor was Ajmal Amir Kasab. However, during the 'siege' itself there were reports, later disclaimed, that a number of other 'terrorists' had been captured alive. There were also widespread rumors of 'terrorists on the loose', adding greatly to the sense of insecurity among residents of Mumbai.

The 'Mumbai Dossier' explains that a team of ten terrorists travelled to Mumbai from Karachi by sea, hijacking an Indian registered fishing vessel (the MV Kuber) on the way and reaching shore in a dinghy. They landed near Cuffe Parade at about 8.30 pm on 26 November. According to the dossier, the team then divided into five pairs, taking taxis to different locations. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were planted in two of the taxis and these later exploded, killing the taxi drivers. At about 9.20 pm two assailants identified as Ismail Khan and Ajmal Amir Kasab entered Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus station (CST, popularly known by its old name Victoria Terminus or VT). There, they started firing and throwing grenades into the crowds of passengers, killing 58 people and injuring 104. Poorly equipped and ill-prepared police and security guards could do little other than hide behind the columns. After leaving CST station, Khan and Kasab made their way towards Cama Hospital, where they encountered and fired on a police vehicle carrying seven policemen. Khan and Kasab killed all but one of the policemen and hijacked the police vehicle. They later left the police

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[8] The 'Mumbai Dossier' is a 69-page dossier of material from the ongoing investigation into the Mumbai terrorist attacks of November 26-29, 2008. This is the same dossier that was handed over by India to Pakistan on January 5, 2009. The dossier can be accessed online at: http://www.hindu.com/nic/dossier.htm.

jeep and hijacked another vehicle, which they drove into a police barricade at Girgaum Choupatti, where Khan was shot dead and Kasab was captured.[9]

Another pair of assailants, identified in the 'Mumbai Dossier' as Hafiz Arshad and Naser, chose the Leopold Café and Bar as their first target. They entered the cafe at about 9.40 pm firing assault rifles and killed ten people. After a few minutes they continued to the Taj Mahal Hotel, about 500 metres away from the cafe. At the hotel they joined another two assailants, identified as Shoaib and Javed. These two had, by then, already started firing automatic weapons in the hotel lobby, killing twenty people in the first few minutes. After they regrouped, all four assailants moved up the stairs to the fifth and sixth floors, killing people on the way. They later started several fires in the building. The hostage situation that followed lasted until the morning of 29 November, when commandoes from the National Security Guard (NSG) finally gained control of the hotel. A total of 36 people were killed in the Taj Mahal Hotel, including guests and staff of the hotel, all four assailants, and one NSG major.

The fourth target was the Trident Oberoi Hotel. Two assailants, identified as Abdul Rehman Chotta and Fahadullah, entered the Trident wing through the main entrance at about 10 pm. There, they fired their automatic weapons, and continued into the Oberoi wing where they again opened fire and threw IEDs into a restaurant. Like the assailants in the Taj Mahal, they subsequently moved up the stairs shooting people along the way and barricaded themselves on the 16th and 18th floors, taking a number of hostages. NSG commandoes killed these two assailants in the afternoon of 28 November, after about 42 hours of seige. A total of 33 people were killed in Trident Oberoi Hotel, according to the dossier.

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[9] Footage of his capture shot from a terrace overlooking the scene on a mobile phone camera was later broadcast by SkyNews and IBN7, and can be viewed online at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT25kYM7_HM&feature=related.

The fifth and final target was known locally as Nariman House, a guesthouse that was renamed Chabad House after it was bought by an orthodox Jewish organization called Chabad Liberation Movement of Hasidic Jews. Chabad House was run by Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife, who lived in the house with their two-year old son. Guests were also accommodated in the five-storey building. At about 10.25 pm two assailants, identified as Babar Imran and Nasir, entered Chabad House and took those inside as hostages. As described in the 'Mumbai Dossier': 'terrorists and the police exchanged fire throughout the night of November 26, 2008 and into the next day' (p. 9). Fourteen people escaped from Chabad House, including a maid who rescued the two-year old child, whereas the rabbi, his wife and three other hostages were killed. During the operation, NSG commandoes were landed by helicopter onto the roof terrace of the building and one NSG commando was killed, as were the two assailants.

The 'Mumbai Dossier' has some noticeable omissions in its narrative. The most obvious failing is the lack of explanation as to how three top-ranking officers of the Maharashtra police Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) were shot and killed in the evening of 26 November. The three were Vijay Salaskar, Police Inspector, Ashok Kamte, Additional Commissioner of Police, and Hemant Karkare, Inspector General of Police and head of the ATS. The events surrounding the killing of the three officers were to become highly contentious after the attacks were over. The mainstream news media typically emphasized the heroism of the three officers. For instance, *The Sunday Times* (30 November 2008) reported that when Karkare arrived at the 'encounter site' outside CST station, he 'donned a bullet-proof vest and joined the fray, shooting at the gunmen from just outside the station'.[10] Police investigations later established that Khan and Kasab shot and killed all three police officers while they were

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[10] 'Mumbai: City of Death', *The Sunday Times,* 30 November 2008, online at: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5258462.ece.

sitting in a police jeep near Cama Hospital, not long after the two gunmen had left CST station.

At this stage of events the police forces were left in a state of confusion, and residents of Mumbai were even more clueless. Nobody knew what was going on, or what to make of the fragments of information they were receiving. The need to make sense of the situation raised urgent questions, especially who was behind the attacks, who were the targets, and what was being done to deal with the crisis. In such a situation the media had no time to carefully compile evidence and investigate facts. The events had to be explained without delay, and authorities were quick to reveal that the first fragments of evidence found on the hijacked fishing boat pointed to Pakistan. This was enough to turn the media spotlight on the 'usual suspect' in Pakistan, the militant organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under US law and banned in Pakistan since January 2002, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was formed to fight Indian forces in the disputed region of Kashmir. LeT is allegedly based in Muzaffarabad (in Pakistani Kashmir) and Muridke (near Lahore) and has a 'successor organisation' or 'new incarnation' in the Islamic charity Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD).[11] On 10 December 2008, India took the demand for a ban on JuD to the UN Security Council, calling for Pakistan to take action against the organisation as a 'terrorist outfit' and front for a 'radical armed group behind the attacks on Mumbai'.[12] While spokesmen for LeT denied any involvement in the Mumbai attacks and called for an independent investigation, Pakistani authorities launched an operation against a JuD complex near Muzaffarabad. There they detained several people including suspected 'LeT operations

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[11] 'India intensifies pressure on banning JuD, wants fugitives back', Jansamachar (online newspaper in English and Hindi), 10 December 2008, online at: http://www.jansamachar.net/display.php3?id=&num=17317&lang=English&PHPSESSID=749f372812694b559 6786a3e858c8259.

[12] Randeep Ramesh, 'India calls on UN to ban charity it claims is front for terror group', The Guardian, 11 December 2008, online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/11/mumbai-terror-attacks-india.

chief' Zakiur Rehman Lakhwi who is supposed to have 'masterminded' the Mumbai terror attacks.[13]

Terror and conspiracy in the public imagination

Analyzing the Mumbai attacks in a regional and GWOT perspective, security experts have warned against detrimental effects of the attacks on the stability of Pakistan and the negative implications for confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan. According to Markey (2008), the Mumbai attacks represent a dangerous escalation of the 'war for Pakistan'. This war is understood as a struggle over the future of Pakistan in which that country either develops towards a more moderate and 'modern' society or 'succumbs to extremist, Taliban-like ideologies'. The 'extremist' threat has since become all too evident, as Pakistan has launched military operations against the Taliban in South Waziristan and the North West Frontier Province, while according to the Pakistani government, 'the enemy has started a guerrilla war'[14] by carrying out armed attacks against a number of police stations, police training centres and even army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

In the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, the security challenges faced by Pakistani authorities were of no concern to Indian mainstream media. Rather, the media spotlight was directed towards the domestic political scene. Elections for Indian state assemblies were underway with voters going to the polls in Delhi and Rajastan, and national elections for the Lok Sabha due by May 2009. The Congress-led UPA government's ability to provide

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[13] Saeed Shah, 'Pakistan arrests 'mastermind' of Mumbai terror attacks',
The Guardian, 9 December 2008, online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/09/pakistan-raid-mumbai-terror-attacks; Candace Rondeaux and Craig Whitlock, 'Group Accused in India Carnage Thriving Despite Ban', Washington Post Foreign Service, 1 December 2008, online at:
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/30/AR2008113001904.html?sid=ST2008113002693&s_pos=list.
[14] Declan Walsh, 'Gun and bomb attacks kill 39 people in Pakistan', The Guardian, 15 October 2009, online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/15/pakistan-under-gun-bomb-attacks.

security, deal with 'law and order' issues and respond to the 'terrorist threat' had already become a major issue in the elections, especially for the main contender to the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It was therefore not surprising that Indian news media devoted most of their attention in the election campaign to the political fallout of the attacks and the actions and responses of the government and opposition parties. The BJP, in particular, made good political mileage from popular responses to the Mumbai attacks, framing the 'security failure' as a failure of governance. A poignant example of this was an advertisement that appeared on the front pages of major daily newspapers as early as 28 November 2008. The advertisement featured a large red drop of blood against a black background, on which was inscribed the text 'Brutal Terror Strikes at Will. Weak Government, Unwilling and Incapable', and the simple 'punch-line': 'Fight Terror. Vote BJP'.

In its manifesto for the 2009 Lok Sabha election, BJP described the preceding five years of UPA government as a 'nightmare' for the people of India, because 'terrorists, separatists and insurgents' had led the government on 'a macabre dance of death and destruction'.[15] The BJP pledged that 'within 100 days of coming to power' they would revive the anti-terror mechanisms introduced by the previous BJP-led government and subsequently dismantled by the UPA government. The BJP promised to undertake a 'massive exercise' to modernize intelligence agencies, set up a 'Digital Security Agency' to deal with 'cyber warfare, cyber counter-terrorism, and cyber security of national digital assets'. They undertook to provide state governments with 'all assistance to modernize their respective police forces and equip them with the latest weaponry and communications technology' so that the police as the 'first responders to any crisis situation' would be trained and 'fully equipped to deal with situations similar to that of Mumbai and in meeting the challenge posed by Maoists and insurgents'.

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[15] BJP Manifesto: Lok Sabha Election 2009, online at: http://www.bjp.org/content/view/2844/428/.

Furthermore, they promised to set up special courts for 'speedy prosecution of those involved with acts of terrorism' ensuring that 'their trial shall be fair and justice will be done to the victims swiftly'.[16]

The BJP leadership was well aware that in order to appeal to the many potential voters who typically do not read election manifestos, the party's messages had to be popularized. In response to the Mumbai attacks, the BJP's ideas about the need for strong responses to terrorism, including 'speedy prosecution of terrorists' were 'enacted' in a number of ways including through the staging of public 'hanging ceremonies' for Ajmal Kasab. One such 'hanging ceremony' was recorded on video (presumably by organizers) and was later posted on YouTube alongside the following description of the event:[17]

> This hanging ceremony of Mr. Ajmal Kasab was organized by BJP in Nanded district of Maharashtra on 26-12-08. :P The set was set up including the same atmosphere as in any court. Judge was there, medical inspector was there to check the health of Ajmal Kasab. BJP has given chance to common ppl to express their feelings about this Mumbai terror attack and why Kasav should be hanged till death. Many ppl expressed their feelings. Some expressed their feelings with respect to the court and some could not control their anger so they abused Kasav and expressed their feelings. The common public who were witnessing this ceremony, was shouting against Pakistan. After hearing the public voice, the respected Judge decided to hang Ajmal Kasav till death. After hanging Kasav, somehow his dead body was stolen by few little children and then they expressed their anger on Kasav's dead body by tearing him into thousands of pieces.

As the lone surviving 'terrorist', Ajmal Kasab was obviously cast as the main villain in the popular scripting of the Mumbai attacks. Conversely, the lead role of heroic martyr was

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[16] Ibid.
[17] 'Kasab Hanegd Till Death', 1.28 minutes, online at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeIY3zsKFms&feature=related.

accorded to the police chief Hemant Karkare, the most high-ranking of the policemen killed in the line of duty while combating the attacks. Karkare was already well-known as the chief investigator into the so-called Malegaon blasts; bombings that killed seven people in a crowded shopping area in the town of Malegaon on 29 September 2008.[18] Just weeks before the Mumbai attacks, Karkare, as chief of the ATS, had ordered the arrest of eleven suspects in the case, including a serving lieutenant colonel in the Indian Army, Prasad Shrikant Purohit, and a retired army major, Ramesh Upadhyaya. Purohit was suspected of having helped to obtain the explosives (RDX)[19] used in the blasts. There were also reports of evidence linking Purohit and other suspects to Hindu extremist groups, adding to the political controversy. Indian authorities had initially claimed that LeT was responsible for the Malegaon blasts as well as the Samjhota Express bombings, which were also being linked to the suspects in the Malegaon case. Considering that Hemant Karkare was in charge of investigations that were disproving allegations against LeT in two other cases, it seemed all the more incredible that he was killed in an attack supposedly carried out by LeT. As a result of disbelief in the official account of the attacks, rumours were soon spreading that Karkare had not been killed by the terrorists, but was a victim of assassination. In numerous online discussions, questions were raised about the circumstances surrounding his death. Stories were circulating to the effect that Karkare was actually killed by a 9mm bullet from a hand gun, and not by the AK47s fired by the 'terrorists'. Some demanded that the autopsy report had to be made public, alongside others who articulated doubts about the reliability of any evidence produced by the police. In the Lok Sabha, Union Minister for Minorities Affairs Abdul Rehman Antulay demanded a probe into the killing of Karkare, questioning the circumstances of his death and alluding to the possibility of a conspiracy by Hindu radicals. Although Mr. Antulay was met with the

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[18] Mateen Hafeez and Yogesh Naik, 'Blasts in Maharashtra, Gujarat; 8 killed', Times of India, 30 September 2008, online at:
http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Blasts_in_Maharashtra_Gujarat_8_killed/articleshow/3542011.cms.
[19] RDX is also known as cyclonite, hexogen and T4, and chemically as Cyclotrimethylenetrinitramine. It is an explosive nitroamine commonly used in military and industrial applications.

strongest opposition from BJP and Hindu organizations such as Shiv Sena, the suspicions he

voiced could not be silenced. According to a number of online 'conspiracy theorists', the

actors in the Mumbai attacks (or even the 'Mumbai 11/26 film') may have been Pakistani but

the directors and producers were Indian politicians or 'Hindu terrorist groups' such as

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). The attacks were

thus an 'inside job'.

The 'truth about the Mumbai attacks' has emerged as a highly contested issue as it is

represented (rather than debated) in the cyber world of webcasts, blogs, threads and forums.

Here I am not judging what is the truth about the Mumbai attacks, but rather describing how

people - through narratives in the form of inscriptions and performances, re-enactments or

visualizations as well as textual scripts- are attempting to creatively imagine or make factual

certain realities that can be witnessed through the Mumbai attacks. As suggested by Duranti

(1993, p. 236) 'truth' should be seen as a process 'whereby members of a given society

produce acceptable versions of reality […] embedded in local theories of what constitutes an

acceptable account and who is entitled to tell the facts and assess their value and

consequences'. Duranti (citing Foucault, ibid.) refers to the definition of truth as 'part of the

local technology of power' and 'part of the battlefield where the social system is tested'. If the

question 'what is truth?' is rephrased as 'how is truth produced?' contests over definitional

power are invariably highlighted, and attention redirected to truth 'in the making', or the

discursive construction of truth(s).

The production of truth(s) is not limited to the factual (such as the reporting of news) but is

also an inherent aspect of fictional accounts that pose as reconstructions of reality, including

fiction films based on 'true' stories. Since November 2008 Indian film makers have registered

numerous titles for movie projects about the Mumbai attacks, the first of which, 'Total Ten,' went into production during the summer of 2009. The makers of 'Total Ten' claim to be telling the 'true story' of Ajmal Amir Kasab, a story which culminates in his execution. However, the making of 'Total Ten' and especially its final scenes, has been met with a legal challenge from Kasab's lawyer, Abbas Kazmi, who has claimed that 'Any depiction of the attacks would jeopardise the [legal] proceedings'.[20] Indeed, while the movie is being produced (with a Kasab lookalike in the lead role) the case of Ajmal Kasab himself is being heard in a special court with a single judge and no jury. The case is due to be concluded in a further six months to a year. However, the movie's producer, Sugath Kumar, has countered the claim that the movie might be prejudicing the trial with the argument that 'We are only showing what was shown to the world by TV channels live'.[21] The two sides of this argument encapsulate critical questions about the possibility of Ajmal Kasab having an 'unprejudiced' trial, when his penalty has already been preempted, not only in the promotion of 'Total Ten' but also in the kind of public 'hanging ceremonies' described above, and in similar fatal terms by the 'virtual jury' on the internet.

Scripting the 'terror tapes'

Another important dimension of the Mumbai case is raised by the so-called 'terror tapes', the taped phone conversations between the 'controllers' of the attacks and their 'ground forces' in Mumbai. In spite of the digital and internet age we live in, the seven hours of recordings have never been broadcast in their entirety, although the tapes have all been transcribed and translated into English. Excerpts of the transcripts were published in the 'Mumbai Dossier', and the complete recordings and transcripts were made available to the Indian TV channel Headlines Today and the makers of the documentary 'Terror in Mumbai'. It is striking how

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[20] Ben Child, 'Bollywood producers fast-track film of Mumbai attacks accused', The Guardian, 10 June 2009, online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jun/10/mumbai-terror-attacks-film.
[21] Ibid.

different narrators have selected excerpts to be used in their scripting of the tapes, the variation in the commentaries that accompanied these excerpts, and how these have been utilized in the two TV productions to project a particular view or interpretation of the events. This is especially evident in comparing 'Terror in Mumbai', an investigative documentary made primarily for a non-Indian (British) audience, to the 'Terror tapes' production, made for an Indian audience by a mainstream Indian news company.

The 'Mumbai Dossier' presents a 'Translation of some selected intercepted conversations' in its Annexure VII. In these excerpts, the speakers are identified as 'caller' and 'receiver', and only exceptionally named. As the dossier was created to present evidence from the investigations, the use of commentary is limited. The excerpts of conversations appear to have been chosen primarily to highlight the intentions of the 'callers' and the orders they were giving.[22] In stark contrast to the simple transcripts in the 'Mumbai Dossier', the Headlines Today 'Terror tapes' TV production is heavily loaded with commentaries and introductions narrated by the anchor, alongside dubbed sound and visual effects. Numerous clips of the audio recordings are played with their English transcripts on screen, and 'expert' commentators present their views on what the tapes have 'to say'. Amongst the commentators are two former army chiefs and retired generals, S. Roychaudhary and V.P. Malik, as well as the channel's defence correspondent Shiv Aroor. Although the selection of excerpts is much larger and more varied than in the dossier, the focus remains on the orders of the 'handlers' and the 'detailed directions' given to the 'robos'[23] carrying out the operation, these handlers

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[22] The narrator only departs from the line of 'mere recording' at one crucial point, where a parenthesis is added after one of the 'callers' directs 'Fahadullah' to kill all hostages except two Muslims. 'Fahadullah' says: 'We have three foreign hostages, including women. From Singapore and China'. The 'caller' replies: 'Kill them.' The following parenthesis describes what happens next, at this point naming all those involved: 'Voices of Fahadullah and Abdul Rehman directing hostages to stand in a line, and telling two Muslims to stand aside. Sound of gunfire. Cheering voices in background Kafa hands telephone to Zarar'.

[23] The term 'robo' is used by the anchor and at least one of the interviewees, to refer to the ten gunmen. It is also used in recurring on-screen headlines.

providing, as the anchor calls it, a '24/7 helpline'. The experts interviewed discussed the level of military expertise of the handlers as well as the assailants. While all the commentators agreed that the handlers must have had military training, the two former army chiefs disagreed over the 'terrorists' carrying out the attacks. One of them argued that those who planned the operation had 'picked up the cheapest possible cannon fodder', while the other emphasized the gunmen's calmness and amazing 'lack of excitement'.

As compared to the 'Terror tapes', the investigative documentary 'Terror in Mumbai' narrates a much more complex story. It presents a far wider range of voices, including interviews with senior police officers, other witnesses to the attacks, and two Muslim hostages whose lives were spared by the gunmen, as well as exclusive footage of Kasab being interrogated by the police in hospital, soon after his capture.[24] In addition, 'Terror in Mumbai' reflects on problematic aspects of the news media's coverage of the attacks. One of the issues raised is how real-time TV served as a key source of information for the 'controllers' as they directed their operatives over the phone. Another significant question is how the attacks were designed to ensure maximum media coverage, especially by the broadcast media. The documentary highlights the 'staging' of the Mumbai attacks, and in order to emphasize the level of media consciousness of those who planned the attacks, several illuminating statements by the 'controllers' are cited.[25] In one excerpt, the 'controller' says: 'My brother, yours is the most important target. The media is covering your target, the Taj hotel, more than any other'. Later a 'controller' makes a revealing request to one of the 'gunmen': 'Give the government an ultimatum. Say, "This was just the trailer. Just wait till you see the rest of the film."'

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[24] Exclusive footage of interview with Ajmal Kasab, online from Channel 4 Dispatches: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/articles/terror-in-mumbai-exclusive-footage.
[25] Phone intercepts, online from Channel 4 Dispatches: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/articles/terror-in-mumbai-phone-intercepts .

As a work of investigate journalism, 'Terror in Mumbai' explicitly tries to portray the 'untold story' of the attacks, 'in the words of its victims and the gunmen'. It gives a human face to the gunmen through some of the phone call excerpts, which reveal their amazement over computers with 30-inch screens, and the luxury suite with 'two kitchens, a bath and a little shop'. The interview with Kasab is also illuminating in this regard, giving insight into how poverty and family commitments led him to join the LeT, and how Kasab was persuaded to become a suicide fighter. In stark contrast to the humans depicted in 'Terror in Mumbai', the 'Terror tapes' presents the ten assailants as dehumanized 'robos' mindlessly executing the orders of their 'handlers'.

Institutional reform and counter-terrorism policy responses

Described by many commentators as 'India's 9/11', the comparison of events on September 11 in New York with 26-29 November in Mumbai became a subtheme of its own in the ensuing debates. Similarities and differences between the two cases were discussed in terms of a number of themes: 'symbolic' targeting; media attention; 'spectacle' and the reactions of the public; policy responses to the attacks, especially the rethinking of 'security'; the pressure to strengthen the counter-terrorism capacities of security forces; and demands to extend the mandates of intelligence agencies to carry out surveillance.

As early as 30 November 2008, in a meeting of major political parties, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pledged to establish a new federal investigative agency, strengthen maritime and air security, and set up a number of new bases for commando forces.[26] The Mumbai attacks were carried out 'commando-style', and many of the 'solutions' offered

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[26] Rama Lakshmi, 'Cabinet Minister Resigns Amid Anger in India', Washington Post Foreign Service, 1 December 2008, online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/30/AR2008113000316.html.

followed in the same vein. Plans were developed to train and equip more and better commandoes, to be deployed on a shorter notice when and where the next strike comes. When the first anniversary of the attacks was commemorated on 26 November 2009, high-tech weaponries acquired since November 2008 were prominently displayed in exhibits and parades, giving the general public an opportunity to witness firsthand the enhanced fighting capabilities of Indian security forces.

On December 17 the Indian Parliament enacted new amendments to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, (UAPA), 1967 and passed the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, which provided for establishment of a new National Investigating Agency (NIA) exclusively intended to investigate and prosecute 'acts of terrorism'. Following the passing of the new legislation, the BJP commented that the UPA government 'in its dying days' had tried to 'fool the people by tampering with outdated laws' and setting up a National Investigating Agency to fight terror. The BJP claimed that 'such half-hearted efforts to calm anger and disquiet following the 26/11 outrage are neither enough nor the right approach to tackling the menace of terrorism'.[27] On the other hand, Amnesty International had quite a different perspective on the new 'anti-terror laws', fearing that they would 'violate international human rights standards'.[28] Amnesty's criticism focused specifically on a number of features of the new Act: the 'sweeping and overbroad' definitions of 'acts of terrorism'; the lack of clear and strict definitions of what constitutes 'membership' of a 'terrorist gang or organization'; the minimum period of detention of persons suspected to be involved in acts of terrorism (extended from 15 to 30 days); and the maximum period of detention of such persons (extended from 90 to 180 days), which Amnesty argued was 'already far beyond international

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[27] BJP Manifesto: Lok Sabha Election 2009, online at: http://www.bjp.org/content/view/2844/428/.
[28] Amnesty International, 'India: New Anti-Terror Laws Would Violate International Human Rights Standards', press release, December 18, 2008, available online at: http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/india-new-anti-terror-laws-would-violate-international-human-rights-stan.

standards'. The UAPA amendment was also criticized for denying bail to foreign nationals who may have entered the country in an 'un-authorized or illegal manner', and for including a requirement 'in certain circumstances, of accused people to prove their innocence'. On the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, Amnesty pointed out that the bill authorized special courts to 'close hearings to the public without defining or limiting the grounds under which they may do so'.

As we have seen, the Mumbai attacks were subject to exceptionally high media coverage, partly because the theatre of conflict was brought to the very heart of India's financial capital. As perceptively described by one correspondent, the attacks hit right at the 'doorstep of India's affluent' where it struck at the 'symbols of their prosperity'.[29] The first case assigned to the newly established NIA in June 2009 was strikingly different. The assignment was to investigate alleged 'terror incidents' in the North Cachar Hills of Assam, involving a militant group known as Black Widow, a splinter group of the Dima Halam Daogah (DHD).[30] In stark contrast to the Mumbai case, the first assignment of the NIA was a case of criminal violence and insurgency in the periphery, in a secluded hill area in Northeast India. Prior to the assignment, state police had recovered more than 10 million rupees belonging to the autonomous district government during the arrest of suspected members of Black Widow, reportedly meant for procurement of arms and ammunition. The NIA is currently investigating as 'terrorist activities' the local politician-insurgent nexus and illicit weapons trade, while leaving to state police to investigate the killing of more than 60 people since so-called 'ethnic clashes' broke out in the area in March 2009. These killings were allegedly carried out by Black Widow and other armed groups operating in the area.

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[29] Emily Wax, 'In Outcry Over Siege, Two Indias Emerge', Washington Post Foreign Service, 9 December 2008, online at:
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/08/AR2008120803685.html?sid=ST2008120900105
[30] Black Widow is also known as DHD (J), while the 'pro-talks' faction of the group is known as DHD (N).

Although a review of the NIA's first case cannot be done within the scope of this paper, it is worth noting how an agency set up to bolster the government's 'counter-terrorism' agenda, specifically mandated to deal with offences affecting the country's 'sovereignty, integrity and security', is being harnessed to support counter-insurgency operations against ethnic militancy in India's frontier regions. The choice of this particular case is also interesting for its potential to showcase the achievements of NIA as well as the government's counter-insurgency efforts. When the case was chosen in the spring of 2009 security forces were already carrying out a major offensive in North Cachar Hills, and police were on the verge of arresting the leader of Black Widow, Jewel Gorlosa. Moreover, the group had been offering a unilateral truce since March 2008, which was turned down by the government. When Black Widow surrendered arms in September 2009 the security establishment claimed a 'military victory', keeping silent about a long process of negotiations between Black Widow and the Assam state police. It is obvious that when the decision was taken to make this the first case of the NIA, it had an exceptionally good chance of becoming a 'success story'.[31]

As argued by critics of the current (re-)construction of India's counter-terrorism apparatus, a severe lack of resources, outdated equipment and inadequate training, especially in the police forces, are major bottlenecks in the government's capacity to carry out its plans. Moreover, establishing a coherent national counter-terrorism strategy may be a more urgent task than amending legislation and creating new agencies.[32] As several analysts have pointed out, developing such a strategy requires a systematic reflection on what Indian 'counter-terrorism' is and should be. A useful step in this exercise would be to draw lessons from the long history

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[31] The 'reactive' nature of earlier counter-insurgency responses, and incapacity of security forces to deter insurgent violence in the area is detailed in Goswami (2007).

[32] See for instance Ajai Sahni, 'CT Scan', Defence and Security of India, 1(3) December 2008; Soutik Biswas, 'Will India's Security Overhaul Work?', BBC News, 11 December 2008; Praveen Swami, 'Mumbai Siege Turns Spotlight on Crisis within NSG', Hindu, 12 December 2008; V. Venkatesan, 'Short on Strategy', Frontline, 19 December 2008.

of counter-insurgency operations in Northeast India, Kashmir and the so-called Red Corridor of Maoist insurgency. This is all the more crucial due to the close interconnectedness of Indian counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency planning and thinking, reflected in the widespread confusion (or even conflation) of the concepts of 'counter-terrorism' and 'counter-insurgency', terms often used interchangeably in debates on India's 'internal security'.

One important lesson that could be drawn from the history of Indian counter-insurgency concerns the experience of militarization as a 'state of exception'. Large parts of Northeast India and Kashmir have been declared as 'disturbed areas' under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. As described by the Manipuri researcher Amarjit Gurumayum, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act does not 'aid', but supplants the 'civil powers'. Moreover, the Act fails to differentiate between the 'domestic space' and external or 'enemy space'. The conditions in 'enemy space', where coercive military instruments fail to distinguish between 'citizens' and 'aliens', are being superimposed on the 'domestic space' where democratic principles should be the premises for regulating 'public order':[33]

> In this condition, the rule of law is replaced by rule of 'Armed forces', thereby curtailing citizens' 'fundamental rights' provided under the Constitution of India. On the other hand, the armed opposition groups (AOGs) seek to identify the 'Armed Forces' as the coercive instruments or the 'foreign oppressors' that propagates 'oppressive rule' on an 'erstwhile independent and sovereign state'. For them, the region is in a state of war with the 'Indian State'. Hence, they do not differentiate the masses into citizens, rebels, criminals, women and children etc. [...] One may find these forces as belonging to different sets of institutional arrangements, with different goals and objectives, different strategies of war etc. However, what is common to both

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[33] Amarjit Gurumayum, '"State of Exception" and Struggle of the "Oppressed"', unpublished paper, 2009.

is the undifferentiated nature of the operation of military practices. Both engage in the 'business of war'. As a result, every site of human settlement like the family, community, village, market etc may become the space for armed conflicts.

The unpredictable nature of the Mumbai attacks, the 'randomness' of targeting and the sense that the entire city had become an undifferentiated 'enemy space' in which nobody could feel safe, these were also among the most unsettling, if not frightening aspects of the 'terror' in Mumbai.

Concluding remarks

The Mumbai attacks were 'staged' in a conscious effort to obtain maximum media visibility. To secure international coverage the targets included some of the city's landmarks; the central train station, luxury hotels and a cafe famous among tourists. Foreigners were also among the hostages singled out for execution, as were the rabbi and his wife at the Jewish centre. The masterminds of the attacks had also planned live interviews on Indian TV channels. It is clear from the phone interceptions that Imran Babar had been instructed exactly what to say in the interview he gave to India TV. The assailants who targeted the three buildings acted only on direct orders delivered by phone, even asking for directions on what they could eat and drink, and whether food could be shared with hostages. In following the orders there is nothing to indicate that they were acting on their own motivation, and they were also plainly aware that their mission was to be ended by death in 'martyrdom'. The masterminds of the Mumbai attacks manipulated the media to create a media 'spectacle' that spread fear, not just among the 'common public' affected so often before by random bombing incidents, but also among the affluent and the 'foreigners' whose vulnerability was suddenly exposed.

While the Mumbai 'spectacle' was carefully 'stage-managed' by its planners, they were not (and could not be) alone in 'scripting' what took place. As the operation was executed, it was immediately reinterpreted by firsthand witnesses and victims of the events, including security personnel as well as journalists called out to provide 'news coverage'. The media further 'scripted' the events as 'terror attacks' and these inscriptions then became the 'raw material' for numerous creative reinterpretations by civil society (including political parties) and the common 'public', all clamoring for the 'truth' about the events and the implications following from this new 'reality'. This is another 'true story' of the Mumbai attacks.

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