Fighting for Kashmir: Examining the Influence of Foreign Fighters in the Kashmir Insurgency

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Abstract

How does the Indian government's religious stance impact the influence foreign fighters have on Lashkar-e-Taiba's portion of the Kashmir insurgency? Foreign militants are a lucrative resource to insurgencies; they bring with them skills, resources and strengthen the capacity of the insurgency as a whole. They present risks as well, they deviate the objectives of the insurgency, radicalize it, cause mass and unnecessary atrocities, and disrupt the relations insurgents have with locals. Present literature seeks to explain the influence of foreign fighters by examining their impact on an insurgency as a single causal variable. These explanations do not account for the role the regional government's religious engagement with a population – often in the form of discriminatory rhetoric or policies – may provide foreign fighters with the much-needed buffer to reshape, radicalize and increase the intractability of the insurgency within which they function. This paper intends to add to that gap by examining whether the influence of foreign militants in the Lashkar-e-Taiba's portion of the Kashmir insurgency changed based on the religious stance of the Indian government. To do so, the paper will adopt a mixed-methods approach consisting of small-n and interpretivist methods. The paper will use the Indian National Congress (2008 – 2013) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (2014 – 2019) as its primary cases; Lashkar-e-Taiba will be the unit of analysis of the study. These cases will be analyzed while controlling for the majority religion in Kashmir and the type of government in India. The paper observed, within Lashkar, noticeable deviations in framing and tactical innovation; furthermore, it found that the local population of Kashmir was immune to the presence of foreign fighters in the insurgency.

Keywords: Lashkar-e-Taiba, Foreign Fighters, Kashmir

1. Introduction

Foreign militants represent an asset to insurgencies. They are hardened and detached from the local population, bring with them unique skills, resources and add operational capabilities to the insurgency; therefore, it is no surprise that militant organizations seek out foreigners to help their cause. The Kashmiri insurgency is one such conflict that has an active presence of foreign militants, with over 45% of militants in the insurgency being foreigners.[1] However, these militants come with risks of their own, they may radicalize movements, disrupt relations with local populations, deviate the core objectives of the organization they join, and, ultimately, escalate the entire conflict to intractable lengths. Past literature has attempted to examine the impact of foreign fighters on insurgencies; however, these explanations fail to account for the role a government's religious engagement with a population – often in the form of discriminatory rhetoric or policies – may provide foreign fighters with the much-needed buffer to reshape, radicalize and increase the intractability of the insurgency within which they function.

  The Kashmir insurgency has been seen, in academia and otherwise, as an insurgency with a unified objective – liberate Kashmir from Indian rule; the role of foreign fighters in the insurgency, and the organizations functioning within it, has been examined only in a supplementary context – as an operational resource to insurgent organizations. However, measuring the impact of foreign fighters on the entire Kashmir insurgency presents a tricky case. Unlike other insurgencies, such as the Chechnyan insurgency, where the vast majority of the struggle

is spearheaded by one main figure or organization, the Kashmir insurgency has given rise to multiple parties acting in their own autonomy: the Hizbul Mujahideen, Harakatul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Lashkar-e-Taiba, to name a few. While not attempting to identify the impact of foreign fighters on the entire insurgency, this paper examines the impact of foreign fighters on Lashkar-e-taiba (LeT) and its portion of the Kashmir insurgency.[2]

The project also intends to initiate an academic exploration concerning the addition of governmental engagement with insurgencies, as a variable, to existing frameworks used to understand the impact of foreign militants on insurgencies. The Kashmiri insurgency is largely hinged on religious rhetoric: Muslims being ill-treated in a Hindu India. Exploiting that, militant organizations in the insurgencies have adopted a 'jihad vs. Hindu India' framing of their movement. On the government side, since the start of the 21st century, India has experienced governments operating on two complete opposites of the political spectrum: the Bhartiya Janta Party – advocating Hindu nationalist – and the Indian National Congress – advocating secularism. In exploring the question - How does the Indian government's religious stance impact the influence foreign fighters have on Lashkar-e-Taiba's portion of the Kashmir insurgency? This paper hopes to add to the academic conversation surrounding foreign fighters and their impact in South Asia.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

This paper draws on existing theories to create a framework for the examination of the causal relationship between the Indian government's religious stance, foreign fighters in the Kashmir insurgency and the impact foreign fighters have on the insurgency. To set the theoretical base for the rest of this paper, this and the following sections will establish baseline definitions and predictions for the research question. This section will serve to identify gaps in existing scholarship.

There are four main scholarly debates critical to examining the role and involvement of foreign fighters in an insurgency. The first grouping is the debate over defining foreign fighters. As Hegghammer argues foreign fighters serve to fill an intermediate category that is between local insurgents and international terrorists, making their identity complex.[3] The first definition comes from the United Nations, which defines foreign fighters as "individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict."[4] However, scholars seldom refer to this definition. More widely used definitions include Hegghammer's, who defines a foreign fighter as "an agent who (1) has joined, and operates within the confines of, an insurgency, (2) lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, (3) lacks affiliation to an official military organization, and (4) is unpaid." Mendelsohn, however, finds this problematic.[5] Firstly, he prefers to identify them as "foreign volunteers" rather than "foreign fighters." And secondly, he defines them as individuals "who: (1) leave their home countries to participate, directly or in supporting roles, in an armed conflict in a foreign location; (2) are not formally affiliated with an official state force; and (3) their deployment is not the result of outsourcing to a private security company." For the purposes of this paper, any individual who fits the criteria of one, or multiple, definitions listed above will be identified as a foreign fighter.

Second, the debate over the impact of foreign fighters. The inclusion of foreign fighters into a conflict gives rise to an array of concerns: radicalization of local populations and groups, unnecessary escalation of the conflict, elongating the conflict, and making the conflict intractable. These, while a cause for concern for the state involved, might not always be negative for the insurgents or rebels. Chu and Braithwaite, examining the impact of foreign fighters on the outcomes of conflicts, observe that foreign fighters increase the intensity of conflicts, and reduce the cohesion between rebel groups and local populations. [6] Furthermore, they argue that, while foreign fighters might be a resource, there exists the potential of these people becoming liabilities; they identify two ways in which foreign fighters might end up liabilities: causing more atrocities and having objectives and visions that might diverge from those of the insurgency.[7] Bakke, moving further, argues that foreign fighters can be detrimental to the entire stability of the state in question.[8] Firstly, she argues that foreign fighters transform conflicts by changing the objectives of a conflict from a regional struggle to a fundamentalist and universal one. Next, she argues that, since foreign fighters lead to an escalation of conflicts, they have the potential to turn conflict-ridden states into failed states or safe havens for terrorists. Lastly, she asserts that by gaining experience from conflicts abroad they learn skills that they use to help conflicts back home.

The third conceptual group examines factors motivating individuals to join foreign insurgencies and factors motivating insurgencies to employ or actively seek out foreign fighters. Bakke, examining motivations through the eyes of organizations, identifies four potential reasons why an organization might want to use foreign fighters: operational needs, political considerations, organizational capacity, and ideational factors.[9] Within these three, she creates a hierarchy where she argues that political considerations of the insurgency take top priority when an insurgency is faced with the decision to accept or reject foreign fighters entering its insurgency, followed by

operational needs and organizational capacity. Looking at the motivations of individuals, on the other hand, Sheik argues that terrorist organizations offer their target audience the opportunity to fight for a cause larger themselves, tangibly.[10] He further argues that this illusion of a tangible objective is created by framing the concept of an ideological and religious state, a state which would provide the fighters with autonomy.

Finally, looking at the fourth conceptual grouping that examines jihad and terrorism in Kashmir. One scholar, Siyech, posits that the Islamic State holds minimal prospects in the Kashmir conflict.[11] He identifies three factors that have made Kashmir an unattractive target for the Islamic state: None to limited access to a battlefront, high internal cohesion, and low chances of victory.[12] He argues that, as a result of these factors, the global Jihad movement never spread adequately in the Kashmir insurgency and, hence, the Islamic state abstained from sending or receiving foreign fighters from the insurgency.[13] Two more scholars, Cheong and Seng, taking an opposite stance, make a case for how Kashmir could turn into another terrorist stronghold.[14] They identify five factors - siege mentality, youth despair, the influx of arms, internet radicalization, and the presence of foreign Jihadist groups – to assert their case, that Kashmir possesses the risk of turning into another terrorist hotbed.[15] Furthermore, they argue that with the Islamic state collapsing in the Syria – Iraq theatre, there is a push to find a new territorial base for the organization, and Kashmir presents a lucrative option.[16] Mohanty argues that the roots of terrorism are deeper in Kashmir and start with the government of Pakistan; he argues that terrorism and fundamentalism are central to Pakistan's game plan and strategy for Kashmir.[17] Mohanty makes a case for the presence of factors such as siege mentality and troubled and vulnerable youth, as mentioned by Cheong and Seng.[18] He goes on to argue that radicalism in the Kashmir insurgency is rooted in Pakistan's choice, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, to promote a fundamentalist view of faith in the region to combat the communist thrust in Afghanistan, during the Soviet invasion.[19]

Current literature, while comprehensively examining foreign fighter impact, fails to account for the role the regional government's framing/engagement of or with the insurgency plays on the development of foreign fighter influence on the insurgency in question. In relation to the existing academic conversation, this paper attempts to extend Bakke's framework to measure foreign fighter influence, a framework that measures changes tactical innovation, framing, resource mobilization and local support, by adding a pivotal variable to it: governmental involvement. It also attempts to initiate the examination of foreign fighters in South Asian insurgencies, by examining the impact of foreign fighters on Lashkar-e-Taiba in the Kashmir insurgency.

3. Research Design

This project will employ a mixed-method approach, consisting of the small-n case study and interpretivist methods. The following cases will be examined as a part of the project: Indian National Congress (INC; 2008 – 2013), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; 2014 – 2019). The cases were chosen to demonstrate variance and show a spectrum of government involvement in the Kashmir insurgency over the last two decades. To examine these cases chosen, one insurgent/extremist organization was chosen as the units of analysis: Lashkar-e-Taiba. The group was chosen for two main reasons: 1) it had the longest legacy and most influence among locals in the Kashmir insurgency, 2) foreign fighters played a pivotal role in the organizations' insurgency operations, and 3) the organization constitutes a major portion of the Kashmir insurgency. It is important to note that while the final objective of Lashkar, and the insurgency in general, involves a free Kashmir integrated into Pakistan, Lashkar's actions to reach these final objectives are not confined to the boundaries of Kashmir. A majority of Lashkar's attacks are focused on attacking major cities in India, to inflict damage on India and deter the Indian government from engaging further in Kashmir. Therefore, this paper will analyze attacks across India to answer its research question. The comparative case study approach was chosen because it allows for the development of a causal chain that can be used to construct and determine the role of each of the explanatory factors in the project. An interpretivist approach was chosen to operationalize the government's religious stance by examining their rhetoric. The form of government and the majority religion in Kashmir were used as control variables, the indicators of both these variables remained constant across all cases. The religious stance of the government will be used as an explanatory variable; this variable shows sustained variance longitudinally and will be used to explain the dependent variable. Finally, the dependent variable was chosen to be the impact of foreign fighters in the Kashmir insurgency.

To examine each of the explanatory variables and the dependent variable the project will utilize a structured, focused comparison. For its sources, the project primarily relied on media reports on NexisUni, government case reports on the prosecution of foreign militants, scholarly and government projects, and, finally, translations and interpretations of LeT's manifestos by scholars. The religious stance of the government will be examined by looking at how the national level leadership of the BJP or INC identifies India's culture. Each case will be assigned an indicator value on a scale of secular, Hindu, Hindu Nationalist, and Hard-line Hindu Nationalists. When present, as supporting material, policies made based on religion will be examined as well. First, by looking at the text of the document that established the policy and second, by looking at official, government press releases

following the passing of the legislation. The dependent variables (two levels: impacts to local support) will be measured using Kristen Bakke's theoretical framework, by examining 1) changes in the framing of the movement, and 2) tactical innovation in the insurgency. Framing will be measured by first establishing a base value for the objectives of the movement – objectives at the group's inception; following which an initial primary opponent for the LeT will be identified. A base for tactical innovation will be established by examining the tactics/strategies of the group pre-2008. Changes in tactical innovation and framing will be calculated using the base values established. If changes are observed, in the above two metrics, the paper will also examine the impact these changes have to the degree of local support foreign militants and the LeT receive. Local support will be examined by looking at news reports that show locals explicitly supporting LeT and its foreign militants. Local support will also be measured by examining, across time, changes in the number of locals joining the Kashmir insurgency.

Table 1. Case Comparison

Case/Variable	IV: Religious Stance	IV: Majority Religion in Kashmir	IV: Form of Government	DV: Impact (Tactical Innovation/ Deviations in Framing/Local Support)
INC (2008 – 2013)	Secular	Islam	Constitutional Parliamentary	Present /Present/Present
BJP (2014 – 2019)	Hard-line Hindu Nationalist	Islam	Constitutional Parliamentary	Present/Absent/Present

Table 2. Operationalizing FF Impact Indicators

Indicator	Questions
Framing	Was there any change in the primary opponent identified by the organization? ("present") or did the primary opponent identified by the organization remain the same? ("absent")
Tactical Innovation	Was there any radicalization in the attack or changes in the tactics adopted by the organization? ("present") or did the tactics remain the same or reduce in terms of intensity? ("absent")
Local Support	Did the number of people joining the insurgency and the show of support by locals, towards foreign militants and the LeT stay constant or show an upward trend? ("present") or did they reduce? ("absent")

4. Lashkar-e-Taiba

Founded in 1990, the Sunni group vowed to free Kashmir from India and merge it with Pakistan. It has been branded as one of the most capable terrorist organizations by the US' Intelligence Community the Department of State, and the European Union. The group gained its initial recognition after its 2001 Indian Parliament attacks; following that, through the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the group placed itself on the world map as an international terrorist organization. Of the two main interpretations of jihad – Ahl-e Hadith and Deobandi – the group subscribes to the Ahl-e Hadith interpretation of jihad.[20] In theory, the group has shown some signs of deviation from the traditional interpretation of their version of jihad. For instance, the spokesperson of LeT went on record stating that their organization believed that violence was not the only option in the movement but was rather only a means for them to be given a voice.[21] However, as evidenced by the continued violent efforts of the organization, the statement did not translate into action. The group is designated a terrorist organization and banned in India, Pakistan, and the United States.

The group has four main sources of external support: the Pakistani government (mainly ISI), foreign financiers, foreign militants, and local Kashmiris. The focus of this project shall be foreign fighters. This paper will focus specifically on foreign fighters as a source of support. Foreign militants are crucial to LeT's operational needs.

They serve a variety of roles, from leaders and managers to on-ground combatants. While one cannot estimate the number of foreign militants involved with LeT, the high degree of involvement can be seen clearly, as illustrated by the following. It is first important to note that Lashkar is a group based out of Pakistan. As a result of this, the Pakistani fighters deployed by Lashkar, into the Kashmir insurgency, count as foreign operatives; however, Lashkar's foreign militants are not limited Pakistan and include fighters from the US, Arab and Gulf states, Afghanistan and regions in close proximity to these places.[22] Of the 500 militants recorded, by the Indian government, in 2010, it was estimated that about 40% of them were foreign militants and most of them originated from LeT.[23] Times of India found that even in 2015, the Kashmir insurgency still held a 60:40 local to foreign militant ratio, with LeT and Hizbul Mujahideen harboring the majority of these militants.[24] Finally, despite being a regional movement (Kashmiri independence), the LeT has been able to position itself as a desirable employer on the global market for foreign militants. As evidenced by a START study that found that, between 1980 and 2015, 4% of foreign militants originating from the United States were associated with LeT.[25]

5. Religious Stances

Owing to its role in the Indian Freedom Movement, the INC has held a progressive political and social outlook on Kashmir. This outlook can be evidenced by the reasoning behind the INC's claims to Kashmir. Nehru, during the Delhi Conference in 1952, argued that Kashmir is central to maintaining India's status as a democratic and secular nation.[26] Nehru's claim on Kashmir was driven by a need to prove India's status as a culturally diverse state, and not by any nationalist agenda. Moving into the 21st century, both Rahul Gandhi – formed president of the Indian Youth Congress and then the Indian National Congress - and Manmohan Singh – an INC affiliated former Prime Minister – had secular stances on Muslims and Kashmir. Rahul Gandhi, in 2010, went as far as to identifying Hindu extremists as one of the largest threats to religious inclusion and stability in India.[27] Manmohan Singh possessed a similar track record as well. During Singh's pursuit of economic development, he specifically endorsed the idea of a secular and pluralistic democracy. Singh, during his term, also undertook a 15-point plan, under the National Minorities Commission, dedicated to improving equity.[28] This stance particularly stood in opposition to Modi's 'Hindutva' based discourse during the 2014 general elections in India. It is important to note that the INC, identified by its executive leadership, did not engage in any direct anti-Muslim or anti-minority rhetoric throughout its term; however, multiple INC affiliated local politicians have engaged in discriminatory remarks, at their own accord.

The BJP has since its inception progressed from a basic Hindu stance to that of a Hardline Hindu Nationalist stance. Ram Madhav, BJP's spokesperson, in an Aljazeera interview openly identified and defended India's civilizational culture as 'Hindu'; he further went on to add that it was under this Hindu culture that all other ethnic and religious groups in India existed.[29] Ram Madhav's comments are not his own, but rather fall in line with the BJP's broader objectives. BJP, currently represented by Prime Minister Modi, functions under a parent organization – The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); therefore, Modi and his government, have aggressively advocated for the vision and mission of the RSS: "The Hindu culture is the life-breath of Hindusthan. It is therefore clear that if Hindusthan is to be protected, we should first nourish the Hindu culture. If the Hindu culture perishes in Hindusthan itself, and if the Hindu society ceases to exist, it will hardly be appropriate to refer to the mere geographical entity that remains as Hindusthan."[30] Additionally, the recent policy of the BJP to pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill – a bill which fast-tracks and explicitly prioritizes the status of Hindu's as Indian citizens over the status of other Indian minorities – further supports this stance from a policy perspective.[31]

6. Predictions

Hegghammer notes that Jihad functions on an alarmist propaganda that gains its value from in-group suffering and categorizing 'others' as a threat.[32] In Kashmir, the central rhetoric of Lashkar has been that of Jihad vs. a Hindu nation. For this rhetoric to have a strong base, one would expect that the Indian government would have to adopt a Hindu to a hardline Hindu nationalist stance; as such as stance would identify Hindus as the primary community for which India was built, and Muslims as 'others' as people encroaching on that structure. One would also expect the actions of such a government would disproportionately harm Muslims. This would perfectly fit the bill of the insurgents' alarmist propaganda – suffering and ostracization of Muslims. The following predictions about LeT were made based on the causal relationships theorized above:

6.1 Prediction 1

A government stance closer to hardline Hindu nationalism will result in the increased impact of foreign fighters on LeT.

6.1.1 sub-prediction 1a

The presence of a concrete 'other' for Kashmiri insurgents to target would allow the LeT to focus on both their regional and global jihad goals; this strengthened rhetoric would lead to significant deviations in framing.

6.1.2 sub-prediction 1b

Tactical innovation would be high under the BJP, as radicalization would be more acceptable under a strengthened jihadist agenda.

Conversely, a secular stance-based government would have the opposite impact by not directly hurting Muslims and not categorizing them as the 'others.' The following predictions were made under the above causal relationship:

6.2 Prediction 2

A government stance closer to secularism will result in the reduced impact of foreign fighters in the Kashmir insurgency.

6.2.1 sub-prediction 2a

The lack of a concrete 'other' for Kashmiri insurgents, under the INC, to target would weaken and reduce the appeal of LeT's global and regional jihad rhetoric; the weakened rhetoric would lead to no or little deviations in framing.

6.2.2 sub-prediction 2b

Tactical innovation would be low under the INC, as radicalization would be less acceptable under a weakened jihadist agenda.

Finally, with respect to Kashmiri local support; unlike LeT, locals have no interest in terrorism or extremism, rather their support for the insurgency is driven by the fact that the LeT will help the locals gain independence; furthermore, locals often do not wish to be associated with organizations engaging in indiscriminate killings and radicalization. Therefore, local support for an insurgent organization is largely contingent on an organization maintaining and sticking to the core objective it used to rally support for the insurgency; it is also contingent on the insurgency maintaining levels of violence and radicalization acceptable to the locals.

6.2.3 sub-prediction 1c

Local support for Lashkar would be high or remain constant under the INC due to lack of deviations in framing and/or the presence of tactical innovation.

6.2.4 sub-prediction 2c

Local support for Lashkar would reduce under the BJP due to deviations in framing and/or the presence of tactical innovation.

7. Measuring the Impact of Foreign Fighters

7.1 Framing

First, starting with the establishing of LeT's base framing. The LeT at its inception served the purpose of a Pakistan proxy. Therefore, the organization aligned itself with Pakistan's agenda: liberate Kashmir and integrate it into Pakistan; in its manifesto "Why are we waging jihad" it extends that agenda to establish rule over the entirety of India. [33] The group takes specifically targeted Sikhs and Hindus in their attacks against India. As evidenced by the Chittisinghpura Massacre (2000), where the LeT murdered 35 Sikhs or the Wandhama Ganderbal massacre (1998), which killed 23 Hindus.[34] The group has also vowed to plant its flag in Washington, Israel, and the United States; however, those objectives lay second to Kashmir; additionally, it also operates in Afghanistan.

The first concrete evidence of this shift, from a regional to transnational agenda, can be seen in the 2008 Mumbai attacks by the LeT. As noted in a previous section, LeT was founded to mirror and accomplish the objectives of the Pakistani government. In line with that, the objectives of the 2008 attacks would have been to deter India from engaging in Kashmir. However, as the events show, that wasn't the only, or even primary, objective. The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel and the Trident Oberoi were both housing high-level European dignitaries at the time of the attack (including delegates from the European Parliament Committee on International Trade, the President of Madrid and multiple European parliament members); the Nariman House was a Jewish center and the Leopold café was a major foreign tourist attraction.[35] The specific targeting of westerners by the LeT, if not conclusive proof, is evidence that the organization was moving towards a more universal Jihad agenda that categorized westerners as a threat. This represents a major deviation from the organization's primary agenda to integrate Indian occupied Kashmir into Pakistan; and also, deviation from the primary opponent of the organization which was initially India but was now more west oriented. The same LeT operative – David Headley – was also allegedly involved in the 2010 Pune German Bakery bombing – another action targeting westerners.[36]

Another instance of deviation can be seen in 2009 – the Denmark terror plots.[37] David Headley was also prosecuted for planning terror attacks in Denmark. Headley confessed that he was instructed by Lashkar to "conduct surveillance of the Copenhagen and Aarhus offices of the Danish newspaper *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* in preparation for an attack in retaliation for the newspaper's publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed."[38] Even though the Danish newspaper's actions directly offended the ideological beliefs of LeT, the organization's choice to retaliate against it shows evidence of deviation. Before this, there exists no evidence of LeT engaging in transnational attacks, specifically in retaliation to anti-Muslim rhetoric. While the plot was not successful in the end, as noted in the department of justice report on Headey's arrest, it was failure on Lashkar's part to keep the operation covert and not a result of ideological considerations. There exists evidence proving the opposite; the group has so strictly adhered to its agenda, to liberate Kashmir, that in 2001, post 9/11, Lashkar, initially, did not dispatch any troops to support the Taliban to counter US troops in Afghanistan. In that context, LeT's efforts in Denmark point towards the possibility that the organization is trying to move away from Kashmir and establish a global presence, by showing its concern for a greater agenda. However, such plots or attacks could not be noticed 2009 onwards. A possible interpretation of this could be that after the operational failure of the Denmark plots, Lashkar moved its focus from conducting attacks to developing long term operational capacity.

Lastly, evidence can be seen in the Jamaat-ud-Dawa's publication Dar-ul-Andlus. In their publications, the LeT goes beyond categorizing Hindu's as the enemy and includes Christians as well; Maulana Amir Hamza, one of the authors, explains his visit to a Church and goes on to identify how he finds Christian practices and worldviews problematic.[39] To prove his point, he argues that Christian practices and based on excess, and their worldview does not afford Jesus the ultimate status of a god, which according to JuD's philosophy, one should. The identification of Christians as the opposition shows a fundamental shift in the LeT's identification of enemies and problems, a shift from the objective to eliminate a 'Hindu India' to one that sees Christians as an impurity – a characteristic of the larger Jihad movement. Therefore, evidence of deviation in framing can be observed.

7.1.1 analysis

First, examining these changes in framing in the context of governmental rhetoric. In the case of the Indian National Congress or the BJP pre-2004, there was no evidence of direct anti-Muslim rhetoric, from national-level leadership of the organization, that called for a response from the LeT. On the other hand, there were multiple statements and stances during the BJP's term that gave LeT the opportunity to strengthen their jihad rhetoric. Instances include Ram Madhav – BJP's spokesperson – calling Indian culture 'Hindu' on international television, the RSS branding Muslims, among other minorities, 'bloodsuckers,' or the Citizens Amendment Bill Act of 2019,

which exclusively gave Hindus the option to receive refugee status, but denied the same right for Muslims; furthermore, the BJP in its manifesto (which it later followed through on) vowed to revoke Kashmir's special status and make it a permanent part of India. However, it was observed that LeT, through its leader Hafeez Saeed, did not respond to any of these events. The only time Saeed delivered a response to the Modi government was when Modi and Imran Khan started showing signs of collaboration, and the possibility of compromise.[40]

These findings completely contradict the initially hypothesized relationship. They contradict the observations where foreign fighter impact was increased as a result of strengthening alarmist propaganda; alarmist propaganda that should have been strengthened as a result of anti-Muslim stances by the BJP.[41] A possible explanation for this observation could be the need for regional cohesion and support. In the case of the INC, LeT did not have any confrontations, ideological or otherwise, with the government, since the government was already secular and accepting of Muslims, to begin with. This meant the foreign militants in the LeT driven insurgency had space, or buffer, to drive the organization towards a part of global jihad. However, in the second case, the LeT's mission, vision, and ideology were in confrontation with that of the BJP. This meant that the LeT needed to maintain a clear path in its mission to free Kashmir and integrate it into India. To do so, it had to specifically ensure that there was cohesion between the LeT ideology and the vision of the people of Kashmir. This might have led the organization to resist any deviations it might have experienced, from foreign fighters, in the framing of the movement. Chu and Brawaithe's theory, and observations, that foreign militants change the course of the insurgency and intensify it, increasing the gap between the insurgents and locals, would serve as support to this explanation.[42] This deviation also contradicts the objectives of one of the LeT's major supporters – the ISI. The LeT's objectives may experience deviation, however, the Pakistani government's objectives have stayed the same, since their infiltration across the LoC in 1947 – take control of Kashmir. While Pakistan might resort to aiding terrorists in its Kashmiri agenda, it can be reasonably inferred that the state would not risk associating itself with a global jihad movement. However, this is speculation; the role Inter-Services Intelligence played, along with Lashkar leadership, in selecting targets with significant Western presence, makes it hard to make, beyond reasonable doubt, such an inference.[43]

7.2 Tactical Innovation

Tactical innovation was measured by examining the changes in strategy relative to pre-2008 approaches. Tactical innovation can be measured in one or a combination of two ways: 1) the increase in the effectiveness or intensity of an attack in terms of fatalities, and 2) changes in the tactics or strategies adopted.

Tactical innovation by both metrics was observed during both periods. Measuring based on intensity, LeT under the BJP government showed higher tactical innovation. The Mumbai 2008 attacks, the 2016 Pathankot attacks, and the plans of the Denmark attacks showed a significant increase in intensity. Under the INC, between 2008 and 2013, the average intensity of a major attack was 3.31 deaths per incident; however, the Mumbai attacks lead to an estimated 174 deaths, and the German Bakery bombings lead to 17 deaths.[44] Under the BJP, the average intensity of a major attack was 2.91 deaths per incident; the Pathankot attacks led to 17 deaths, on a military base, of which 7 were security personnel. Both events showed significant increases in intensity.

Measuring based on changes in strategy or tactics, before 2008 the LeT engaged in direct, focused attacks. The LeT focused primarily on small scale attempts to encroach on the Line of Control.[45] In addition to these, it occasionally engaged in single high impact attacks that either, like the 2000 Red Fort attack, impacted an important location but had low fatalities, or like the 2000 Chattisingpura massacre had high fatalities.[46] However, the Mumbai attacks and the Denmark plots show a change in this strategy. Both attacks involved coordinated attacks in multiple locations, with the same primary target. In the Mumbai attacks, it was six places that were known for Jewish and American presence. And, in the case of the Denmark plan, it was two different cities – Copenhagen and Aarhus – where the offices of the newspaper were located. Furthermore, before 2008, attacks on Indian forces were primarily a result of surprise encounters or attempts by militants to infiltrate the LoC. The Pathankot attack was the first to demonstrate the LeT's capabilities to significantly damage security infrastructure and infiltrate army bases; the attack was on an Indian Airforce Station that was part of the Western Air Command - a heavily armed and guarded military facility.[47] However, Lashkar was not the sole perpetrator of the attack, it was a primary member of the United Jihad Council (a coalition) which carried out the attack.[48]

7.2.1. analysis

There is evidence that LeT, in its military operations, has used foreign militants in four main ways: Commanders,[49] Frontline Combatants, Trainers for Local Militants,[50] and Intelligence Agents.[51] Furthermore, the LeT has also been developing sleeper cells consisting exclusively of foreign militants; this can be evidenced by the November 2010 Indian Security Assistance forces seizure of a commander who was running a cell comprised of 50 foreign militants.[52] While no direct link can be established between foreign militants and tactical innovation directly,

based on the presence of foreign militants in positions of military leadership, and as combatants as well, a reasonable inference can be made that they do yield a degree of influence on the tactical decision of the LeT. Pointing towards the fact, that they may play a role in tactical innovation. However, this causal link comes with some serious limitations; the nationality of the foreign militant leaders, identified by the Indian government, was not specified. Therefore, there exist two possibilities. First, that these leaders may be individuals from Arab countries, Afghanistan or any other region Lashkar recruit's foreign militants; in which case, the shifts in tactical innovation may in fact be foreign expertise.[53] Second, since for the Indian government any individual who is not of Indian nationality qualifies as a foreign militant, some or most of these leaders might be Pakistani leaders, who, while foreign militants from India's perspective, are not particularly bringing foreign expertise to the insurgency or the organization.

   The paper rightly predicted the presence of higher tactical innovation under the BJP; however, it was wrong in predicting the lack of tactical innovation under the INC. A straightforward answer to the consistent rise of tactical innovation in Kashmir would be that tactical innovation can be seen as positively correlated to the involvement of the government in Kashmir. As established in sections one and four, the religious stance of the government (secular or Hindu nationalist) is directly correlated to the government's involvement in the conflict. On that note, BJP, a Hindu nationalist government, would be more involved in Kashmir, warranting increased tactical involvement from Lashkar; similarly, the INC, a secular government, would have the opposite impact.

7.3 Local Response to Changes

Lashkar foreign militants have enjoyed fairly consistent strong, unrelenting local support from Kashmiris, as illustrated by the following examples. An Indian counter-insurgency unit, after killing Lashkar foreign militants in an encounter, laid out the bodies of militants to be photographed.[54] As they began the photographing, a large crowd of Kashmiri locals, shouting Lashkar slogans, pelted stones at the police and army men and stole the bodies of the foreign militants. The stolen bodies were later buried according to Muslim tradition. The protests also resulted in the police firing on the protesters. The happenings of the events not only show the support militants enjoy from locals but also provide evidence that the militants are viewed as martyrs and respected by the locals, so much so that people are willing to sacrifice their lives to give the militants a proper burial. Additionally, some towns such as Hanij, in Srinagar, and Baramulla, before being declared militance free, served as hubs for foreign militants originating from LeT.[55] The degree of support these towns offer militants can be further evidenced by the fact that these towns are not militia safe havens, but rather towns overlooking Indian Army infantry divisions.[56] This implies that the towns would have to work as a collaborative unit to hide and support the foreign militants – showing a very high degree of support from their end; Baramulla housed foreign militants so well that it took the Indian army a full six months to locate three militants. Albeit a limited measure, other evidence of increasing local support can be seen in the increase of locals willing to join the Kashmir militancy. From 38 locals joining the militancy in 2013, to 54 in 2014, to 88 in 2016 (the highest since 2000).[57] Therefore, local support for the LeT, and local militants alike, has either stayed consistent or risen independent of the government in place or tactical innovation and deviations in framing by the organization.

8. Conclusion

The paper attempted to understand the impact a government's religious stance had on the impact foreign fighters had on an insurgent organization. To so, building on past theories and frameworks, it predicted that the more polarized towards a particular religion a government was, the more impact foreign fighters would have on an insurgent organization. The projects investigation of LeT revealed the following findings:

- **Finding 1:** There existed significant deviations of framing as a result of foreign fighter involvement under a highly secular and inclusive government.
- **Finding 2:** There was no evidence of deviations in framing under the BJP.
- **Finding 3:** There also existed noticeable deviations in tactics under both the BJP and INC. However, the BJP showed greater evidence of tactical innovation.
- **Finding 4:** The LeT, through its direct responses, showed concern towards India-Pakistan collaboration. However, it did not directly respond to any anti-Muslim government rhetoric.
- **Finding 5:** Framing and tactical innovation did not happen mutually. Some events/activities showing deviations in framing were the same events/activities that exhibited tactical innovation as well.
- **Finding 6:** Local support for the insurgency was not impacted as a result of tactical innovation or deviations in framing.

These findings, while not conclusive or concrete by any means, do raise some important questions about the behavior of foreign militant and insurgent organizations. Contrary to the paper's initial prediction, framing changes were observed under a secular government and were not observed under a religious and nationalist one. This finding has implications in two scenarios. The first scenario - deviation did exist under the both the BJP and INC but was not visible at the surface level actions of the organization – a limitation of this paper. This would mean that LeT foreign militant's agendas are immune to the environmental factors in which the insurgency functions. Second scenario – the findings of the study are accurate. This would imply an inverse relationship between a government's religious stance and the impact of foreign militants on an insurgency, opposing the traditional theory of insurgencies being weakened by inclusive governments. However, the project was right in predicting that more tactical innovation would be observed under the BJP. Finally, the project observed that despite shifts in the central objectives of the insurgency and radicalization of tactics, the local population of Kashmir remained indifferent and showed signs of consistent or increasing support. Showing evidence that, irrespective of the government, the idea of a free independent Kashmir is a strongly ingrained notion in the locals.

It is important to note that the project comes with limitations of its own, in addition to those account for in the main body of the paper. Deviation in framing and tactical innovation was observed, but the study was unable to establish a definitive causal link between the government's religious stance and the impact of foreign fighters on LeT. Furthermore, while the LeT – in terms of size and impact – constitutes a fairly significant portion of the Kashmiri insurgency, it is important to acknowledge that this project does not take into account other major insurgent organizations, such as Hizbul Mujahideen or Jaish-e-Mohammed, which may have responded differently to the government; as a result, the project is unable to generalize the extent of the impact foreign fighters have had on the Kashmir insurgency as a whole. Finally, since 2013 the LeT has significantly increased its covert capabilities, and this project may have been unable to uncover signs of changes in framing or tactical innovation it might have shown under the BJP.

To conclude, the findings of this paper gives cause to believe that the Kashmir insurgency may have developed a great degree of immunity against the environment in which they function – particularly political. Signs of this immunity can be specifically seen in the context of the local population. The idea of an independent Kashmir, having been strongly ingrained for nearly seven decades, has had a serious impact on the locals. Unlike in other insurgencies, such as Chechnya, Kashmiri locals disregarded any changes the LeT adopted as long it supported their cause for a free Kashmir. The LeT, as well, developed a degree of immunity towards the Indian government and maintained a jihad vs. Hindu India rhetoric independent of the religious environment in the country. This paper, among other literature, provides evidence that insurgencies rapidly evolve from regional to global threats; to that end, it is essentially that the evolvement of these organizations as transnational threats is kept track of, and their strengths, weaknesses and blind spots identified.

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