



Abu Jundal's Arrest and India-Saudi Arabia Counter-terrorism Cooperation

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The arrest and deportation of Abu Jundal alias Abu Hamza alias Sayed Zabiuddin Ansari, a Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) handler, involved in several attacks in various parts of India, by Saudi Arabia is a classic case of good counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries. The key questions: Who is Abu Jundal? How did he get involved in Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT)? Why did he go to Saudi Arabia? What factors were responsible for his acceptance to deport Jundal despite Pakistan's opposition? What is the way ahead in the bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia?

Abu Jundal

Belonging to Gevrai area of Beed district in Maharashtra, Sayed Zabiuddin Ansari, was initially impressed by tenets of Ahle Hadees or Salafism to the pristine teachings of Islam as enshrined in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.¹ He gradually gravitated towards Students Islamic Movement of India and took care of its operations in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra for sometime before shifting to Indian Mujahideen. It was through his contacts with the LeT and went on to become its handler in India. As police net was closing in, he fled to Pakistan after 2006 through Nepal. He was considered a "good find" by the LeT and, therefore, was roped-in in various anti-India operations.

Apart from the famous Aurangabad arms haul case (May 2006), Hamza has been involved in or connected with a number of terror attacks: the attack in Bengaluru (December 2005), Mumbai train bombings (July 2006), 26/11 Mumbai attacks (November 2008), German Bakery attack (February 2010), Chinnaswamy Stadium attack in Bengaluru (April 2010) and Jamma Masjid attack in Delhi (September 2010). After this, the role of Ansari's involvement is blank. The plausible explanation he shifted his base to Saudi Arabia in 2010, at around the same time when he was implicated by one of the accused in the German Bakery case. Until then he was believed to have been involved only in the Aurangabad arms haul case. Investigators soon realised that an Indian Hindi voice in the recordings of conversations between 26/11 attackers and their controllers in Mumbai was of Abu Hamza. His name was, therefore, listed, in the dossier of 50 most wanted criminals sheltered in Pakistan released by India on 21 May 2011.

By then he had already been sent to Saudi Arabia by the LeT to mobilize funds and recruits from Indian Muslims working there. The plan was to launch an attack in India at an appropriate time. The LeT already has a good network in Saudi Arabia. Bearing a Pakistani passport in the name of Hamza, he started working on his assignment even by using internet, especially the social networking site Facebook. It was this overconfidence that led to the discovery of whereabouts of Jundal in the form of electronic trails. He was put on surveillance for some time with the help of Saudi intelligence agencies.

After the arrest, Saudis were initially reluctant to handover Jundal to India because of Pakistan. Saudi Arabia did not want to upset Pakistan. Islamabad knew the significance of the arrest and Jundal's value to Indian authorities and the damage it could cause to Pakistan if he was released. Pakistan confesses whatever he knows. He was the only Indian present at the "control room" in Karachi that guided the entire course of 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Pakistan only knows who else were present, but also their exact role and motivations. Ajmal Kasab, lone terrorist caught alive among the 10 terrorists in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, was just an operative. But, Ansari had been involved right from the planning of the attacks to its execution and also in the recruitment of terrorists. His first-hand testimony is important for India to connect various unconnected dots in the case.

Thus far, testimonies of Kasab and David Headley are available to India; only Ansari should be in a position to confirm whether they spoke the truth. Zabiuddin Ansari should also be able to explain the extent of Pakistan's, its intelligence agencies to be more precise, involvement in various terror attacks against India. As Pakistan claims, is it really not in a position to control anti-Indian militant groups based in its soil? Or, is it controlling the planning to execution of terror attacks against India? Whether Jundal fled to Saudi Arabia with the help of Pakistani establishment or without? How did he manage to survive in Saudi Arabia for nearly two years with a "fake passport"? Ansari is also expected to know a lot about the internal workings of LeT: its leadership, motivations, funding, recruitment, training, bases (both political and military), logistical support, its linkage with state actors of Pakistan, other internal and external networks, its modules and ' sleeper cells ' in India, selection of targets, plans for future attacks, and the extent of connections with Indian jihadist groups like SIMI and IM.

India-Saudi Arabia CT Cooperation

Indeed, intense pressure from the US worked. However, it was the realisation on the part of the Saudis on the need to cooperate with India against terrorism that prompted them to deport Jundal, but on the condition that only if he is an Indian national. They finally came around to his arrest and deportation.

they got convinced by DNA profile of Jundal and other proofs submitted by India unambiguously establishing his Indian nationality. Pakistan had no credible proof to show to the Saudis to ascertain that he was a Pakistani citizen. In the recent years, Riyadh has been concerned over collaboration between Al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and LeT and its possible implications in the long run. US' d as one of the most dangerous terror outfits, first by listing it as a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization' and later by announcing \$10 million on Saeed, sent strong signals to Saudi authorities: that they should not let Al Qaeda enter into the Kingdom through LeT.

The counter-terrorism cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia has to be looked at also from the point of improving bilateral ties. been on the upward trend ever since January 2006 when King Abdullah visited India (a visit by a Saudi head of the state after 50 years) India's Republic Day celebrations. The 'Delhi Declaration' that was signed during the visit termed that the "visit heralds a new era in relations and constitutes a landmark in the development of increased understanding and cooperation between the two countries and cre beneficial partnership."² Apart from other areas like economy, trade, science & technology, health and culture, the two countries recog intensify and coordinate bilateral, regional and global cooperation to combat and eradicate the menace of terrorism."³ However, the agreement on counter-terrorism cooperation except for signing a 'MoU on Combating Crime'. Although the MoU provided for coope security agencies of the two countries for combating organised crime, illicit trafficking of narcotics, weapons, and historical artifacts, ai currency and travel documents, in practice there were hitches.

The obstacles came in the form of perception of what constituted "crime" and priorities in addressing them. Yet, when the overall improved to the level of 'strategic partnership' in 2010⁴, and when Saudi Arabia found that the importance of India as a major power resonance, there have been meeting grounds. This was reflected in the signing of Extradition Treaty between the two countries in the s Minister AK Antony's visit to the Kingdom in February 2012, the first by a Defence Minister of India, tremendously boosted defence tie countries, including in counter-terrorism.

The counter-terrorism cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia does not stop with the deportation of Abu Jundal. It has a vast potent that the two countries, as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has pointed out, are "strong allies against the scourge of extremism and te global peace and security."⁵ Since Abu Jundal was assigned to work also among Indian Muslims in radicalizing them, it is important ti between the two countries goes further in identifying the network of those already radicalised and in safeguarding Indians (about tw radicalising attempts by jihadi groups based in the Kingdom. It is appreciable that the Saudi authorities have apprehended another In Mohammed, who was involved in Chinnaswamy cricket stadium bomb blast in Bengaluru and shooting incident at Delhi's Jama Mas deportation would help the ongoing investigations in these cases.

Further, Saudi Arabia should arrest and deport all Indian fugitives hiding in that country and in future should discourage such elements the Kingdom. Much attention is also required in blocking funds to Indian terror groups from non-state actors based in Saudi Arabia. The to gain not only on economic complementarities, but also on security and defence complementarities. A Joint Committee on Security si Defence should be set up to make the security cooperation comprehensive: intelligence sharing, monitoring and surveillance, joint e visits, exchange programmes, and so on. Using the present momentum, India should make best use of its diplomatic energies to pre state actors based in Pakistan, like the LeT, through Saudi Arabia. Riyadh's help is vital for New Delhi to counter jihadist terrorism in the c Abdullah called as his "second home".

Reference:

For more about Ahle Hadees, see <http://www.ahlehadees.org/about-ahle-hadith-hadees/markazi-jamiat-ahle-hadees-hadith-history.html>

For full text of the Delhi Declaration, see <http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/WebFiles/Delhi%20Declaration.pdf> Ibid.

Riyadh Declaration signed on 28 February 2010 between India and Saudi Arabia during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Riyadh, decided " cooperation to a strategic partnership covering security, economic, defence and political areas." Full text of the Declaration is available at <http://www.indianembassy.org.sa/WebFiles/Riyadh%20Declaration.pdf>

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's interview with Saudi journalists during his visit to Riyadh. For full text of the interview, see <http://pmindia.nic.in/nodeid=3>

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