

# PUNISHING JAISH

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

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Almost immediately after a suicide bomber rammed into a CRPF convoy in Awantipora, killing at least 40 security personnel, the Pakistan-based terrorist outfit, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), claimed responsibility for the terror strike. The attack bore the JeM's signature. Since 2000, when a 17-year-old blew up an explosive-laden Maruti car which he had driven to the headquarters of the Army's 15 Corps in Srinagar, suicide strikes have been one of Jaish's preferred methods. The 2000 Srinagar attack had announced the arrival on the terror stage of Maulana Masood Azhar. Released a few months earlier, in late 1999, from an Indian jail in exchange of the crew and passengers of an Indian Airlines aircraft that was hijacked and taken to Kandahar in Afghanistan, Azhar took the help of the Afghan Taliban to form the JeM. Its attack on Parliament in 2001 almost pushed India and Pakistan to the brink of war. A few months earlier, Islamabad had used the term "terrorism" to condemn a JeM attack on the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly. However, even though it outlawed the outfit in 2002, forced in large measure by international pressure, Islamabad has allowed it to operate under different names — Afzal Guru Squad, Al-Murabitoon and Tehreek-al-Furqan — while Azhar remains under nominal house arrest in Bahawalpur. Pakistan's denials of his involvement in terror flies in the face of the JeM's ownership of Thursday's attack. Its ally, China, has stonewalled India's attempts at the UN to have Azhar declared a global terrorist.

After lying low for nearly 10 years, the JeM has upped the ante in the last three years. In November 2015, it claimed responsibility for an attack on the Brigade Headquarter at Tangdhar, very close to the LoC in Kupwara district. India has also blamed the outfit for the January 2016 attack on the Pathankot airbase, in which seven security personnel were killed and the September 2016 Uri attack which claimed the lives of 20 soldiers. In the last two years, security forces have killed at least two JeM commanders in the Valley.

Thursday's attacks should bring into focus India's security challenge in the aftermath of US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw his country's troops from Afghanistan. With Kabul's current regime under President Ashraf Ghani sidelined in the peace talks, the Taliban, which currently holds sway over 45 per cent of Afghanistan, looks set to return to the country's political centrestage. The outfit has maintained it will not go back to terrorism, but that could be a bargaining ploy. On its part, the JeM has never shied away from its umbilical connection to the Taliban. Russia and China, both of whom have advocated a role for the Taliban in Afghanistan, have condemned Thursday's attacks. But it is evident that the first step towards addressing India's concerns would be bringing Azhar to book. It is time China reconsidered its position on the matter.

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