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Hafiz Saeed's Social Outreach: Digitalisation of Terrorism

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Hafiz Saeed, chief of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), and a UN, US and India designated terrorist, was released from house arrest, in November 2017, after a three member judicial review board in Punjab turned down Pakistan government's request for the extension of the duration of his detention. Soon after his release, Mumbai terror attack master mind and founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba was welcomed by showers of rose petals and a freedom cake. Although Saeed is a staunchly anti-West but has no hesitation in following the western tradition of cake cutting to celebrate his freedom. Hafiz vowed to continue his struggle to "free" Kashmir from India in a sermon soon after the release. His new threat to India issued in mid- December in Lahore is that he will *avenge the creation of Bangladesh by liberating Kashmir*. According to Saeed, "The road leading to revenge is in progress in Kashmir and this movement would intensify in the near future as it has to go a long way" (REPUBLIC).

Saeed has been one of the most acknowledged terrorist and his release has clearly further stressed US-Pak relations. New Delhi is outraged, has expressed deep disappointment and sees Saeed's release as "an attempt by the Pakistani system to 'mainstream proscribed terrorists". Saeed has serious plans to enter mainstream politics and launched his political party Milli

Muslim League (MML) while he was under house arrest. He plans to contest the upcoming elections this year indicating a dangerous trend in a struggling democracy.

Pakistan has adopted a rather contradictory and inconsistent approach with Saeed which presumably is taking shape owing to the intensity of the international pressure, especially US pressure. On one hand, in November 2017, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, claimed that there is no case against Hafiz Saeed and he challenged India to prosecute him internationally if New Delhi can find the proof. Earlier, former President Pervez Musharraf termed himself as a big supporter of Hafiz Saeed. According to the former Army chief, LeT is a 'trusted support' in Kashmir. Saeed has an open support of the serving Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, who has hailed Saeed as 'active' to 'resolve' the Kashmir issue. On the other hand, Pakistani government says that it will push ahead with its plans to seize control of charities run by Hafiz Saeed.

While US and India have been consistently putting pressure on Pakistan to act against Saeed, China has opposed any Indian move that demands action against Pakistan on account of terrorism. Saeed enjoys the indirect support of Beijing,

which counters Indian moves against him at the international level.

Saeed is undoubtedly seen by Pakistan as a vital strategic asset and enjoys a heroic status in the society. A key question is how Saeed manages to generate so much popular support within Pakistan? Charitable services offered by Jamaat-ud-Dawa do have a major role in his image building but it is also extensive use of social media which has given this larger than life image to JuD and its leader. It is important to look into JuD activities in the cyber domain to be able to understand Hafiz Saeed's projected heroism in the Pakistani society.

Digitalisation of Terrorism: JuD's Cyber Footprint

Internet, especially the social media platforms, have become a force to reckon with in making as well as breaking things in global affairs. Though the benefits of cyber world need no explanation as it is evident from the everyday dependence the real-world has on this virtual space, the downside of it cannot be ignored. One such downside is the exploitation of these virtual platforms of communications by terrorists and other anti-social elements to carry out their evil missions and cyber-enabled terrorism.

Jamaat-ud-Dawa has exploited the cyber realm together mass support for the ideological propaganda and anti-India sentiments. JuD's cyber activities are mainly focused on the aspects of publicity, propaganda, fundraising and psychological manipulation. In this direction, the organization operates websites, blogs and has heavy presence in social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, etc which are created, operated and maintained by their *exclusive Cyber Team*. The websites run by the organization generally contains all the information from its history, leaders, ideology, agenda, publications, speeches of its leaders and popular statements made by its leaders apart from photo and video galleries. In fact Hafiz Saeed launched the official website

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"<http://jamatdawa.net/>" on May 31, 2012 with the agenda to reach wider audience (Refer Image 1).

Image 1: Screenshot of JuD - 2012



The Cyber Team of JuD complements their cyber presence along with their website in terms of blogs as well. For instance, "<https://judofficial.wordpress.com/>" is a blogsite which had active posts till mid-2013 and "<http://cyberteambjud.blogspot.in/>" is also a blogsite claimed to have been operated by the Cyber Team of JuD with active posts till mid-2016. Both these blog sites seem dormant for now. However, one of the organisation's wings operating from the district of Mirpur Khas in the province of Sindh manages an active bilingual website "<http://jdpmps.weebly.com/>" - with a host of content including videos, live video streaming, e-books, Pamphlets, posters and photo gallery. The website also has a link to download a computer game called 'Age of Jihad' which promotes the organisation's agenda besides *violence against non-Muslims*.

Additionally, another website that was found during this research supposedly operated by JuD is "<http://jamatdawa.webs.com/#>" which is like an information database of the organization filled with e-library resources as well as videos, audios and articles of the organisation's leaders like Hafiz Saeed, Abdur Rehman Makki, etc. Besides serving as an information database, the website provides links to the organisation's various social media pages which are mostly active and thriving. There is also a clone of the same website found

in another URL: "http://jamatdawa.blogspot.in/".

Apart from all these websites, the current active official website of JuD Karachi is "http://markaztaqwa.com/". (Refer Image 2). The image does reflect violent sentiments and JuD's appeal for Kashmir in one of the pictures. Apart from providing host of information and news related to JuD, the website boasts about its numbers of followers on its social media platform and provides a Whatsapp number.

Image 2: Screenshot of JuD's active website



JuD's social media presence is strong and in fact, the organization puts more effort on its social media platforms in order to easily reach the vulnerable minds of the masses. Although, Facebook and Twitter have suspended a few accounts of JuD and Hafiz Saeed in the past (The Economic Times), there are many active social media accounts associated with JuD. Table 1 provides gleaned information about the active social media accounts associated with JuD.

Hafiz Saeed's political party MML also has its own cyber presence. Despite the fact that the party's registration has been denied by the country's election commission, the party maintains an official website: "http://millimuslimleague.org/", which is a bilingual platform. It is noteworthy that this nascent party has more than 3,158 followers to its official twitter page: @MMLOfficial1. Also, the Lahore wing of the party maintains a Facebook page with approximately 7,804 followers.

The overt support and nurturing of the Pakistani government to Saeed and his organization JuD has allowed it to thrive in the cyber domain despite mounting international pressure. There have not been sincere efforts to curb the organisation's activities, especially in the cyber

Table 1: Information on the active Social Media accounts of JuD

Social Media Platform	Account Name	Status	Likes/ Followers
Facebook	Taqwa Islamic Centre	Active	32,250 likes and followers.
	Khyber Centre Faisalabad	Active	3,830 likes and followers.
	Qadsia Islamic Centre	Active	73,892 followers and 71,297 likes.
	Taiba Islamic Centre	Dormant	700 plus followers. Last post on August 14, 2017.
	Jamat-ud-Dawah	Dormant	Last post on March 8, 2017.
	Jud Ct Lhr	Dormant	Last post July 19, 2017.
Google+	Cyber Team Jamat-ud-Dawah	Dormant	Last post October 31, 2016.
Flickr	Qadsia Islamic Centre	Active	Operated with the mail id: cyberteamlhr@yahoo.com

domain, which is evident from the thriving use of social media by JuD.

The social media usage by JuD and its elements is on an upward trend and it is expected to grow more due to the organisation's efforts to nurture more cyber warriors. In this direction, JuD is organizing many workshops and training programmes for its followers on the use and exploitation of internet and social media from time to time (Image 3).

JuD has managed to use social media quite successfully to fetch popular support. Pakistan leadership needs to understand that his hate speeches and anti-India propaganda is strengthening extremism in the society which will be impossible to counter through military means.

Despite few instances where JuD's social media accounts had been taken down by the authorities of respective social media platforms based on complaints, JuD is able to bring back their presence mainly due to the inert nature of social media platforms which does not require verification and authorization of actual identity.

Moreover, since JuD doesnot operate just one website or social media page, rather has multiple platforms supposedly operated and maintained by respective regional cyber teams, it becomes difficult to track and take down all at the same time. Therefore, even if one account is suspended by authorities other accounts are active and

within no time, they come back with several new accounts. Also, if one observes the active social media accounts of JuD, it can be understood that there are many Facebook pages active and thriving, however the Twitter pages of these same accounts have already been taken down.

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which will be impossible to counter through military means. Growth of radical extremism in the society would invariably deter overall development of the nation. Pakistan military has been very proud of its anti-terror operations and claims to have successfully defeated Taliban on the frontier borders. But giving leverage and support to Saeed and allowing the growth of his cyber foot print has serious repercussions for the Pakistani society.

Sincere efforts from Pakistan are required to address terrorism and the leadership needs to take steps to counter Saeed's cyber presence which is propagating hatred and extremism. With

Image 3: Social Media workshops and Training of JuD



an expanded cyber footprint, appeal for Saeed's extremist ideas would continue to grow and impact the young minds in Pakistan. Saeed claims JuD is a charitable organization but the organization claims to *intensify its activities* for the so called 'Kashmir cause', as pronounced by the Pakistani leadership.

It is time for India to think in the aspect of institutionalizing the aspect of counter narratives and feeding it across the border through posts using the same social media platforms and other sources of internet – in short a social media task force for the nation.

Since social media is here to stay and its utility is only going to increase in the future, it is time for India to think in the aspect of institutionalizing the aspect of counter narratives and feeding it across the border through posts using the same social media platforms and

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