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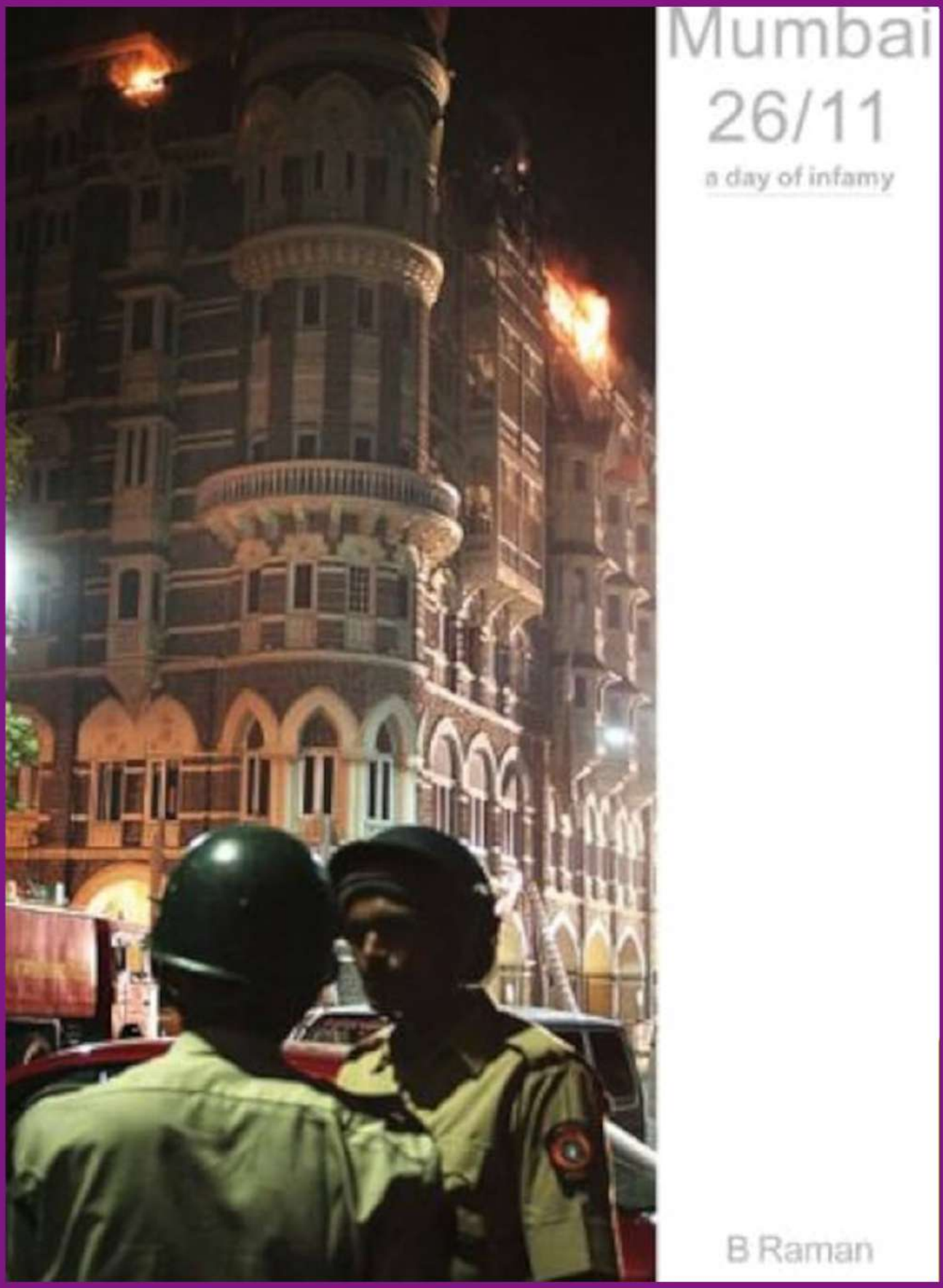
BR/09/26

BOOK REVIEW

Mumbai 26/11: A Day of Infamy

Authored by *B. Raman*



Introduction

In Mumbai 26/11: A Day of Infamy, B. Raman, a founding member of R&AW and former head of its Counter-Terrorism Division, provides a precise analysis of the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Raman reconstructs the 60-hour siege and identifies it as a new "commando-style" urban terrorism defined by its complexity and target selection. He establishes direct links between the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Pakistan's ISI, arguing that the attack was orchestrated with the blessing of the Pakistani establishment. Published just a year after the tragedy, the book moves beyond emotional reporting to categorizing the event as a new global model of terrorism that poses a fundamental challenge to international security services.

The Argument at the Centre of the Storm

Raman tracks the attack from its roots to its aftermath, arguing that the tragedy was predictable given India's strategic choices. He reveals that intelligence regarding a possible maritime attack existed, yet physical security remained inadequate. Raman famously metaphorizes the situation as an "iceberg" of jihadi terror moving through Indian cities while a second "iceberg" from Karachi hit Mumbai, catching professionals by surprise.
He uses President Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech to critique India's non-response. While Pearl Harbor targeted military installations, the 26/11 attack targeted civilians, both Indian and foreign. Raman defines India's failure as a "strategic timidity" toward Pakistan, noting that while Roosevelt declared war to avenge Pearl Harbor, India pursued peace talks that failed to create a "fear of God" in the minds of the Pakistani establishment.

The Expert Voice

Raman's credibility stems from his tenure heading R&AW's Counter-Terrorism Division from 1988 to 1994, where he tracked the LeT from its inception. His writing possesses technical precision, utilising specific intercept dates and GPS coordinates. While insider accounts often risk institutional bias, Raman offers a level-headed yet honest critique of both the government and his fellow security professionals. His style is forensic; his anger is palpable but directed toward systemic failure rather than mere narrative drama.

What the Book Gets Right

A major achievement of the book is the "causation chain". Raman views 26/11 not as a standalone event, but as the result of "accumulated negligence". He traces the attack back to the 2006 train bombings and the Aurangabad RDX recovery, where forensic failures, such as the contamination of blast sites by onlookers, fatally hindered investigations.
Furthermore, he documents the LeT's transformation into a global entity through its functional merger with Al-Qaeda and its operational hubs in Saudi Arabia. His chapters on Pakistan are particularly damning, detailing five specific extradition refusals and the involvement of figures like Arif Qasmani, who served the LeT and ISI simultaneously.

Where the Book Falls Short

Written in the immediate aftermath, the book lacks a long-term perspective. For example, Raman speculates heavily on local Indian accomplices to explain how the LeT obtained topographical data. We now know, via the later confession of David Coleman Headley, that a Pakistani-American operative performed the reconnaissance, which was a fact unavailable to Raman at the time of writing.
Additionally, Raman's solutions focus heavily on top-down bureaucratic reorganization. By prioritizing elite forces like the NSG or new administrative posts, he overlooks the dire need for grassroots police training. Local police are the first responders in urban terror, yet Raman neglects the realities of their outdated training and inadequate gear.

The Larger Debate and Enduring Relevance

Raman enters the debate on whether Pakistan is a "failing state" or a "sponsor of terror," firmly arguing for the latter. This stance challenged the 2009 Western diplomatic consensus but has been reinforced by subsequent attacks, such as Pathankot in 2016 and Pulwama in 2019.
Fifteen years later, the book's record is mixed:

- Implemented: The NIA was created, maritime security was upgraded, and the NSG established regional hubs.
- Failed: No independent public inquiry was held, and the NCTC proposal collapsed due to federal-state disputes.
- Correct Predictions: Raman correctly forecast that US policy would fail to change Pakistani behavior.
- Costs: He argued that only "credible costs," such as financial blacklisting via the FATF, would force action against figures like Hafiz Sayeed.

Conclusion

Mumbai 26/11 treats the attack as a security issue rather than a tragedy, providing a microscopic and macroscopic view of the terror ecosystem. It is an essential, if uncomfortable, read for students of South Asian security. Raman's most troubling revelation is not about Pakistan's aggression, but about India's relationship with its own failures: a nation that cannot look honestly at what went wrong cannot build what must go right.

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