
Terrorism in India: External Ramifications

Vikram Sood

India is possibly the only country in the world that has faced insurgencies and terrorism of all kinds – ethnic, ideological and ethno-religious – for over 60 years. Yet, despite this sustained onslaught on its very being, India has survived this. And 60 years after independence, India and Pakistan – the main perpetrator of terrorism in India – are on different trajectories.

India remains a secular democracy although our secular credentials are sometimes under some strain. After years of uncertainties, the fortune graph is now a steady upward curve as India positions itself to become a rising economic power. Pakistan, on the other hand, is on a downward slope, as it slips into a self-created jihadi abyss with the Taliban threatening to establish a radical Islamic regime in the country from its bases in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where all seven districts are under their control. While the world applauds India, it increasingly looks at Pakistan with suspicion as an irresponsible state.

In today's context, international terrorism, invariably invokes references to jihadi terrorism. Unfortunately, the response to this, described as the global war on terror, was neither global, nor was it against terror. It remained restricted to handling the problem in only one part of the globe against targets that were unevenly defined. The ill planned war in Afghanistan or the unnecessary one in Iraq, were not about defeating terror because both created more terrorists than they destroyed. An over-militarised response gave it the wrong description of a war on terror whereas one should have been thinking and working in terms of counter-terrorism.

To the Muslim world, Osama bin Laden is not necessarily the devil incarnate that he is perceived as in the rest of the world. Osama had promised to deliver his

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followers from centuries of oppression and humiliation by the West and by their own rulers. Western media and propaganda to demonise Osama have made him into a cult figure. Many believe in him and his ideals and are willing to die for them. And there is no way you can kill a man who is willing to die.

As harsh extremist Islamic fires rage in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is no use exulting in this. There are varying estimates about the number of terrorists in FATA, from 8,000 to 4,0000. Those who have dealt with terrorism in Kashmir know what it takes to handle a terrorist force that numbers between 3,000-3,500 at any given moment. Pakistan does not have the ability or the inclination to take on this terrorist force. Almost surely, these flames will singe us too, as they have begun to in Jaipur, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Delhi and Ahmedabad. It may not be long before we could see a Taliban regime in Afghanistan with all its implications for the neighbourhood. It is fine to say that no religion propagates violence and terror and, therefore, a terrorist has no religion. But our response to this cannot be communal either. We have to get prepared to deal with it now and regrettably we are not prepared to deal with the gathering storm.

In the West, the problem has been that socio-economic factors have led to political-religious manifestations. In India, externally inspired political factors threaten India's already weak socio-economic fabric. In the West, the Muslim population is a result of immigrations after the World War II and their succeeding generations. In India, the Muslims are indigenous. In fact, it is Pakistan where its Muslim immigrants from India – the Mohajirs – after independence, have had difficulty being accepted by the Punjabi-dominated society. In Europe, the original population and the host governments have had difficulty in accepting outsiders who are extremely aggressive about preserving their way of life. The challenge in the West is how to amalgamate; the challenge in India is how to preserve the amalgam.

The Use of Islam by the Mullahs

While discussing roots of terrorism in his book *No End to this War*, Walter Laqueur says that Muslims have had a problem adjusting as minorities, be it in India, the Philippines or Western Europe. Similarly, they find it difficult to give their own minorities a fair deal, Muslim or non-Muslim, in their own countries — the Berbers in Algeria, the Copts in Egypt or the Christians or Shias in Pakistan or the Sudan. This has, in turn, led to what Olivier Roy calls globalised Islam – militant Islamic resentment at Western domination or anti-imperialism exalted by revivalism. State sponsorship of terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy and strategy to negate

military and other superiority, has been another facet of this problem.

Since religion has been at centre-stage in our country in the last few years, it is time we looked at this head on. A person's religion is more often an accident of birth and sometimes an act of faith. The AlAqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the Lourdes in Spain, the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem, the Amarnath Yatra in Kashmir and the Ram Setu in Rameshwaram are all a matter of faith and not a matter of cold scientific logic. In a country like ours, with all our religions and languages, with our tempers on a short fuse for any number of reasons, the best way to keep our secular identity and sanity intact is to say, "My religion but our country."

In our country, Salman Khan celebrates Ganesh Chaturthi; the Indian cricket team's speed attack could, on a given day, be led by Zaheer, Irfan and Munaf; like cricket, Bollywood is India's great unifier and is dominated by the Khans; and, some of the best music has come from Naushad and AR Rehman. The finest dhrupad has been rendered by the Dagar brothers – Fahimuuddin and Rahimuuddin. Yet no one bats an eyelid because they are all Indians and do India proud. But some fundamentalist mullah from Mumbai served Salman Khan with a fatwa. Salman's father was brave enough to reject this and we need to acknowledge his conviction. Ours is, and has to be, a composite culture. There is no other way.

In Pakistan, they teach them that jihad is the only way. Years ago, they solved their problem by getting rid of their minorities and today even Shias are kafirs in a country that never tires of proclaiming that it is a homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. In Pakistan, the present day purveyors of religion teach their children that theirs is the Only Faith which must overcome the idol worshipping Hindus, the Christians and the Jews. In one of his Friday sermons, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)-backed Pakistani Jamaat-ud-Dawa leader, Hafiz Saeed urged that "The solution to all your problems and that of the Muslim ummah lies in jihad."

In dealing with Pakistan, we must remember that there is another Pakistan beyond the chic and elegant salons of Lahore. And these "others" wield considerable clout. In the words of Pervez Hoodbhoy, a well known Pakistani academic, "The Talibanisation of Pakistan's tribal areas has caused alarm, but it is the rapid

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developments in the heart of the nation's capital, Islamabad, that have stunned many." Hoodbhoy quotes several incidents to say that he feared that the stage for transforming Islamabad into a Taliban stronghold was being set. Hoodbhoy's paper adds that women nurses will not be able to attend to male patients. Male doctors will not be allowed to perform ECG or ultra sound on women for fear that women may lure men away. After the 2005 earthquake, girls under debris in Balakot were not allowed to be rescued by a male ambulance team. In April 2006, 21 women and 8 children were crushed to death in a stampede in a Karachi madrassa because the ambulance team comprised men. This is the way the Pakistani society is headed. The mullahs are winning and this will have repercussions for us.

In India, we have shadowy organisations like the Indian Mujahideen sending off letters to the Press that spew hate and venom against others and misquoting the Quran in support of this. In Pakistan's increasingly intolerant sections, a similar letter by a minority would have resulted in massive reprisals against that minority. In India, we let it pass, because the majority of Indians wants to be secular and believes in it although we do have aberrations like Raj Thakeray in Mumbai and fringe elements elsewhere. It is also unfair that a Muslim in India should have to prove his loyalty to the country each time there is a terrorist incident or a Hindu be accused of being a fundamentalist each time he owns up to being a Hindu.

Hafeez Saeed and others like Abdur Rahman Makki in Pakistan routinely quote from the Quran when they exhort their followers to launch jihad against India. They cite verse 9.5 from the Quran, "Fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them, take them, captive, harass them, lie in wait and ambush them using every stratagem of war" or verse 9.14, "Fight them (the disbelievers) Allah will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace and give you victory over them and He will heal the hearts of those who believe." This was also quoted by the Indian Mujahideen in their fax after the Ahmedabad bombings. The point is that these are selectively used, out of context, in both time and space. It is against this misuse of religion that the moderate Muslim majority must speak out both against those who spread hate and also to educate that Hindu majority that only gets to read or see the wrong side of the story.

Recently, MJ Akbar wrote about this in *The Times of India* when he distinguished between the fasadis and the jihadis. The point is that he knows this, a lot of us understand this, but those who get killed in terrorist blasts do not know and those they leave behind do not understand. Nor do those uneducated unemployed youth understand this for they are fed carefully edited portions from the Quran written in a language that they do not know. Is it not time that

we translated the Quran into Indian languages so that most of us can read it and understand it? In this age of the internet this should be easier and would help counter the hate that is pasted on the Net. Asghar Ali Engineer (“Making a Mockery of Jihad”) and Tahir Mahmood, (“If Hindus are ‘Mushrik’ What are We?”) have recently written on this. The Muslim needs to hear the voice of the moderate and not just that of the extremist-fundamentalist.

Otherwise, the voice of the likes of Hafeez Saeed will prevail.

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The Two Great Obsessions

Internationally, the battle is really between globalised capitalism and global Islam. The clash is between two Great Obsessions – one obsessed to retain its declining superpower global dominance and the other obsessed with the ambition to become the dominant religion. One is affluent, powerful, politically empowered, mainly Christian, but running out of resources; the other is poor, politically unempowered and Muslim, and resource rich. Both find nationalistic politics an obstacle to their progress because nationalism impedes economic domination and theological control. The former wants unhindered access to finance, markets and resources required to retain primacy while the other strives for Islamic Caliphates, which practise a puritan Islam, and a return to former glory.

There is a naive assumption that if local grievances or problems are solved, global terrorism will disappear. The belief or the hope that, if tomorrow, Palestine, or Kashmir or Chechnya or wherever else, the issues were settled, terrorism will disappear, is a mistaken belief. There is now enough free floating violence and vested interests that would need this violence to continue. There has been a multifaceted nexus between narcotics, illicit arms smuggling and human trafficking that seeks the continuance of violence and disorder.

International Terrorism as a Way of Life

Modern terrorism thrives not on just ideology or politics. The main driver is money and the new economy of terror and international crime has been calculated to be worth US \$ 1.5 trillion (and growing), which is big enough to challenge Western hegemony. This is higher than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Britain, ten

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times the size of General Motors and 17 per cent of the US GDP (1998). Loretta Napoleoni refers to this as the “New Economy of Terror.”

All the illegal businesses of arms and narcotics trading, oil and diamonds smuggling, charitable organisations that front for illegal businesses and black money operations form part of this burgeoning business. Terror has other reasons to thrive. There are vested interests that seek the wages of terrorism and terrorist war.

Narcotics smuggling generates its own separate business lines, globally connected with arms smuggling and human trafficking, and all dealt with in hundred dollar bills. These black dollars have to be laundered, which is yet another distinctive, secretive and complicated transnational occupation closely connected with these illegal activities and is really a crucial infusion of cash into the Western economies.

In today’s world of deregulated finance, terrorists have taken full advantage of systems to penetrate legitimate international financial institutions and establish regular business houses. Islamic banks and other charities have helped fund movements, sometimes without the knowledge of the managers of these institutions that the source and destination of the funds is not what has been declared. Both Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) have been flush with funds, with Arafat’s secret treasury estimated to be worth US \$ 700 million to \$2 billion. Our main problem has been in dealing with Pakistan-inspired terrorism.

Countering Terror

When terror struck America and Britain, they introduced draconian laws. The Bush Administration even introduced controversial surveillance laws. In India, we did away with the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), but did not consider it important to have an adequate substitute. Battling terror is a long and arduous task: the capability to prevent attacks has to be upgraded constantly, with the knowledge and acceptance that not all attacks can be prevented. It is hard battle where there are no rules for the terrorist and no scruples. Democracies have their inhibitions. Terrorism will never be overcome through good intentions. It

will be overcome or managed through exercising hard options. There cannot be communalising of counter-terror and there cannot be compromises till the terrorist is on the run. Otherwise it is appeasement, in the terrorist's lexicon.

Sharpening Intelligence Capabilities

Even with our present system, there are many attacks that get aborted. But when intelligence is inadequate and follow-ups incomplete, indiscriminate arrests follow which lead to further alienation. Heightened intelligence capability, sustained and built over a period of time, which is able to keep pace with the growing threat, skillful investigation and forensics, particularly at the state level, sharing intelligence, national identity cards, CCTVs at important places, speedy justice which is also seen to be fair, a system of governance that delivers what it is supposed to and a media that does not compete for TRP ratings over such issues— all this and more will have to be put in place for us to succeed. The character of terrorism has changed more rapidly in its operating procedures. There is greater reliance on the cyber and less on the cell phone and on sleeper cells among the jihadi networks while the Naxals retain a very strong hierarchical control mechanism. Both retain their element of surprise but the latter is also a reflection of poor ground state led intelligence. Both seem better trained, better equipped and extremely mobile. The counter-terrorist lacks in all three spheres.

It is easy to blame the intelligence agencies for all that occurs. Globally, it has been found that despite all the state assistance for intelligence agencies, the ability to collect intelligence about non-state adversaries remains the most difficult and this includes not just the terrorist, but the mastermind, the arms smuggler, the safe house owner, the money launderer and other transnational operatives. No single agency, no single country can provide this information and no one can still guarantee that every attack will be aborted or every terrorist cell unearthed on time. There has to be multi-level, multi-agency multi-national cooperation acting in real time. We must understand that even the best intelligence can only minimise the threat or the forewarning will make the attack insurmountably difficult. And yet, such cooperation is the most difficult to achieve.

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The questions are: why is it that we let it happen again and again, and can we not do anything to win this war against an unscrupulous and invisible enemy? Why do we give the impression of being soft and confused? There is no short cut to improving the intelligence and security apparatus of the country. Spare no cost and accept no compromises on this. If the country has a well endowed and trained intelligence apparatus acting without political interference (as distinct from accountability), it could provide preemptive intelligence that could abort terrorist acts and lead to arrests. It would also prevent indiscriminate arrests and all that follows. We could learn from the Americans – not completely but suitably – they tightened their laws even to the extent that they were draconian, spent billions of dollars and improved intelligence collection and surveillance, making them intrusive and they outsourced certain aspects of the work to maximise use of talent.

In its latest White Paper on Defence and National Security, the French government has stressed that the world has become “more unstable, more unforeseeable. New crises, in particular from the Middle East to Pakistan have come to the fore and have become interconnected. Jihadism-inspired terrorism aims directly at France and at Europe, which are in a situation of greater direct vulnerability.” The paper defines its national security strategy as something that provides a response to “all the risks and threats which could endanger the life of the Nation.” In another key finding, the White Paper says, “Knowledge and anticipation represent a new strategic function and have become a priority. In a world characterised by uncertainty and instability, knowledge represents our first line of defence. Knowledge guarantees our autonomy in decision-making and enables France to preserve its strategic initiative. It is knowledge which must be provided as early as possible to decision-makers, military commanders and those in charge of internal and civil security in order to go from forecasts to informed action. Intelligence of all kinds, including from space and prospective studies, takes on major importance.” Yet we in India show no urgency of this kind.

One cannot forever blame the foreign hand. The French, for instance, realised quite early that terrorist networks are multi-layered and they routinely infiltrate them to try and stay a step ahead of their adversary. It was the French external intelligence – the DGSE – that had picked up signals of Al Qaeda attacks on the US, including about airplane hijackings as early as January 2001. After 9/11, the British MI5 was able to prevent a major terrorist attack across the Atlantic through a combination of telephone, cyber and physical surveillance along with human intelligence

In India, our tendency has been to make some post-event superficial changes, pious declarations of intent and condemnations of the act accompanied by horrendous photographs of the event, with knee-jerk expert comments from media rookies. That is, until the next attack takes place. We do not even have adequate laws to deal with the threat like the British and the Americans do, and for a country that has had to face terrorism for most of its independent existence; we do not even have national identity cards because it is politically inexpedient. Our border controls remain inadequate. Post-event, the investigating agencies should be allowed to operate in areas and societies from where the attack is suspected to have occurred or planned. There can be little success if exclusions are made on the grounds of religion or region.

Lack of Public Awareness, Overzealous Media and Bureaucratic Lethargy

Public indifference to terrorist incidents may indicate that the people may have overcome fear which is a positive development but if it is because of indifference to suffering based on the hope that “I” shall not be the target because tragedies are only meant for “the other,” then we have a problem. There is inadequate public response because it is generally assumed that prevention of terrorism is exclusively the task of the state. This attitude has to change and only the state can help this change. The average citizen must be encouraged and educated to help the state by providing clues, warnings and assistance in investigations.

It has to be acknowledged that the police force is inadequately prepared to deal with the menace and it is not their fault that this is so. The governments of the day are responsible for this state of affairs. Ill equipped, ill trained, in undermanned station houses, they live in appalling conditions, sometimes at the mercy of the very don against whom they are supposed to protect the society. Successive governments have taken away the authority and dignity of the profession. The public has little confidence in the force and the force is unsympathetic to the public. The witness protection schemes are badly flawed and justice is indefinitely delayed. There is little incentive for the public to come forward with evidence and little incentive for the force to prosecute.

A terrorist event makes a good story or “breaking news” but the media too need some rules of conduct. It is important to report the truth but it is also sometimes important when we are fighting a war to sometimes not report or to modify the report without modifying the truth. Repeated telecast of pictures of frightened families, terrified children or mangled bodies is a victory for the

terrorist. He has succeeded in frightening the people. And photographs of a prospective witness circulated widely would only help the terrorist. Often we glorify a terrorist when we refer to him as a *fidayeen*. All this has to change too if we want to win the war on terrorism. India must get ready to detect, deter and destroy this menace before it destroys us.

It is amazing that after 60 years of struggling with terrorism, we still say that each terrorist attack is a new experience for us. The one institution that needs major reforms is the Ministry of Home Affairs. It has simply become too big and amorphous. It is manned by transient bureaucrats forever looking for greener pastures elsewhere and by junior staff who have no other future. Like the Ministry of External Affairs, we should think in terms of a Ministry on Internal Security that is manned by a permanent cadre of regional, subject and language experts. Further, the running and control top down should belong to this cadre and not be left to those who qualify for life on the basis of an exam they passed decades ago.

The Shape of Things to Come

A familiar Pakistani strategy is unfolding in India where the attempt is to hoist all attacks in India outside Kashmir on the Al Qaeda banner or to pretend that things are not fully under the control of the army in Pakistan. Anyone who has studied Pakistan knows that this is not true. And if things are not under control in a military dictatorship of more or less 60 years standing, then that country is falling apart. We all know that it is the Pakistanis — essentially of the Punjabi Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad who operate from bases in Pakistan and are members of Osama's International Islamic Front — who continue to target India. They are not members of the Al Qaeda which is an Arab organisation but are ideologically akin.

There are many in India, Pakistan and the West who remain in a state of denial about the march of Islamic forces in Pakistan. The manner in which the FATA episode has been dealt with, the manner in which the Lal Masjid episode was handled, or the innumerable suicide attacks that have taken place, highlighted by the Marriott bombings in Islamabad, are some of the symptoms of the disease in Pakistan. Islamic radicalism is not seen in the chic salons of Lahore but at Miramshah and Wana in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and FATA and Faisalabad and Jhang in Punjab. One has to do some sustained reading of the radical Urdu Press, which has a much larger circulation than the English newspapers, to assess the mood. And, it is Islamic radicalism backed by

the gun. India should worry that this fire in Pakistan will spread to India as well. In fact, one can see the signs of this happening already.

The truth is that the Pakistani security system still treats India and its own nationalists as the biggest threat. Perennially fearful of India's presence in Afghanistan, the Pakistani establishment feels it not only needs the Taliban but even nurtures them just as it nurtured elements like the Punjabi Lashkar-e-Tayyeba in Kashmir. It cannot, therefore, be serious about curbing the Taliban. But the Pakistan Army, no matter who rules, and because of their own proclivities, cannot take action against the fundamentalists and extremists and also rely on them for survival. Yet, unless the Pakistan Army moves beyond looking for patchwork solutions to ensure its own primacy and decides to eradicate this menace, a spectre of total radicalism haunts Pakistan. The fear is that the Pakistan Army is now far too much and dangerously radicalised to want to change the system. We also need to remember that the US has given US \$ 10 billion in military aid to Pakistan in recent years, ostensibly to tackle terrorism.

It is not easy, but the civilised world must counter the scourge of terrorism. In a networked world, where communication and action can be in real time, where boundaries need not be crossed and where terrorist action can take place on the Net and through the Net, the task of countering this is increasingly difficult and intricate. Governments are bound by the Geneva Conventions in tackling a terrorist organisation, whatever else Bush's aides may have told him, but the terrorist is not bound by such regulations in this asymmetric warfare.

It has to be accepted that there can be no final victory in any battle against terrorism. Resentments, real or imagined, and exploding expectations, will remain. Since the state no longer has monopoly on instruments of violence, recourse to violence is increasingly becoming a weapon of first resort. Terrorism can be contained and its effects minimised but it cannot be eradicated any more than the world can eradicate crime. An over-militaristic response or repeated use of the armed forces is fraught with long-term risks for a nation and for the armed forces. Military action to deter or overcome an immediate threat is often necessary but it cannot ultimately eradicate terrorism. This is as much a political and economic battle and also a battle to be fought long-term by the intelligence and security agencies, and increasingly in cooperation with agencies of other countries.

Ultimately, the battle is between democracy and terrorism. The fear is that in order to defeat the latter, we may have to lose some of our democratic values.