

Why the War on Global Terrorism is NOT Being Won? Part-I

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It is a natural law that when a vacuum is created somewhere in the atmosphere, at once a flow begins from an area of greater pressure. But while the flow starts from the area of greater pressure, the cause lies in the vacuum. It is the vacuum that creates the situation.¹

Taking off from the above commentary, while it may not be possible to classify it in the category of natural law, human experience over the millennia has shown, nevertheless, that whenever there is a vacuum in the affairs of humans it is invariably – and almost inevitably – malevolent forces that rush in to fill the vacuum. As to why that should be so is the basis of a separate essay. The existing state of affairs in most parts of the world is, however, no exception. Confining oneself to the present situation, vacuum in one or more countries in any given region is generally created under the following conditions:

- (a) Collapse of the central governing authority. (Whenever the collapse is sudden the ripples are felt much farther, as was the case with the collapse of the USSR).
- (b) Inroads made by a new ideology. (Communism around the beginning of the last century; radical Islam coinciding with the advent of the new century).
- (c) Ineffective governance.
- (d) Corruption becoming so endemic as to make good governance a non-starter.
- (e) Forces inimical to the national interest making inroads into the process of governance. (This process that has already overtaken several countries could, should it remain unchecked, reach alarming proportions in India as well).

There could be several other reasons that are not being included in this discussion.

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Introduction

India is incrementally being seen as a *soft state* on account of the government seemingly preferring vote bank politics *at the cost of national security*. Most responsible officials in the military, paramilitary and intelligence hierarchies hold this view and have brought it to the notice of the government ad nauseum. End result - it is water off a duck's back. *Ordinary law-abiding Muslims as well as Hindus and other communities simply want to get on with their lives. They do not wish to have anything to do with the radical elements.* It is the government policies of appeasement that strengthen the latter at the cost of the former. India is potentially a strong country. At this point in its history the gravest threats to its security are internal, not external. Bombay-ites and Indians as a whole have a lot of resilience. They have been living with terror on an unprecedented scale much longer than the countries that became alive to global terrorism after 11 September 2001 attacks on the US. Bombay-ites will resume their normal life in a matter of days. They do not really have a choice.

The subject will be covered under the following heads:-

- (a) **The Indian Context.** Addressing a few basic issues at the outset; The dangerous drift; some of the essential ingredients of a successful war against terrorism in India; clear enunciation of a no-nonsense policy to deal with the threat; the Indian Army and terrorism.
- (b) **The Global Context.** The demographics of global terrorism; US response to global terrorism; Afghanistan revisited; waiting for the US to restrain Pakistan or waiting for the cows to come home; reappraising Pervez Musharraf.
- (c) **Concluding Remarks.**

THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Addressing a few Basic Issues at the Outset

These can be tabulated as under:-

- (a) Democracy, with all its noise, chaos and attendant ills, remains dear to the people of India. The Armed Forces of India are guarantors of the Indian Constitution. For them it is sacrosanct and inviolable.

(b) All criticism of the functioning of the governing polity and other entities at the helm of affairs is in the form of a critique of the type that is carried out after a war game to improve functioning for the future. It should be taken in that light by all concerned. The criticism is not necessarily directed at any particular government. Various governments up to the present have shown similar pusillanimity in the face of grave threats to the country.

(c) It should be eminently clear that religious polarisation is taking place across the globe at a frightening pace. Societies that were accommodating and tolerant have changed their outlook. The change is self-evident.

(d) The religious polarisation that is taking place has not yet peaked. Each new terrorist attack, regardless of the motivation, exacerbates the divide.

(e) The polarisation on the world canvas is generally between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and not so much between other denominations. Different countries may have ethnic or religious strife of equal or even greater intensity, but the term 'global terrorism' in today's setting is confined to Islamic *jihad*, which has acquired a global reach at par with the global reach of the superpower, though it cannot match the superpower's military or economic resources – at least not in the near future.

(f) By present indications, the invasiveness and global reach of Islamic *jihad* is increasing by the day, at a pace faster than the ability of their opponents to contain or quell it.

(g) India cannot exercise the very hard options open to countries like the USA, Russia, China and a few other countries to indulge in punitive strikes across borders.

(h) Nor is a full-fledged conventional war -regardless of whether it leads to a nuclear confrontation or not - an option for India. As mentioned in an earlier book: "Another war between India and Pakistan would be tantamount to: " a physical suicide for Pakistan, economic suicide for India and a catastrophe for the subcontinent."

(j) India has, however, several other options, not necessarily

counter terror strikes, to bring neighbours to their senses in fairly quick time. These options had never been exercised before for several reasons, that included, inter alia: pusillanimity of the governments; crippling of India's external capability by one or more Prime Ministers of the day for values based on cherished traditions or in the mistaken belief that India being the bigger country, it could withstand repeated transgressions from neighbours and that forbearance on its part would sooner or later bring them to their senses.

(k) India does not have to indulge in foreign policy flip-flops due to pressures put on the government of the day by the minority community or the Left parties. The government has to shed its tentativeness and diffidence. It represents, or should represent the national interest of India. The majority community constitutes over 80 per cent of the population of the country. If national security demands that the country improve its relations with Israel or the USA, the government does not have to be apologetic about it. For over 50 years the Indian government did not open diplomatic relations with Israel and went out of its way to condemn Israel and the USA in every forum, irrespective whether its opinion was sought or not. The majority community, although it may have felt otherwise, went along with that decision in the national interest. The needs of national security or the sentiments of the majority cannot be indefinitely put on hold for the sake of vote bank politics or pressures brought to bear by less than 20 per cent of the electorate. That way could lead to national disaster. (It would have been an altogether different matter had India remained non-aligned in the true sense of the word).

(l) Whatever other alignments or shifts in foreign policy that might take place in the coming decades India's strategic relationship with Russia remains inviolable. It is non-negotiable. Both countries have arrived at a comfortable understanding whereby each country pursues its own interest without allowing the strategic relationship to be impaired or eroded.

In the light of the foregoing unless countries like India, that are the most threatened by the scourge of Islamic *jihad*, start confronting the stark reality squarely and stop playing the vote bank card, they will undermine the efforts of the instrumentalities

of the state designed to deal with the threat. For India this threat at the present juncture is greater than any external threat. There is a growing feeling in many circles that the government might have tied itself in knots by being held hostage to forces hostile to India. What else could explain the government's inexplicable action of bringing back the IMDT through the backdoor in the form of the amended Foreigner's Act merely to neutralise the effect of the Supreme Court's striking down the IMDT. The result is there for all to see. There has been deportation of only one Bangladeshi infiltrator in Assam after the Supreme Court struck down the controversial Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunals Act a year ago.

It is indeed a very serious matter that the political class -or substantial elements thereof – appear, on the face of it, to be deliberately undermining national security. One cannot think of any other country where the nation's highest court gives direction for retrieving a dangerous national security drift to have it so brazenly undermined by the political class. The government's step was taken in the face of the Governor and security agencies bringing to the notice of the government that infiltrators in large numbers were crossing over daily from across the border. Should this trend continue, many people in the country and friends of India would be compelled to start wondering whether the governing process -or a part of it – had fallen into the hands of interests that were bent upon undermining the country's security. Neither the misgivings of the President of India on national matters nor the decisions of the Supreme Court to strengthen good governance and national security seem to have any effect on the political class. According to a well-known editor of a national daily, "The blundering policy of cosying up to Naxalites was followed by a most shockingly cynical approach to negotiations that brought back to life a near-dead ULFA in Assam where, it seemed sometimes, the line between political and national interest had been washed away in a Brahmaputra flood".²

That is not all. Just three days after the Bombay blasts a dawn-to-dusk general strike in Assam to protest the killing of six ULFA militants by security forces brought normal life to a halt. Who exactly is calling the shots in Assam? The government or interests across the border? The people of India would then be impelled to pose the question:

"Does the Constitution of the country stand hijacked"?

Having seen the cavalier manner in which security of the nation is being handled – or mishandled -by the ruling dispensations it would be worthwhile taking a look at whether other countries are also taking threats to their national security as lightly. Since long the UK was in the forefront of condoning the activities of Islamists in UK and worldwide. It continued to harbour – even nurture -many of the radical Islamic organisations in its bosom; several of them had their headquarters in the UK. Yet after the London bombings the government lost no time in banning even those organisations that merely glorify terrorism. Recently it has banned organisations like Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect. In India, on the other hand, *jihad* is permitted to be glorified from any number of mosques and in numberless madrassas, even though the country has been at the receiving end of terror through this route for over two decades. That is why terrorists are now using youngsters by hiring them for Rs. 200 to 500 to throw grenades.

The Dangerous Drift

The myth of Indian syncretism stands exploded. It remains a figment of the imagination of daydreamers. What is being talked about is the actual state of affairs and not what the desired state should be. The paper began with the suggestion of a vacuum being created. In this country the Hindu-Muslim divide was brought about by the political class in state after state and by the government's inability to act firmly and, in time, when the first signs of the reinforcement of orthodox ideology by outsiders became apparent. Even today the government policies tend to push the Muslims towards orthodoxy when it is seen to be giving in to elements that are the fountainhead of such orthodoxy, thus strengthening their position at the cost of segments opposed to them. In sum, Islamic orthodoxy in India is being reinforced as much by the policies or infirmities of the governments at the Centre and the States as by forces of radical Islam.

Even Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, having realised the potential of radical elements to disrupt the normal flow of life have now taken recourse to bolder steps to prevent further inroads by these orthodox groupings than is the case in India. The government at the Centre

is itself so mired in vote bank politics that Chief Ministers of States are actually able to undermine the Centre's attempts to limit further damage by banning organisations like SIMI (Student Islamic Movement of India). It has emboldened the radicals to the extent that a Muslim leader in one of the provinces actually gave a call -later denied - for setting up a Muslim Pradesh in Western UP. Such talk would have been unthinkable a few years ago. Here a caveat would be in order: *The policies followed by the right wing Hindu parties are not the answer to India's problems.*

There is a paradox working here. India is one of the countries most threatened by terrorism. Yet it has one of the weakest laws in the world to deal with the menace. It is a sobering - and frightening -thought that the great country India, potentially a world power, has allowed itself to sink in a political quagmire whereby a person suspected to have links with forces inimical to the well being of the country can hypothetically become the home or defence minister of the country or a chief minister of a state. Going by present trends, soon it might even be possible for a person with dubious credentials to become the Prime Minister. There do not seem to be foolproof mechanisms in place to counter this trend. Even a constitution bench of the Supreme Court has been constrained to point out to the government the limit to which this process can be carried to undermine the sanctity of the country. The Hon'ble Court would like to know from the government that since the government has appointed ministers with criminal cases against them to take charge of important ministries would it then go on to appoint the Election Commissioners and even judges with similar backgrounds? The implication being that they can be blackmailed by elements inimical to India; some might even have been financed by such elements. There is a deafening silence from the government on this issue of paramount importance to national security. The line taken by the Supreme Court is meant to serve as a wake up call for India. Unfortunately, few people seem to have taken note of the gravity of the situation. It explains why the government is not able to act decisively against entities hostile to India, to the extent that it ignores and often goes against the advice of its own armed forces and intelligence agencies. Therefore, if one takes the line of thinking opened up by the Honourable Supreme Court to its logical conclusion one comes up with the dreadful deduction that today the biggest threat to the security of

India might be the political class, full 20 per cent of whose members happen to have criminal cases registered against them. If the percentage as given out by the Election Commission is right then the criminal class that has entered Parliament is perhaps one of the single largest blocks, although affiliated to political parties across the political divide. As to why this should be the case is to an extent explained by the excerpt that follows. It relates to the Battle of Somme that took place in France and Flanders eighty years ago. On that first day on the Somme, 30 British officers of the rank of lieutenant colonel or above were killed. The excerpt below is from an international publication:

"Equality of sacrifice" is sometimes a convenient phrase, but no one could deny it then. When the war began, the prime minister was the Liberal, H.H. Asquith, and the Tory leader of the opposition was Andrew Bonar Law. Both would lose sons in action. Lord Salisbury was an earlier prime minister; five of his grandsons were killed. And several younger Members of Parliament, including William Gladstone, grandson of one more prime minister, joined up and were killed.

All that is a sharp contrast with a Blair government, not one of whom has ever performed any kind of military service, and a Bush administration whose senior members have never been much burdened by any sense of private honour incurred by privilege.³ (Emphasis added).

What applies to the Blair and Bush governments in the excerpt above can be easily applied across the board to the political class in India with just the odd, very rare exception. Not only that, it is likely to continue to apply to the political class in the future as well. Their sons and daughters have better things to do than to volunteer for the Indian Armed Forces. Amongst other vocations they would like to legislate for the security of the country without having the faintest idea as to what security is all about. Leaving the rest of the country to fend for itself the political class cocoons itself in the security provided by gun-toting bodyguards paid for by the exchequer, irrespective of whether the persons so protected have a number of murder, dacoity or rape cases pending against them. Indian democracy is definitely on the march, in all its glory. The march is toward the abyss.

In all other countries the political class comes together in the face of national emergencies. In India they come together to undermine the decisions of the highest judicial bodies in the country. In no other country in the world are the decisions of the Supreme Court - the final arbiter - overturned or thwarted as summarily as is presently happening in India. One has only to study the behaviour of the politicians after the Bombay blasts of 11 July 2006. Instead of uniting to face a common foe, they are busy hurling missiles at each other, going for each other's jugular. Meanwhile, their priority in the weeks immediately following the blasts would be to yet again come together to fight the Supreme Court rather than the terror engulfing the land. How can the country effectively fight against the threat of terrorism with the type of behaviour that politicians at the helm of affairs are manifesting?

Some of the Essential Ingredients of a Successful War Against Terrorism in India

India is facing many types of insurgencies of differing magnitudes. This discussion is Islamic *jihad* specific for the simple reason that the country's ambivalence in taking a tough stand against this threat on its own soil stems from the size of the Muslim population on the subcontinent, an indeterminate portion of which, going by present trends, could fall under the sway of sophisticated hostile propaganda. In the case of Pakistan the vast majority of the people of that country would definitely be happy to see India go under. To a lesser extent something similar could be happening in Bangladesh. Both these countries are able to ferment trouble in India, putting the Government of India on the defensive due to the enormously large Muslim population in India – approximating 150 million or more, which would make it not very much below half the size of the existing population of the European Union and anywhere up to 50 per cent of the population of the United States.

It is more important to state, however, that had the Indian governments, since Islamic *jihad* first reared its ugly head nearly two decades ago, dealt firmly with this menace *ab initio* well over 99 per cent of the Muslim population would have had no difficulty in resisting Pakistani machinations on their own. They had shown their mettle as well as any other Indian in all the threats that India faced up till the new century. Things took a turn for the worse after 11 September 2001 and on account of the wishy-washy policies of

the government since then. Today Hindus feel threatened by Islamic *jihad*. In actual fact, the Muslim community is more threatened – because they are threatened and abused – both psychologically and physically. They have watched with dismay the government's inability to ward off the *sub rosa* threat from Pakistan, and now Bangladesh as well. Within the country they see the leaders across the political spectrum meekly succumbing to the harangues of the very elements that are keeping the Muslim community backward and pushing them towards Islamic orthodoxy. It can be stated with near certainty that had the government or its agencies demonstrated the ability to protect the Hurriyat leaders from blackmail and threats from across the border quite a few of them would have been singing a different tune. The guilt complex in the Muslim community is engendered by the inability of the Government of India to weed out the elements that have undermined the security of India and the well being of the Muslim community. Whether the Act called POTA should be restored or not is an unending controversy. The irrefutable fact is that, "the most threatened country in the world has the least effective counter terrorist regulations".

(To be concluded)

Notes

1. *Bhagavad-Gita* by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Page 220.
2. Shekhar Gupta in *The Indian Express*. 15 July 2006.
3. Geoffrey Wheatcroft "*Honour and Carnage : Battle of the Somme*" *International Herald Tribune*, Saturday-Sunday, 1-2 July 2006.

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