

# **Lessons Learnt from the 26-11-2008 Pakistan Lashkar-e-Taiba Raid on Mumbai**

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## **Introduction**

In March 1993, there were a series of thirteen well-coordinated explosions directed against chosen economic targets by a group of Muslims trained and organised by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan with the assistance of Dawood Ibrahim a Mumbai Muslim who was a kingpin in a smuggling and *Hawala* (illegal foreign exchange) racket in which 250 innocent civilians were killed. Incidentally Dawood Ibrahim was a leading smuggler who, reportedly had the Central Government Customs and the Mumbai city Police on his pay rolls. Opium and heroin were smuggled in boats from Pakistan and both the Customs and the Police were on the payroll of Dawood Ibrahim. After the Babri Masjid was demolished, Dawood Ibrahim was given the task of smuggling in weapons and explosives supplied by the ISI of Pakistan into Mumbai and this he did adopting the usual pay offs to the Customs and the Police by saying it was the regular consignment of drugs!

This was the first response to the dastardly demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, an utterly stupid and idiotic action of the Hindutva forces, which could easily have been prevented by the Central Government but for their total lack of courage to remain strictly neutral on a religious issue.

## **The Root Causes of the Failure of Intelligence and Policing in India**

Describing the demolition of the Babri Masjid as an utterly stupid and idiotic action is absolutely justified. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD when Islamic armies from the West crossed, what was the then Afghanistan and entered India, they encountered the idolatrous

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Hindu religion with idols of Gods and Goddesses carved in stone in temples, with more sculptures of Gods and Goddesses on its walls. Fresh with the tenets of a new religion – Islam, that had freed them from worshipping 256 idols in the *Kaaba*; the inspired Islamic armies destroyed the temples of the Hindus and their stone idols of Gods and Goddesses. I do not think History has counted and recorded the number of temples that were destroyed by the invading Muslim armies. Dozens of Mosques must have come up on the sites of the destroyed Hindu temples. What then was the necessity of destroying the Babri Masjid, which was probably built on a Hindu Temple that was perhaps destroyed by the victorious Muslim Army? The mass destruction of temples by the invading Muslim armies happened in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. What happened at that time was because the numerous Hindu kingdoms were divided and the different Hindu kingdoms could not fight the Muslim invasion. “Might is Right” was the dictum of the kings of that period and the Hindu kingdoms were defeated in war and the consequence was the destruction of their temples. The early Muslim kings gave way to the dynasty of the Slave Kings also Muslim but more moderate in their approach to the majority Hindu people. Then came the Mughal dynasty and you had kings like Akbar who synthesised a religion absorbing the best tenets from Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Hindus and Muslims were treated as equals by Akbar.

After all this, the British came and then India got its Independence. People of all religions could freely practise their respective religions in India. What then was the necessity of demolishing a *Masjid* that was supposed to have been built over a temple that was destroyed hundreds of years ago when rulers ruled as per their might?

It is the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1991 that has triggered off a wave of Muslim hatred for the Hindu Indian people that finally led to the creation of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups like the Indian Muslim Mujahideen. Being a majority Hindu country, when we have sizeable sections of people of other religions: Islam, Buddhism, Christianity it is the duty of all the people of the majority religion to be tolerant and not rake up issues of temples having been destroyed hundreds of years ago when the international rule between nations was “might is right”. Might is not right in the comity of nations today.



Now that we are in the midst of this situation, how are we handling it? I am afraid in a very poor manner. Whoever are the rulers of this country that has a large Muslim population, some Christians and some Buddhists and of course a majority of Hindu people, must rule this mixed religious groups strictly impartially. Are we doing this? Regrettably not. Whoever constitutes the ruling party should be strictly impartial and treat all religions equally. Instead you have a Hindu majority party who will treat the minority groups with special privileges, hoping that they will vote enmasse for the ruling party. This naturally enrages other parties who are not favoured.

The worst is what happens to the Police. Here we have a disease that has slowly crept into the body politic, called 'committed bureaucracy'. This is a foul disease that has crippled our Government very badly. The bureaucrats and Judiciary who administer this country are afflicted badly with this disease. It is this disease which is at the root of all our troubles. It should be a fundamental principle of the Police and Judiciary to be above religion and be strictly neutral and impartial. Instead of this we find political parties being absolutely partial favouring one religious group against another. When this is added to the obsequious issue of committed bureaucracy we have a system that has destroyed society.

### **Details of the Lashkar-e-Taiba Attack on Mumbai**

Let us go back to the situation in Mumbai. When the situation was normal, the Police and the Customs departments of Mumbai were in league with Dawood Ibrahim, a known smuggler and *Hawala* dealer, allowing him to smuggle in large quantities of drugs like opium and heroin. As for the *Hawala* racket, this is known to every Indian who works in the oil rich Arab countries. The majority of Indians working there send their money earned in *Dhirams* or other currencies by the *Hawala* route where they get a higher exchange than the Bank route. This open crime was continuing with the Government of India (GoI) doing nothing to curb it. The Government lost millions of Rupees by allowing this illegal money trade to go on.

The leader of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) had a cousin who was an official football referee. After he retired from active football refereeing, he went to Mumbai and became a *Hawala* dealer. Paresh Barua sent all the lakhs of Rupees extorted

from the business community from Assam to his cousin who exchanged them for Dollars from the illegal *Hawala* channel and sent Dollars to Paresh Barua. He purchased arms from the Kachin Independent Army and armed the ULFA cadres to fight the Government of Assam.

What action did the GoI take to control Dawood Ibrahim? They took no action because a number of Government departments were getting pay offs from him – the Customs, the Income Tax and of course the Police. The Politicians controlling these departments must have been at the head of recipients. Obviously, the Intelligence agencies knew of this enormous financial racket. Here we come to the fundamental issue that is the root cause of this problem – committed bureaucracy.

The heads of various crucial departments are told verbally to layoff these billion Dollar rackets. If Dawood Ibrahim was picked up and prosecuted at the first instance for his drug smuggling, he would have been in no position to smuggle in weapons and explosives in the name of drugs and there would have been no serial explosions. Much more serious than this was the committed bureaucracy of the Babri Masjid demolition. This was clearly an illegal action and could have set-off communal riots as it did. Why did the Police not take action to prevent it? Why did the Director General of Police of UP not deploy force around the Babri Masjid and disperse the riotous mob? Because he was verbally told to layoff? This is committed bureaucracy. And this is why we are paying such a heavy price today.

When the Babri Masjid was demolished, Dawood Ibrahim and all his Muslim workers were upset. They decided to teach the Hindus of Mumbai a lesson and brought in a consignment of explosives and weapons from Pakistan and got them past the Customs by saying it was the usual drugs that were being brought in. The weapons were distributed and explosives utilised in preparing Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that were timed and simultaneously set-off in suburban trains, stations and bus stands causing a number of casualties.

When it was known to the Police that contraband like drugs were being brought from Pakistan regularly for sale in Mumbai and other urban centres, did the Intelligence Bureau and R&AW officers think of taking steps to seal this obvious smuggling route from



Karachi, Pakistan to Mumbai? During my tenure in the Border Security Force (BSF), I had sailed through all the channels of what is known as the Creek area at the northwestern boundary with Pakistan, because I was worried about infiltration across that stretch of the International Boundary (IB).

This area consists of four wide channels that flow from Pakistan into India and then move out into the Arabian Sea. The first channel from the North is called Sir Creek and as per old agreements its southern boundary is the IB. Further south are two channels Vianwari creek and Pabewari creek, both roughly parallel to Sir Creek. Both these channels open into the Arabian Sea south of the mouth of Sir Creek. The three creeks are linked by several narrow navigable channels that are navigable only at high tide. Hence any attempt at intrusion from the Sir Creek into Vianwari creek and from there to Pabewari creek can easily be checked and the enemy prevented from ingress from Sir Creek itself. The dangerous and far more likely ingress is along the coast of the Arabian Sea from the mouth of Sir Creek or directly from Karachi by sailing, hugging the coast. This must have been studied by the Coast Guard and the Navy. It is this route that was taken by the ten desperados who sailed from Karachi carrying weapons. After reaching some distance they steered close to a local boat and boarding it killed its crew and then sailed down the coast and reached Mumbai, before abandoning the boat and sailing to the jetty in Mumbai in a dinghy that they had brought from Karachi.

### **Failure of the Coast Guard**

Well before this incident several States on the sea board had set-up coastal Police Stations (PS). Each of these PS had a stretch of coast as its jurisdiction and only a limited area of the shore. The task of these Coastal PS was to basically monitor the movement of all the fishing and other craft berthed in their jurisdiction. It was the duty of the Coast Guard to set up a liaison with each coastal PS along its jurisdiction of several kilometres of the coast. A couple of years before I had taken a lecture of Intelligence officers of the BSF and the Coast Guard. The first question I asked of the Coast Guard officers was whether they had liaison with the coastal PS of their jurisdiction along the coast. The answer was in the negative. And this was well after the 26/11/ 2008 raid by the commando terrorist group of ten L-e-T terrorists from Pakistan. I was amazed

and disappointed and told the Coast Guard officers that they should go back and immediately set-up liaison with their respective Coastal PS.

If this liaison had been established, the Coast Guard officers who interacted with the Coastal Police would have found out the involvement of the Coastal Police in the smuggling of drugs and how explosives had been brought by the Islamic fundamentalists to set-off the explosions in Mumbai after the Babri Masjid demolition. The Intelligence agencies, both Central and State could not find out that the explosives used by the Muslim fundamentalist terrorists to take revenge for the Babri Masjid demolition were brought in through the smuggling network that already existed.

From the results of the investigation of the case of the ten L-e-T commando terrorists it has been found that a L-e-T terrorist was arrested in February 2008, who carried information with him that the Taj Mahal hotel had been selected as a target for attack. This information was passed on to the Hotel authorities and security was bolstered for some time, but when nothing happened after some time, the alert was downgraded.

This warning by the Intelligence Agency based on their intelligence was correct, but the guard was dropped after some time when no attack happened. This threat is confirmed by the interrogation report of the United States/Pakistan terrorist, David Coleman Headley, arrested by the United States Security Agency. In his interrogation he is reported to have said that selected persons had come to Mumbai to reconnoitre the targets and had even stayed at the Taj Mahal hotel. Immediately after the incident had occurred I was in touch with a friend of mine who was then the Chief Security officer of a Western hotel in Mumbai. He said that he had some sources in Mumbai who told him during the attack on the Taj Mahal hotel that some of the terrorist commandos who were inside the Taj Hotel had visited Mumbai earlier and had stayed at the Taj Mahal hotel and even cached weapons and grenades in some hidden places in the hotel! This naturally could not be verified, but it was found that no security check of the visitors was being done at that time.

This is only a stray piece of information. But could it be that our Intelligence Agencies, both external and internal knowing that in Mumbai there is a Jewish Institution close to the Sea Board did



not warn them of a Sea Board attack by a Muslim fundamentalist group in the background of Israel being a target of international Muslim fundamentalist groups? Also it is criminal negligence that terrorists were able to bring in weapons and explosives /grenades into the Taj Mahal hotel. Was no metal detector being used on all baggage in this hotel?

Regrettably today the situation on the West coast has not changed one bit. There has been no liaison between the Coast Guard units covering a stretch of the coast and the Coastal PS on that stretch. Is there sharing of intelligence between the Coast Guard on the coastal stretch and the Police on that stretch? Obviously smuggling of drugs continues to be carried out along the sea route between Karachi and Mumbai and landings must be taking place along the coast. Smuggling of drugs from Karachi is regularly taking place all along the Western coast right down to Kerala. I remember a case that I had supervised of the Central Bureau of Investigation in 1989 where the Customs had been bribed by a smuggling syndicate and there was a landing of heroin on the Mangalore coast. This was many years ago. I had recently discussed this with a Customs officer, who said that this smuggling route is still very much alive!

### **Steps to Prevent Future Use of Sailing Down Along the Coast for a Commando Raid**

In the background of the above paras, I would suggest the following steps be taken to prevent such commando raids. This applies to the stretch of the Arabian Sea from the coast of Kutch touching the Pakistan border at the mouth of the Sir Creek straight down to Mumbai and further below. It will also apply to vessels that sail from Karachi out to sea and then curve in to hit the West coast of India below Mumbai all the way to Kanyakumari. This will also apply to the East coast, to cover the coast of the Sunderbans from the Bangladesh border to Kolkata and then follow the coast further all the way to Chennai and beyond.

It will be necessary to place two geostationary satellites in space, one to cover the West coast from the Pakistan border all the way to Kanyakumari and another to cover the coast from the Bangladesh-Indian border in the Sunderbans to Kolkata port and beyond to Vishakapatnam and Kanyakumari. These two satellites should be able to track all vessels moving from Karachi south and

from the Sunderbans-Bangladesh border moving to Kolkata port and beyond.

The second part is to establish a liaison between the Coast Guard and the Coastal Police of all the sea board states both on the West and the East coast. The Coast Guard could monitor all movements of vessels plying parallel to the coast by monitoring the satellite transmissions. The Coastal Police will have to account for all the boats, large or small, that leave the coast for fishing or transport. It should be made compulsory for all boats, large or small, that are beached in the jurisdiction of a Coastal PS to register with that station and inform the station of their movement. The Coastal PS should collect intelligence of all smuggling syndicates and other criminal elements that use the sea for their movements. If such a net was in place, Dawood Ibrahim would never have been able to smuggle in weapons stating that the cargo was the usual heroin or opium and there was a pay-off for this.

### **Conspirators of the Attack on 26/11/2008**

The conspiracy to carry-out the attack on Mumbai was hatched in December 2007. The persons involved in the conspiracy were – Hafiz Muhammad Sayeed, the chief of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, Abu Hamza, Abu al Kama @Amjid, Abu Kaahfa, Mujamil @ Yusuf, Zarar Shah, Abu Fahdullah, Abu Abdul Rehman, Abu Anas and twenty two others with similar assumed names. Included are – Major General Sahib and one Hakim Sahib. These last two were probably an Army and an Intelligence officer. It is clear from the names Abu Fahdullah, Abu Anas that they are from the Lashkar-e-Taiba. In this Tanzeem once a Pakistani joins he assumes a name from the Kuniats of the Quran. It is clear from the above data that the Pakistan ISI and Army were involved in directing this commando terrorist raid.

### **Indian Reaction to the Raid on 26 November 2008**

It was clear from the reaction to the raid that the Mumbai Police had not anticipated any such raid and had, therefore, not prepared an emergency plan to react to it, if and when it occurred. Prior to this, there was the Madrid bombing of a train and the simultaneous suicide bombing in the underground by Pakistani Muslims who had immigrated to Britain, but whose children influenced by TV and indoctrination had gone to Pakistan and were trained in



Madrassas of some fundamentalist *Tanzeem*. We had several such cases to set us thinking – “Could some such act be done here?”

Mumbai Police were the first responders but they had no commandos who could take on diehard terrorists, well entrenched in a huge complex of buildings. The only other commando element available nearby were the naval commandos (MARCOS) who are trained for different kind of operations. In any case their numbers were too small to handle the entire situation. In the event, the available MARCOS about 25 of them entered the building around midnight and continued to operate to the extent possible till the NSG arrived on the morning of 27 Nov (some thirty hours later) and took overall control of the operations. However, MARCOS though small in numbers were able to contain the terrorists and rescued a number of hostages. Overall, the response of the Indian State to the crisis was quite slow and inadequate.

### Conclusion

At the root of the majority of our problems is this cancer of committed bureaucracy. Our Intelligence Bureau, the Central Bureau of Investigation and all the State Police organisations are humble lackeys of the political parties. Until our Government is ridden of this cancer of committed bureaucracy, our financial and security situation is not going to improve and we will keep staggering from one crisis to another in an erratic manner leading to, heaven alone knows, where?