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War through Terror under the Nuclear Umbrella

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The international community is justifiably concerned about the risks of nuclear terrorism since the probability may be low but the impact would be horrendous. This is made more worrisome since most experts believe that the world has also reached a nuclear proliferation "tipping point." What perhaps is less recognised and even lesser understood is the reality of terrorism under a nuclear umbrella. For two decades Pakistan has practiced trans-national terrorism as an instrument of foreign and security policy under its nuclear umbrella legitimised in Pakistani military as sanctioned by religion.¹

Pakistani elites believe that its nuclear weapons have "deterring" India from any punitive action (even after December 13, 2001 attack on its parliament), and forced it to fight terrorism defensively within its own borders. The international community is concerned about the risk of nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India in case of a continuing crises erupting into a shooting war. On the other hand, the tally of Indian casualties of this externally waged war through terrorism under the nuclear umbrella now exceeds the numbers killed in the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. At the same time Pakistan army leadership is confident that the United States would be extremely cautious in a direct military attack beyond the border lands as long they control a potent nuclear arsenal; and hence "cooperation" in US war on terrorism could continue along a low vector as long as it provides modern weapons at subsidised rates.

The above has to be seen in the context of the belief among military and civilian elites of Pakistan that has promoted the concept of "bleeding India through thousand cuts" which is based

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on the strategy that each cut (or act of terrorism) would bleed India but would not be sufficiently provocative to invite a high level of military response. This is why the total number of terrorists in J&K hardly ever exceeded 2,500 with 'hard core' terrorists remaining around 800 as a result of this conscious planning by Rawalpindi (the headquarters of the Army and ISI) and not because they could not have pushed more into the state. The terrorist attack on Indian parliament in December 2001 in this respect was quite different. And the attack on Mumbai is even a greater departure no doubt because the perpetrators wanted to provoke a military punitive response. If

this assessment is valid then we should even more careful to try our best to apply political and diplomatic pressure (including that of the UN Security Council) and hold the military option for a later day if adequate steps are not taken by Islamabad.

The horrendous terrorist act starting on 26th November on Mumbai executed ruthlessly with military precision took nearly 200 lives and injured close to 450 persons. All this mayhem by just ten jihadis. One of them was captured alive and gave crucial information supplementing the intelligence reports of the fuse wire leading back to Pakistan. The electronic media covered the tragedy

from outside for 60 hours and played snippets from it later including the live footage of two terrorists moving around the Victoria Terminus. The nation nearly exploded in anger.

However, it would be imprudent to act in anger or frustration. Wars are not won by assuaging anger or even defeating the enemy's military (or in this case, its terrorists); they are won by defeating the enemy's strategy. Our first and main choice,

obviously, is to rely on political approach and diplomatic steps (which are being taken) to press Pakistan to change its policy. But any action by Islamabad to punish the perpetrators would be temporary in the absence of a fundamental shift in policy of waging war through terror. These politico-diplomatic moves would have to be sustained in the face of diplomatic counter moves, unabashed propaganda and misinformation by Pakistan.² The international community is outraged by the Mumbai attacks; but there is already a tendency to focus only on our failures which tend to shift the responsibility to Indian government.

This is not to imply that the government of the state and at the centre have not made mistakes, but to emphasise that the mistakes (or successes) are a *consequence* of the war through terror and not the *cause* of it. But Pakistan remains answerable in the face of irrefutable evidence to eliminate the cause of such terrorism in India. And the fact that epicentre of religious terrorism in the West (at least since the first bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York in 1993) also can be traced to Pakistan-Afghanistan region and the patronage of Rawalpindi's Army-ISI combine.

Taken these factors and the weight of evidence together with the use of terror as an instrument of policy for more than two decades, this is just one battle in the long war against India. And this has been the first war through terror played out in front of TV cameras. But the sheer timing and nature of the attack ensured that the policy options available to India would be constrained, the leeway available to the elected government in Islamabad with the Pakistan army constantly looking over its shoulder while exercising real power would be limited,³ and the diplomatic manoeuvrability available to the international community, especially the United States bogged down on Pakistan's western border (because of Pakistan's previous and current policies), would be very low. President-elect Obama has stated that "We can't solve Afghanistan without solving Pakistan."

Pakistan has to deliver results and no amount of superficial indignation and India bashing would substitute for action. Its civil-military government which claims and is answerable for sovereignty may be afraid of the hydra-headed Frankenstein monster it has created;⁴ but this sovereignty is valid only if it is exercised in the domestic domain to end the terrorism from its territory mostly sponsored by the Army-ISI combine.

Our first option has to be political-diplomatic and a number of steps are possible for raising the economic and political

costs to Pakistan: for example, invoke UNSC Resolution 1373; press for a squeeze/suspension of IMF loans, following up with our own trade restrictions; urge the US to alter its logistic supplies route to Afghanistan through Central Asia, and then start squeezing SLOCs to Karachi as part of counter-terrorism checks; seek renegotiation of the Indus Waters Treaty, and so on. I feel that till the Army-ISI leaders in Pakistan find that their children can no longer study and work in the West, and till their own dollar supply is not cut off, this war cannot be won.

However, the central question is what happens, as has happened so often in the past, if Pakistan keeps trying to wriggle out of promises that it would be unwilling or unable to keep? Islamabad would try hard to buy time at the minimum, and divert attention to less relevant issues. But at some stage a military option would become necessary, even if for what the Chinese do: "teaching lessons." Never before has India had a greater legitimacy or international acceptance for the use of force for punitive response if Pakistan does not act in finding acceptable solutions. The

question that needs answers is: how should that military option, if it is to be employed, be exercised to produce maximum results with minimum costs?

Direct ground force strategy would lead to either a stalemate (without a decisive military victory) or an increase in international concerns

about escalation to a nuclear exchange much before we reach that situation and becomes a constraining factor for (as indeed happened in June 2002). Mobilisation of forces *a la* Parakaram, therefore, could be counter-productive even with a Cold Start doctrine which should remain a strategy of last resort within the larger military option being the last choice. Hence the basic instruments of coercion now would be the Air Force, the Navy and/or Special Forces. Here, unlike the Parakaram crisis, we need to ensure we have clear, legitimate and achievable aims. In this context terrorist training camps, though legitimate, are hardly the targets for punitive effect.

On the other hand, the aim of striking at "terrorist infrastructure" would cover a large number of legitimate targets, especially in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) from which (and for which) most of the quarter century's terrorist war has been prosecuted. Military force application seeks effect-based operations mostly conceived in terms of military effects. But in the current scenario we need effect-based operations for *political-economic effects*.

Such effects require selective and graduated use of coercive air strike capabilities even deep inside the

terrorist sanctuary all the way to Pakistan's western border. These would have to be interspersed with political-diplomatic activities and not rushed in time to allow for adequate effect to be derived. For example, air strikes on road bridges and other infrastructure (keeping collateral damage to the minimum) preferably in POK offer the optimum direction for application of coercive force. The onus of escalation would be on Pakistan, and it may well launch its air force in return. However, in my opinion, IAF can more than hold its own against PAF which would have to contend with the high risk of major losses of aircraft and infrastructure raising the political-military costs of Rawalpindi's policies. The key lies in mobilising our ground forces to the minimum to defend against Pakistan army offensive and briefing friendly countries (like we did in early 1990) regarding the facts to reduce Pakistani pressure of threat to the United

States about withdrawing military forces from its Afghan border.

Meanwhile the United States must factor in the reality that Pakistan's "cooperation" in its war against terrorism in the past seven years has been cosmetic at its best; and the Pakistan army is unwilling to make robust changes to a long cherished instrument of policy. The Mumbai attack, no doubt for multiple objectives, also seeks to try and undermine the US surge in strikes across the borders of NWFP by the threat of pulling out forces to defend against India. The real risk is to the disruption of logistics supply chain to US/NATO forces in Afghanistan passing through Pakistan carrying over 70% of their needs. This is already showing signs of severe strain by the resurgence of Taliban in the Peshawar region.

There is no reason to believe that US strikes cannot continue even if Islamabad pulls out its army (which has had a pathetic record of counter-terrorism) from that region. The basic lesson for the western capitals and New Delhi is that the world has tackled terrorism through a defensive war primarily focused on eliminating terrorists and their leadership. Unless there is a change in the policies followed by those who promote and facilitate religious terrorism, the use of terror as an instrument of policy by a nuclear power is unlikely to be reversed. And that should be the main aim of counter-terrorism strategy – to increase the cost of terrorism to the state sponsoring it. This has to be ensured through calibrated approach that increases coercive pressure incrementally/gradually more or less as re-run of Pakistan's strategy of "bleeding" India; except that the choice of means, ends and methods of doing so would be different.

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The foregoing also assumes that we must take steps internally to counter the war through terrorism. Those announced by the government are good steps. But they still amount to investigating and fighting terrorism defensively. It would take a long time to win the terror war, and we must institute long and short planning for *prevention in future*. This necessitates three key steps. One is to establish, as soon as possible a national coordinating/planning body for the prevention of terrorism somewhat on the lines of the Disaster Commission.

The second is the need for re-examination of our Intelligence apparatus, especially the *assessment of intelligence* by a permanent body different from the information, analyses and recommending agencies that we have. The Task Force to set up an NSC had identified poor intelligence assessments and action a year before Kargil! Almost all

information collected by intelligence agencies across the world remains "un-actionable" till some one makes a coherent picture out of it. To make intelligence information actionable we need to undertake objective assessments mostly situate in historical experiences. Even then it would be an estimate at best; but

an estimate much more than just information and hence what cannot be filed and forgotten in a file where national security is concerned. That is the job of assessment experts who can link up information horizontally, vertically and across the time horizon.

Who does this in our country? The JIC (Joint Intelligence Committee) is neither structured nor possesses such capabilities (or even the number of experts vital to such functions)⁵ and that is why it was merged into a larger staff. If any part of the intelligence apparatus is to be reformed and improved, the assessments part qualifies the most. This requires open source studies and analyses of trends which unfortunately do not excite much interest in our country. For example, we assume that Pakistanis think like us and in the process do not fully understand Pakistan and its strategic culture.⁶ The sole NSC meeting on 8th June, 1999 chaired by the then Prime minister had decided to set a dedicated think tank to do so in the early stages of Kargil War. But the think tank seems to have been lost in bureaucratic maze in spite of Cabinet approval ages ago.

The third is the need to revamp our internal security set up beyond the limited scope of investigative agency and expansion of the NSG. This requires separate discussions. But we need to ask ourselves: Who are the members of

NSG? We know they are Indians. But what sets the "black cats" apart from others? Any numbers of regular Indian Army units and individuals have been battling ruthless terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir for a generation. Can we apply the same system of recruitment, training and rigorous discipline to, say, the CRPF? The last attack was on the Oberoi Hotel on the waterfront. Would the next one be on BARC north of the same waterfront? This may not achieve direct physical effect; but the political fall-out of the attempt could be enormous.

(Endnotes)

¹ For example, see Brigadier SK Malik, *Quranic Concept of War*, (Lahore, Wajidalis, 19779) with a foreword by General Zia ul-Haq

and the Army had incorporated the word "Jihad" in its motto in 1976.

² The issue of a hoax telephone call to president Zardari threatening military action is a case in point. ³ The countermanding of the government's decision to limit the role of ISI, and reversing president Zardari's offer to send the ISI Chief to India are more recent examples.

⁴ It was Benazir Bhutto's government that created the Taliban with support from the army, and the ISI very soon took charge of it to prosecute the military's dream of "strategic depth" in Afghanistan.

⁵ US NSC is mandated by law not to exceed 650 people compared to 12 that JIC had in 1998.

⁶ The first ever study based on open sources by an Indian scholar on Pakistan's military was recently published by this Centre; see Shalini Chawla, *Pakistan's Military and Its Strategy*, (New Delhi, Knowledge World, 2008).



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