



EDITOR'S NOTE

THE WAR AGAINST INDIA

As we were going to the press, the horrendous terrorist act on November 26, which should be properly called a meticulously planned covert war on Mumbai executed ruthlessly with military precision, took nearly 200 lives and injured close to 450 persons. All this unbelievably carried out by just ten *jehadis*. 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.

Taken with the use of terror as an instrument of policy for more than two decades, this is 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, and the diplomatic manoeuvrability available to the international community, especially the United States bogged down on Pakistan's western border, would be very low. Yet Pakistan has to deliver results and no amount of India bashing would substitute for action. Its civil-military government which claims, and is answerable for, sovereignty may be afraid of the hydra-headed monster it has created (it was Benazir's government that created the Taliban and the army-Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) combine took it further); but this

sovereignty is valid only if it is exercised in the domestic domain to end the terrorism that today also afflicts Pakistani society.

The big question is: what happens if Pakistan keeps trying to wriggle out of promises that it would be unwilling or unable to keep? At some stage, a military option would become necessary, even if for what the Chinese have always stated: “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 be exercised to produce maximum results with minimum costs? Direct ground force strategy would lead to escalation and increase international concerns about a nuclear exchange. Mobilisation of forces *a la* Parakaram, therefore, could be counter-productive. Hence, the basic instruments of choice now are 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 action.

On the other hand, “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 now 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*. Hence, air strikes in POK road bridges, power stations, etc. The onus of escalation would be on Pakistan, and it may well launch its air force in return. However, the Indian Air Force (IAF) can more than hold its own against the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) which would have to contend with the high risk of major losses of aircraft and infrastructure which would set its rapid air force modernisation back by a decade or two. The key lies in mobilising ground forces to the very minimum to defend against the Pakistan Army.

Meanwhile, the United States must understand that Pakistan’s “cooperation” in its war against terrorism in the past seven years has been cosmetic at best. The Mumbai attack, no doubt for multiple objectives, also

seeks to try and undermine the US surge in strikes across the borders of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) by the threat of pulling out forces to defend against India. These strikes, however, could 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 focussed 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 is unlikely to be reversed. And that should be the aim of counter-terrorism today.