

US-India relations: operation ‘infinite justice’ in the common vision against ‘terrorism’

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By Dr. Rajesh Kumar Mishra

I. Introduction

This essay by Dr. Rajesh Kumar Mishra, analyst for the Indian think tank South Asia Analysis Group, calls for greater inclusion of India in the US-led global campaign to combat terrorism, while highlighting the complexity of Pakistan's current involvement. Dr. Mishra also warns against premature action and impassioned rhetoric on India's part, and appeals for a patient, rational response by the Indian government.

II. Essay By Dr. Rajesh Kumar Mishra

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by Dr. Rajesh Kumar Mishra, South Asia Analysis Group

An outraged America has declared war on Osama bin Laden and his followers with unprecedented air strikes and bombardment on Afghanistan. It is firmly believed that the fallout of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington will be worse in nature, if perpetrators of terror in the future are not deterred with punitive actions.

Historically, the modus operandi of pre-emptive attacks on terrorist groups or entities has been viewed differently depending on the victimized states. While the US has perceived "terrorism" as an imminent threat to its peace and national security, the term "terrorism" remains contested and underdeveloped in meaning and concept by both policymakers and scholars. However, a unity of thought lies primarily with the anti-human and anti-civilisational results that terrorism precipitates.

US intelligence evidence claims to converge on bin Laden as the prime suspect of the terrorist

attacks upon America. The consequent American counter-strikes on Afghanistan has brought the South Asian region under sharp US strategic focus. Pakistan with its long-term collaboration with the so-called Jihadis is at the frontal diplomatic link with the men who harbour and support this prime suspect. The geo-political proximity of Pakistan to Afghanistan is, at present, giving Pakistan a chance to provide "credibility" for its "long enduring" US-Pakistan relation.

It is generally believed in India that the possible US moves involving Pakistan could lead to a backlash for America in the future, if this moment of crisis is dealt strictly in terms of "national interest." Al Qaida is a loosely knit network with worldwide connections to numerous fundamentalist groups. Merely wiping out Al Qaida is therefore not the "only solution." The present US commitment to smoke out the people and entities involved with Bin Laden will only leave "others" ready to fill the vacuum and fight back.

In a surprise attack by the Pakistan based militant group at the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly on October 1st, the so-called Jihadis, again, caused devastation by murdering innocents. This attack on the institution of democracy came immediately after the World Trade Center catastrophe that shocked the world community with terror. This Kashmir incident might serve as a phenomenal example before the world at the moment of American desperation to bring the culprits of Tuesday, 11th September, to justice, but India has been facing this menace over last two decades.

In its endeavour to link the terrorist groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad, Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkare Taiba in India with the international networks related to Al Qaida, New Delhi considers itself not appropriately accommodated in the US scheme of things. Even the recent US enlisting of terrorist entities, groups and individuals, and non-governmental organisations did not include any of the terrorist outfits that operate within India. New Delhi views this US approach as 'Bin Laden first,' and one that does not address many of the issues that concerns India. New Delhi has been watching the ongoing US actions with caution and controlled moderation.

It was during Clinton-Vajpayee meetings that US and India began looking toward a reorientation of US-India bilateral relations in the light of post cold war world realities. The convergence of issues of mutual concern was reflected in a common "vision" to uphold the principles of democracy and to launch the international campaign against terrorism.

Indian Prime Minister was noted saying that, "America alone can determine whether it will address the symptom of terrorism or the system of terrorism." Commenting over Musharraf's recent remarks against Indian perception towards Pakistan, Indian Prime Minister also indicated its probable bearing on future India-Pakistan confidence building dialogues with Pervez Musharraf. And, during British Premier Tony Blair's visit to India, short of naming Pakistan, Vajpayee said that "even while extending our wholehearted support to the pursuit of the guilty terrorists of September 11, we should not let countries pursue their own terrorist agenda under cover of this action."

Pervez Musharraf, on the other hand, is performing a tight rope act with so much domestic and Afghani opposition against his support of America. He may require considerable compensatory provisions from the US in order to appease his constituencies within and outside the country. Kashmir might be high in Islamabad's agenda of future foreign policy review. The relentless support for Jihadis in Kashmir by Pakistan has been an imminent source of threat to India.

Dynamics of such threat perceptions will become more complex if Pakistan emerges victorious from this crisis by hunting down the enemy of America. This will not only re-strengthen the long standing US-Pakistan ties that had its foundation in the cold war period, but the US may in turn also provide several cold war-like concessions to Pakistan for the future too. This, in turn, will affect peace and security in South Asia.

Possibilities Unknown:

The American campaign and the international concern against terrorism has gained an unprecedented shape in the post-cold war world order. While the US is determined to hunt down and punish the perpetrators of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in America, it has yet to explain the nature of its future course of action or offer qualitative support from other concerned states round the globe. Having said this, President Bush wants to draw a clear distinction between those who are involved, harbour, support or encourage terrorist subversions on the one side, and on the other, those who support the US government in its fight against enemy terrorist group(s) or country(ies). The supreme interest of the US is, in any case, to lead the world by example.

As far as Indian national interest is concerned, it is now up to the US to realize and recognize that New Delhi has been struggling against perpetrators of terrorism on Indian soil for more than two decades. Insecurities to India due to terrorism or proxy war are closely related to the China-Pakistan nexus too. Strategic and defence analysts are of the opinion that to bridge the asymmetry in conventional force with India, Pakistan seeks nuclear and missile support from China. Having confidence in its acquired "nuclear deterrence," Pakistan sustains a proxy war against India.

Unfolding the different facets of Pakistani involvement with the Jihadis has become a pertinent task for India, especially given the concerted worldwide determination to fight against terrorism. The world community has been facing a "wait and watch" situation.

In the global fight against the evils of terrorism, in accordance with the international consensus, India wants to join the leadership of America. Yet, some view the Indian eagerness to help Americans as 'jumping before the gun' or 'warm hands on cold shoulders.' Such inferences are too early to be drawn. However, India does in fact claim its commitment to join the international consensus as well as any international covenant that deals with the issues of terrorism.

Media reports suggest that the Bush administration is determined to carry on the reprisal attacks until the perpetrators of terrorism are brought to justice. With the present level of information and international communication, India can ponder the following variables and their underlying cautions in terms of its national preferences:

* India may explore a reorientation in future India-US relations, especially, in the post cold-war world security-insecurity matrix. The concept of security of the state should include terrorism as one of its essential defining elements. Both the US and India may jointly react to the common threat due to cross-border support against terrorism.

* The present US crisis should not be given to impassioned rhetoric, provided reciprocity of transparency in state behaviour is maintained. In other words, India should neither disproportionately criticise nor embrace Pakistani involvement in the US scheme of things. After all, the veil of secrecy maintained by the US intelligence and the Bush administration do not leave enough scope to criticise an enraged America, but delimiting the nature of reaction may remains debatable.

* India may show strong willingness to wipe out the evils of terrorism in general and concentrate on putting forth propositions for engagements that lead to the tracking down and elimination of extremists who directly affect the Indian peace and tranquility.

* Selectively decided opinions should be weighed on cost-benefit analysis. India must maintain its credentials of being a non-aligned state against ignorable odds. Despite having close relations with the former Soviet Union, India has opposed numerous international moves during the cold war and

has sided with the US. Similarly at various occasions, New Delhi had shown same level of opposition or resistance to US too.

* Overwhelmed situational response without waiting for international consensus on any given issue or situation may prove premature for India.

* Future response to American unilateral decisions can be judged rationally with past experience. India could always try to become a partner in facing the international challenges rather than just plunging into the American perspective that lacks Indian sensitivity.

* Short-term objective fulfillment should not be at the cost of long term vital national interest.

* The principles of collective defence as "one for all or all for one" based on international consensus should be strengthened.

* India should firmly stand for its faith in International institutions and norms.

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