



War on Terrorism – Role for 'Modi-fied' India

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The horrific video clips showing masked killers from Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) killing hordes of unarmed civilians and beheading them shocked but convinced the civilised world about the gruesome design and expanding outreach of terrorism in the world today. Joint operations undertaken by the coalition forces led by the US in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere have no doubt uprooted and transplanted government terrorist outfits have sprouted from every assumed victory. The menace of terrorism has only multiplied in size and potential like the myth of demon Raktabeej. Every time Raktabeej was wounded, hordes of his clones would rise from the drops of his blood falling on the ground, finally vanquished and killed by Goddess Mahakali. The Goddess had adopted a unique strategy of pointed and precise lethal strikes ('*Khappar*') not to allow a drop of the demon's blood fall on the ground.

Today, the worsening security scenario of the world warrants a review of the terror climate so that pragmatic strategic options can be explored not only to chase and kill terrorists but also to address the problem in a holistic manner. It is not enough to locate and destroy the frontlines. Roots of terror have not yet been touched. The strategy must encompass ways and means that would discourage, suppress and finally end violence through multi-pronged intervention including the roots.

West Asia – the Cradle of Terrorism

It is now clear to everyone in the world how mass uprisings against the autocratic regimes in West Asia and North Africa in the recent past precipitated the inevitable. The cascading course of these uprisings had markings of a revolution, people's quest for liberty and democracy, and empowered regimes. The tumultuous movement, however, has gone awry giving way to forces of anarchy and ultra-violent extremism in the region. Whereas people had aspired for peace and prosperity and looked for freedom from self-serving despotic rulers, they found themselves in bedlam. It is a case of the proverbial fall from the frying pan into the fire – and the fire has continued to rage from Libya to Syria, Afghanistan and beyond.

While most of the Arab world continues to squirm under turmoil, organisations like Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab and Boko Haram have already established physical control over territories in Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria respectively. The ISIS has grown rather fast and even more menacingly and publically executing innocent civilians en-masse. They have not shied from posting on the social media horrific video clips of hapless social workers being savagely beheaded by masked killers. Display of gore, gloom and horror seems to be a design to induce shock and horrify media viewers and kill resistance achieving thereby instant and absolute surrender of the terrified masses.

Significantly, ISIS already has raised an 'army' of its own from the remnants of Saddam Hussein loyalists. It also has some armoured units from the previous Iraqi regime. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the ISIS chief and self-appointed Caliph has under his control large swathes of Syrian as his Caliphate - an Islamic State (IS). His express dreams are "to capture and convert the entire world into an Islamic State". The end result of the operations being currently undertaken by the coalition forces will be known only after the operations are over. Nevertheless, going by the present trend it is reasonable to assume that the ISIS will regroup and re-emerge in a refurbished form here or elsewhere in due course.

India – the Next Chapter of *Jehad*!

India figures among the top priority targets of most of these outfits. Charge sheets filed by NIA in New Delhi against five *jehadis* captured in the existence of an AfPak based outfit called 'Ansar ul Tawhid fi Bilad al Hind' (AuT). AuT has been hobnobbing with ISIS and planning to undertake *jehad* in India, a threat that draws credence from ISIS Chief Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's video call for *jehad* in India. Obviously, India is the next chapter of *Jehad*. Socio-political environment within the country provides inherent protection for incubating and raising dedicated terrorists. Reports of Hindu girls being induced or blackmailed to marry Muslim boys and reports of their forced conversions reveal how campaigns like 'Love Jihad' are pursued in an organised way. Whenever terrorists are arrested or killed in encounter, politicians waste no time in raising an accusing finger against security forces rather than appreciating their efficiency in pre-empting and defusing what could be devastating terror attacks. Further, clinching evidence, Qazis and Imams have been unwilling to come together jointly to denounce and condemn violence and killings. Politicians have been selective and subjective in their response. Positions thus adopted by vote-bank hungry politicians and community chieftains pose challenges ahead.

The Looming Nuclear Arm of Terror

The Information Age technology has made it affordable even for the not-so-advanced states and terrorist outfits to steal, smuggle or can be put to devastating use. There are many non-nuclear states that have chemical weapon facilities of their own. Investigations carried out by the UN Mission in Syria confirmed that the rebels had used chemical weapons against soldiers and civilians in Syria in August 2013. There is ample evidence of illegal and covert transfer of nuclear technology and weapon grade fuels among nations. Incidents of smuggling weapon grade materials have often surfaced in the media. The name of Pakistani scientist AQ Khan was linked with covert and illegal transfer of centrifuge enrichment components including some carbon-fibre rotors to Iraq and Libya. Concerns have also been expressed in the recent past about North Korea extending 'military cooperation' to Myanmar.

From time to time, there have also been reports and scientific conjectures that some of the non-nuclear states like Iran have acquired the capability to quickly convert their low-enriched uranium available for civil nuclear facilities into enriched weapon grade uranium if and when an adequate safeguards regime has remained inadequate. There are apprehensions that illegal nuclear activities might be covertly in progress in the world despite IAEA oversight because the Agency itself is handicapped in its scope and capacity. Fabricating and detonating 'dirty bombs' without elaborate manufacturing plants nor sophisticated delivery means. The menace of mushrooming terrorist outfits, their expanding power and gaining control of towns, villages, facilities, oil wells and other installations should convince the world that evil forces like ISIS, Taliban already crept very close to grabbing control of nuclear facilities and weapons in nuclear weapon states like Pakistan. Once there with their assets and crews under command, these very outfits shall deter coalition military operations against terrorism and dictate terms to the world.

It is well known that terror groups have been using communication networks including satellite communication to their advantage for which is not as well known is their enhanced capability and potential in cyberspace. Al Qaeda and its affiliates have their threshold domains in cyberspace. They use them to maximise use and misuse of cyberspace ranging from spying, hacking and hijacking communication and guidance systems of drones. This capability renders nuclear safeguards even more vulnerable.

Need for New Vision, New Strategy

Military operations by coalition forces led by the US against rogue states and terrorist strongholds in the past have been vigorously carried out in various areas during the last two decades. Unfriendly regimes were wiped out and friendlier governments were installed. However, in all cases, the regimes have proved to be even more unstable and chaotic. Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya et al are live examples. More terrorist outfits, each stronger than the last, have mushroomed after each phase of assumed victories over rogue terror states and organisations. Terrorism is no longer a distant threat today. The new phase of Islamic terror now stares and dares the world frontally from physically held territories. This phenomenon has forced strategists and planners of counter-terrorist operations that military action alone cannot be the final solution to the world's most vexing problem. Military operations are only one among the potent tools to discourage and suppress violence in a limited area for a limited time.

Today, while President Obama and Prime Minister Modi discuss the problem and resolve to address it unitedly, we need to look at it from a perspective that is universally understood but persistently kept un-expressed in deference to religious sensitivities of followers of Islam. No one can deny that the vast majority are largely a law abiding, peace loving and humanitarian lot full of compassion and care for others. Yet, no one can deny that the terrorists in the world today belong to this community. The painful truth is that not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists make themselves Muslims. In spite of this stark reality, all *jihadis* combined do not make even a noticeable fraction of the total Muslim population of the world. They are the darkest blot on their community and the worst threat to human civilisation and progress. Unabated growth of this evil is harmful to themselves in return. Wary and suspicious under the circumstances, people all over the world are increasingly becoming reluctant to extend jobs, accommodation and relationships with Muslims in every country and society. Quite a few Muslim intellectuals believe Islam is already in a renaissance and the forces of violence are convulsions of labour pains of a new order.

The current strategy is a display of awesome military power that is unwittingly projected as anti-Muslim by the cynics and pro-propaganda makes the terrorists appear as victims in an attempt to garner undeserved empathy for them from the peoples where modern communication networks are controlled and not freely available even today. Thanks to the obscurantists in Islam, a *Fatwa for Jihad* from the fundamentalists galvanises people to support the evil under the cover of ethnic solidarity. Thankfully, however, more and more Muslim leaders, thinkers, and people are getting averse to militancy growing at the behest of a few in Islam. Therefore, any strategy that ignores Islamic role in combat will remain inadequate in the War against Terrorism. Ideally, the onslaught against fundamentalist violence and terror must be led by the awakened Islam rather than powers that are spitefully projected by the perpetrators as un-Islamic and anti-Islamic.

India has a greater responsibility in the war against terrorism for two reasons. One, having suffered from the malaise for decades, India is a hotbed of terrorism. Two, India's Muslim population is more than the total population of Pakistan from where terrorism continues to flow in. Therefore, India has as well as responsibility to assume a bigger and more direct role in the global effort against terrorism.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown early signs of a statesman who has vision and resolve. Also, his team of advisors has some of the best brains with rich experience and proven abilities to devise and implement strategic options of far reaching consequences that could be aspired high position in the comity of nations. Enjoying the backing of a clear and thumping mandate of the people, the Modi Government addressed to the UN General Assembly, the Prime Minister actually sought to introduce a paradigm shift when he exhorted nations to overcome their tendencies – "G-7, G-20..." – and called for "G-All" – a unity of all nations to serve all humanity under the aegis of the United Nations. It is this call into an action plan: "G-All – Be all together to rid the world of terror and save human civilisation."

(The writer is a military veteran, author and social activist)

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