

War on Terror Spawns Fresh Terrorism

by Ramtanu Maitra

Since the Bush Administration's invasion of Afghanistan in the Winter of 2001, and Iraq in the Spring of 2003, terrorism in South Asia, already present, has been given a new life. Despite statements issued by the London-Washington duo, in the real world, their war on terror is spawning more terrorists, in Arabia, the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, this fact has been kept secret not only in the United States, but in all of South Asia. National leaders in the South Asian region are either in a state of denial, or are finding it difficult to contradict what London and Washington are aggressively stating. The other likely reason these leaders are shirking away from stating the obvious, could be the fear of evoking the wrath of the Bush-Blair combo, who are surrounded by Islam-haters.

In this context, it is important to note that the South Asian terrorists are not only Muslims; a large number of them are Hindus, and there is a smattering of Christians in India's northeast. In other words, terrorists in South Asia come in all colors, races, and creeds. Maoists of Nepal and India are Hindus and so are the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka. All of these terrorists have their causes to promote, and kill innocents. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, terrorists are Muslims, and through terrorist acts they plan to establish nations where Islamic laws would prevail—at least that is what they claim. In India's northeast, which is chock full of tribal groups, many of the terrorists, particularly those who belong to the Naga and other tribes, are Christians, thanks to Christian missionaries who proselytized in northeast India for years, and continue to do so even today. Some of the Naga groups point out that they are Christians, and therefore they should be part of the Christian group of nations, and not part of India, which is a Hindu-majority country.

Denial or Compliance?

But the level of denial goes even deeper. While New Delhi accuses Pakistani infiltrators of terrorist activities, and has a lot of evidence to establish that, it does not explain why the Hindu, tribal, and Christian-dominated northeast has remained in flames for at least four decades. It does not explain either why the Hindu-dominated Maoists in Nepal and the Indian Maoists in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka carry on terrorist activities,

and why their terrorism is dealt with less stridently. It is likely that the Indian authorities are less concerned about Maoist terrorists than they are about their Islamic counterparts. It is also likely that it is perhaps politically correct, in the present world environment, to blame the Muslims for all the terrorism that happens in the region.

The state of denial has almost reached the level of absurdity in Bangladesh. On Aug. 17, 2005, at least 400 bombs went off in one day, covering every nook and corner of the country except one district. And yet, Dhaka is oblivious to these developments. The response to the serial bombings was insincere, to say the least.

As a result, terrorism is growing by leaps and bounds throughout Bangladesh. At least five people died, including two suicide bombers, and around 20 others were wounded in two bomb attacks on Nov. 14, which targeted Bangladesh's judicial system, in the country's southeast. Bangladeshi authorities said the latest wave of violence is aimed at judges, journalists, and politicians. According to intelligence reports, the financial resources at the disposal of the militants are huge and still growing. Reports indicate one of the larger extremist groups, Jamaat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) spends roughly \$100,000 a year to maintain its full-time leaders and cadres, and close to \$800,000 for buying explosives, firearms, and for meeting its operational costs.

Following the Nov. 14 killing of judges, Dhaka circulated a compilation of four verses from the Holy Quran and the Hadith to media offices. The Arabic verses were followed by translations in Bengali, advocating moderation and condemning violence against fellow-Muslims. But the denial over the years has made terrorism in Bangladesh a problem of enormous magnitude. If one takes into account the corresponding lack of capabilities of the law enforcers to deal with these terrorists, the picture that emerges is a frightening one.

Indian Terrorists

The denial does not change the realities on the ground. In India, for instance, a series of bombs exploded in the capital city of Delhi on Oct. 29, a few days before a very important Hindu festival, Deepavali, and killed dozens and injured many others. This sent the message that the terrorists are capable of hitting at ease, even at the heart of the capital of India. According to Indian intelligence agencies, at least five instructors from the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizbul Mujahideen, and two from the Lashkar-e-Toiba had planned the Delhi bomb blasts with the help of eleven others who provided logistics, or carried out the explosions. The agencies also said that all the instructors were from across the border in Pakistan, while some of their helpers were from the Indian-part of Jammu and Kashmir.

But the Delhi bomb blasts are only one part of growing terrorism in India. In fact, one has to simply scan the local newspapers to find out about the worsening law and order

situation in India's northeast and its border areas with Bangladesh. According to latest reports, India's northeast is on the verge of experiencing a wave of terrorist violence on an unprecedented scale. The first worry of the law and order people there is that New Delhi's negotiated cease-fire in 1997 with the Naga tribes, particularly with the powerful Naga rebel group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, Isaac-Muivah (NSCN-IM), could break down before the end of January 2006.

If the delicately held cease-fire breaks down, New Delhi knows the consequences could be severe. NSCN-IM had long been adamant on the sovereignty question, demanding a unified Naga territory, called Nagalim, carved out of north-east India. Fearing its weakening position, the NSCN-IM has upped the ante and has brought up its demand for sovereignty, being fully aware that no government in New Delhi can accept that. But any way one slices it, a breakdown in the cease-fire would unleash more terrorism in India's northeast, a vital strategic area of which the mainland Indians know very little.

The other concern of New Delhi centers around the information that seven Chinese arms suppliers, from Hong Kong and Macau, have made contact with the leaders of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in Bangladesh. Reports indicate that large caches of arms have come to the ULFA groups. The arms moved through northern Myanmar to reach Bangladesh. Indian authorities are concerned because it shows the broadening of the network that could keep the ULFA strong, and the northeast in flames in the coming days.

The Maoist-Terrorists

Some parts of India are reeling under the Maoist-terrorist threats. The Indian Maoists, known earlier in the 1960s as Naxalites, have since changed their name, and have proliferated. Some of them even have put on political garb and are trying to be legitimate. Throughout the virtually ungoverned state of Bihar and the jungles of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh, Maoists have emerged as the law. They have developed large dumps of arms, and intelligence reports suggest that the Indian Maoists are not only working hand-in-glove with their Nepali counterparts, but have developed a close business relationship with the mother of all terrorists, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka.

A report published in the Indo-Asian News Service on Nov. 29, 2005, says that 570 persons were killed in Maoist violence in India, in the first ten months of 2005. The Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs, Sriprakash Jaiswal, in a written reply in the Parliament on Nov. 29, stated 1,353 Maoist-related incidents were reported in which 570 civilians and police personnel were killed. Property worth \$12 million was destroyed in the violence, Jaiswal added. Andhra Pradesh topped the list with 448 incidents, in which 163 civilians and 15 police personnel were killed. The terrorism situation in

northeast India and Nepal has the potential to get much worse because of the rapidly deteriorating developments taking place in Bangladesh.

After the U.S. War on Terror

The emergence of terrorism in Bangladesh is directly linked to the forces Washington identifies as al-Qaeda. According to intelligence reports, which are vehemently denied by the Bangladeshi authorities, Osama's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, visited Bangladesh in 2000, hosted by the orthodox Salafist Islamic party, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

There are also reports that beside Ayman al-Zawahiri and his al-Qaeda associates, terrorists from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Myanmar have made Bangladesh their nesting ground. There could be a number of reasons why they chose Bangladesh. To begin with, Bangladesh enjoys a porous border with India's rebellious northeast, and a weakly governed northwestern Myanmar. This allows arms and ammunition to pour in by land from Southeast Asia and Indochina. Bangladesh's location on the Bay of Bengal also situates these terrorists in an important trade route of illegal arms. It is no secret that the terrorists use drugs for payment of arms. Drugs flow into Bangladesh from both Afghanistan and Myanmar. Coastal areas of Bangladesh stretching from the port city of Chittagong through Cox's Bazaar to the Myanmar border, have not

only become a hub of smuggling, arms dealing, and gun-running, but have also come under control of various militant Islamic groups, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami; its student wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir; and the established terrorist groups, like the Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen and the Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islamic (HUJI).

In addition to the fundamentalist and terrorist groups, the area bordering Myanmar holds more than a 100,000 Muslim refugees from Myanmar's Arakan state. Known as Rohingya, they are the nemesis of the Myanmar authorities, and have been blamed for being the carriers of arms and perpetrators of crime in that area. Some observers believe the Rohingya are an important link between various Islamic terrorist groups operating inside, and outside, of Bangladesh.

By contrast, during the four years since 9/11, terrorism in Sri Lanka remained under control. That was due to the fact that the Tamil Tigers, by far the most well-organized of all South Asian terrorist groups, with links far and near, showed signs of battle fatigue, and were negotiating a political settlement of their dispute with Colombo with the help of Norway, a virtual front for the United States. However, that interlude is coming to an end. It is evident that the Tigers, while they maintained a cease-fire, never accepted peace as a policy option, and remained perpetually in a state of preparation for the next battle.

The election of Mahinda Rajapaksa, a hard-line Sinhala chauvinist, as Sri Lanka's President does not bode well for maintaining the cease-fire with the Tamil Tigers. Indeed, President Rajapaksa, in his policy statement at the opening of the new session of Parliament on Nov. 25, 2005, sought to impose new conditionalities on the LTTE under a revised cease-fire agreement that would "ensure the protection of human rights, prevent recruitment of children for war, and safeguard national security . . . [and the] creation of a Government infrastructure that will safeguard Sri Lanka's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unitary nature of the state" and replace "concepts of traditional homelands and self-determination" with that of the "freedom to exercise all the rights enshrined in the constitution"; concepts that would inevitably clash with LTTE's core demands of self-government, self-determination, and national liberation.

Reports indicate that the Tamil Tigers have begun to fatten their war chest. In its Dec. 2, 2005 issue, *Le Figaro* reported that the LTTE had collected an estimated \$120 million by targetting France's Tamil Diaspora. Quoting French intelligence officials, *Le Figaro* added that some 1,000 LTTE cadres enforce the collection of revolutionary tax among the 70,000-strong community.

Similar reports of fundraising have been received from Australia where, on Nov. 23, 2005, Federal Police officials arrested several alleged LTTE agents in Melbourne for fundraising and money laundering activities. This means that the next wave of terrorism in Sri Lanka may not be too far down the line.

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