

The 9/11 Report: Reaffirming Pakistan-Terrorism Nexus

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The 585-page *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States Report* that investigated the plot, design and circumstances leading to the 9/11 attacks on the US has highlighted the dangers of organised terrorism in threatening global peace and security. The same threat has been reiterated in the recent Beslan tragedy in Russia. It is clear that terrorism has acquired global dimensions and has emerged as a fundamental concern for the international community. This commentary focuses upon the salient findings of the Report with particular emphasis on Pakistan's role in fostering terrorism.

Major Findings

The Report throws considerable light on Pakistan's link with terrorism. Its major findings in this regard are as follows:

- The Report has pointed to the involvement of Pakistan with the Al Qaida: 'Pakistan did not break with the Taliban until after 9/11, although it was harbouring bin Laden'.¹
- It also asserts that Pakistan benefited from the Taliban-Al Qaida relationship as Osama Bin Laden's camps trained fighters for 'Pakistan's ongoing struggle with India over Kashmir'.²
- The 9/11 Report can be further corroborated by another 'stunning document' of Pakistani origin. Based on the 'document', Arnaud de Borchgrave states: "the imprints of every major act of international Islamist terrorism invariably passes through Pakistan, right from 9/11- where virtually all the participants had trained, resided or met in, coordinated with, or received funding from or through Pakistan".³

Apart from the Pakistani factor, the Report brings out other weaknesses that briefly need to be highlighted:

- It holds North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), which is responsible for defending the nations' airspace, as negligent, since it had 'no indication of a hijack heading to Washington D.C. at this time' (10.07 hours).⁴ The NORAD was unable to share information quickly or coherently as the attack unfolded during the day. The Langley F-16 pilots were never briefed about the reasons behind their being commissioned at a sudden notice. As the lead pilot later explained, "I reverted to the Russian threat, I'm thinking cruise missile threat from the sea..."⁵ The pilots knew their mission was to identify and divert aircraft flying within a certain radius of Washington, but they did not know that the threat was actually from hijacked commercial airliners.⁶
- The Report also mentions the inability of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) mandated by law to regulate the safety and security of civil aviation as of September 11, 2001, to have a close interaction with the other federal agency, NORAD during the crisis since the communication system were close to collapse after the attack.
- According to the Report, the breakdown in the chain of command also proved catastrophic with simple orders not getting passed like Vice President's orders to shoot down the aircrafts before they hit their targets—"the Vice President was mistaken in his belief that shoot down authorisation has been passed to the pilots flying at NORAD's direction"⁷, states the Report.

Significantly, the Report exposes the Al Qaida-Iran connection while negating the Iraq-Al Qaida link.

- "No credible evidence" was found of any operational link between Iraq and Al Qaida. The finding challenges President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney's recent assertions that the Iraqi leader had "long-established ties" to the group⁸ (Al Qaida), and hence the war against Iraq. The conclusion has prompted John Kerry, the Democratic Presidential nominee, to accuse President Bush of 'misleading' the American people.
- The Report has gathered extensive evidence of ties between Al Qaida and the fundamentalist Islamic leaders of Iran indicating Al Qaida's links the world over. The Report points out:

On June 26, 1996, an explosion ripped through a building in the Khober towers apartment complex housing the US Airforce personnel in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia... Subsequent investigation concluded that the attack had been carried out by a single Saudi Shia Hezbollah group with assistance from *Iran*. *Intelligence obtained*

shortly after the bombing, however, also supported suspicions of Bin-Laden's involvement. (emphasis added)

Impact of the Report

The following analysis attempts to understand whether or not the Commission's findings will have serious impacts upon the domestic as well as the foreign policies of the US.

- The Commission's Report is unlikely to influence the forthcoming Presidential elections in November. President Bush, the Republican nominee is trumpeting his fight against global terrorism by stating time and again that "we will build a safer world and a more hopeful America, and nothing will hold us back".⁹ He is also gaining in popularity ratings (though by a narrow margin)¹⁰ despite the fact that the Al Qaida has regrouped itself and authoritarian regimes around the world are already feeling empowered.
- The 9/11 Report has prescribed no new strategy for dealing with Pakistan. Instead, the US has granted Pakistan the status of a major non-NATO ally (MNNA)¹¹ in league with countries like Argentina, South Korea, Israel, Australia, Japan, despite the country being indicted in the Report. India has quite rightly not raked the issue over Pakistan being elevated to the status of a more 'privileged' ally (in terms of greater security and military relations), notwithstanding the undisputed support which Pakistan has provided to Al Qaida, as brought out by the Report. However, it is possible that India might be forced to review its contribution to the initiatives on 'counter-terrorism' in the light of the dubious duplicity being pursued by the US.
- While remaining taciturn on the Commission's Report, Musharraf is being cautious in fulfilling his commitments to the US-led 'global war against terrorism'. Washington will definitely construe the killing of Naik Mohammad - the renegade tribal militant and former Taliban commander - by the Pakistani army, as well as other Taliban leaders held captive by the Pakistani government as positive exploits.
- The Report is unlikely to have any bearing on Musharraf's already evolved Kashmir policy and the US think-tank community will continue to believe that Washington should seek 'to promote and facilitate' dialogue and peace process between the two South Asian countries - India and Pakistan.
- Interestingly, while the 9/11 Report implicates Pakistan for its links with

terrorist outfits, it also calls for a greater US aid to Pakistan in areas of economy and military. The Report, in fact, further advances the US' ambivalence towards Pakistan. It underlines:

Sustaining the current scale of aid to Pakistan, the United States should support the Pakistan government in its struggle against extremists with a comprehensive effort that extends from military aid to support for better education so long as Pakistan's leaders remain willing to make difficult choices of their own.¹²

With respect to Iran, the Report might add to the current debate within the Bush Administration (between the neo-cons and the realists) whether or not to up the ante against Iran. The Report, which stresses the link between Al Qaida and Iran instead of Iraq, can further alienate the 'neo-cons' from the 'realists' with respect to Iran. A Task Force "Iran: Time for a New Approach" chaired by the former National Security Adviser to President Carter (1977-81), Zbigniew Brzezinski, who represents the realists, argues that the neo-conservatives prodding Washington to pursue 'regime change' in Iran are underestimating the Khatami government.¹³ It is not clear how ultimately the Bush Administration plans to deal with Iran, one of the constituents of the 'axis of evil'. Within the Bush Administration, this would also signal whether the neo-cons are on the decline as against the realists.

Conclusion

The 9/11 Report categorically identifies Al Qaida as the perpetrator of the terror attacks on the US. However, the anti-American anger among the Muslims has not abated. A public survey conducted in June 2004 in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates, where more than three-fourths of the respondents said they believed that the US objectives in Iraq were intended in part to 'weaken the Muslim world,'¹⁴ indicates that there is a ready pool of Muslims willing to participate in Osama Bin Laden's search for global jihad.

Notwithstanding the links between Pakistan-Al Qaida-terrorism getting reactivated, India-US and India-Pakistan relations are taking strides in the right direction. While Washington and New Delhi have met for the sixth Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism (August-September 2004), India's Foreign Minister K Natwar Singh met his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri in keeping with the spirit of a 'composite dialogue' between the two countries. However, on the issue of terrorism, Islamabad's repeated verbal commitments towards reining-

in terror, whether it is cross-border terrorism or tolerance for militant and jihadi outfits in the country, have not translated into actual performance. Clearly, the US attitude towards Pakistan is still seeped in the past policies of the Cold War years.

Hence, with respect to South Asia, the 9/11 Report does not come up with any significant policy formulation by the US administration. In fact, the Report spells continuation of the US policy towards Pakistan as well as further engagement with Musharraf. In the light of the 9/11 Report and other revelations highlighting Pakistan's involvement in terrorism, India and the US are unlikely to converge to a shared perception for resolving the challenge of terrorism, given Pakistan's strategic value to the US.

References/End Notes

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