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BATTLE AGAINST GLOBAL TERROR AND BALAME POLITICS

Vitthal Katti¹ and Rahul Shinde²



INTRODUCTION :

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi was the first to go after the Prime Minister, wanting to know if he had ever spent a sleepless night over the death of a jawan or the victims of a terror attack. Mr. Modi's rejoinder suddenly made it politically correct for many who strut around as liberals and secularists to display their prejudices vis-à-vis Muslims. The google-savvy ones dug up the Prime Minister remark in July 2005 that "I take pride in the fact that although we have 150 million Muslims in our country as citizens, not one has been found to have joined the ranks of the Al Queda or participated in the activities of Taliban".

Suddenly there is a note of glee that Bangalore's two Ahmed brothers have spoiled our carefully presented tableau of a plural order. Easily discernible is the unstated note of "we told you" about "them", "their" insufficient patriotism, and "their" extra-territorial loyalties. Once again, it is seen as intellectually respectable to revisit the secular commitments.

The argument has since been picked up by the sangh parivar's assorted voices who accuse

ABSTRACT

On July 5, 2007, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh invited members of the Indian women's press corps to his residence for an interaction over high tea. He told the journalists that he had spent a sleepless night after watching on television Mohammed Haneef's mother express her agony at the arrest of her son in Brisbane in connection with the Glasgow airport bombing.

KEYWORDS : Glasgow, Global Terror.

SHORT PROFILE

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the United Progressive Alliance dispensation of being "soft on terror". The Leader of the Opposition has even accused the Prime Minister of appeasement of terror. On the first anniversary of the Mumbai train blasts the presumed lack of sufficient progress in the investigation is being touted as proof or this softness, the crux of the argument is that because of its presumed Muslim

vote – bank politics, the UPA Government could not be trusted to take the investigation into various terrorist incidents to its logical end; and therefore the local terror networks continue to survive to inflict another dose of deadly violence on a hapless Indian society.

There may be an element of truth in what the UPA's critics have to say but it is equally obvious that the time has come for the Indian discourse and policy making to move beyond cultivated breast-beating. For nearly two decades our leaders have encouraged a culture of blaming the others / outsiders for the spread of terror, instead of introducing conditions, habits, and thinking to equip ourselves to deal effectively with the trouble – makers. Our

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political debates never encourage the requisite talent, ideas, resources, assets, and commitment that can be deployed to eradicate the menace of terrorism. The security establishment bureaucrats too have encouraged this kind of discourse because as long as one section of the political leadership is content to blame the other, no one will ask hard questions of the ever expanding intelligence community on why it is not delivering.

Our experience with terrorism pre-dates the defining "9/11," when the West made a sudden discovery. In fact, starting with Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, there have been many milestones in terror's spread in India: the Hazratbal mosque siege (provoking Mr. Advani's one liner: biryani for Jihadis and bullets for Ram Bhakts), the Mast Gul-led seizure of Charar-e-Sharif, the IC 814 hi-jacking and the Kandahar surrender; the Amarnath yatra Massacre, the attack on the Raghunath Temple, the blasts at Sankat Mochan, Malegoan, on Mumbai trains, and in Hyderabad.

Then, there is another category of violence. The so-called naxalite violence does not even figure in our public imagination, while the continuing daily dance of death in the Northeast hardly disturbs the "mainstream" equanimity. The bottom-line would appear to be that those who choose to practice violence against the Indian state are able to get away with their nefarious activities without any fear of retribution.

Since 1991 we have had six Prime Ministers, four Home Ministers, nine Home Secretaries, 10 directors of the intelligence Bureau, and 11 chiefs of the Research and Analysis Wing. Apart from these designated custodians of national security, we have had any number of well-meaning, intelligent, dedicated, and committed (mostly) men in various security outfits who must have had the occasion and opportunity to introduce new ideas in dealing with threats from professional terror-vendors. Yet we are far from having a national strategy that

would mobilize our collective resources and energy to protect ourselves. Instead, we have devised elaborate rules of a blame-game, motivated by partisanship and premised on a strategy of Hindu consolidation or Muslim vote bank.

The public discourse, too, is unfortunately entangled in the politicians' preferences. The vocal middle classes, which dominate the discourse industry, are always susceptible to communal stereotypes. For over a decade, the middle classes have bought into the propaganda that the madrassas are the cradle of terror ideology, now, we are at a loss to understand how "modern" people like the Ahmed brothers become willing recruits to the jihadi cause.

We have to move beyond the sweeping demands made in the name of desh bhakti. In this age of globalization and the Internet, it would be foolish and counter-productive to insist that not a single muslim should allow himself to be brainwashed by the global Islamist fervour. No society has been able to shut out ideas, inspirations, and instigations from abroad. In our own country, political leaders and movements were fashionably happy to be inspired by forces and ideas from abroad. And, now with the avalanche of communication across national borders ideas flow in and out effortlessly.

What about those global causes and ideologies that instigate the use of violence and terror? We must be absolutely clear that the doctrinaire pronouncements of an Osama bin Laden cannot mean that we bracket the minorities with the enemies of the Indian state.

At the same time, what we can and must insist upon is that we shall use every coercive power at our disposal to defeat those who seek to import jihadi practices. None can have a licence to use Indian soil to aid and abet terror at home or abroad. Just as no muslim, like any other citizen, should be suspected just because he happens to be a muslim, no muslim can claim immunity from fair scrutiny just because he

happens to be a muslim.

The battle against global terror cannot be won in isolation from other aberrations in the architecture of rule of law. Because of blame – game politics, we have lived with this absurd pretence that while the ruling classes (the political class, the corporate elites, and the media) are free to suborn the loyalty and professionalism of the police, the same compromised security bureaucracy still retains the competence and the edge to take on the global terrorist.

Glasgow and Bangalore have reminded us that the battle has entered a new phase. But this is a battle that cannot be won by the government of the day alone, even if it must be deemed to have the primary responsibility for marshalling the national resources and will. If we have to inoculate ourselves against the vendors of global terror, we will need to produce a new cohesion behind a national purpose. But given the extremely fractured nature of the national political elite, it is any body's guess whether such a cohesion is possible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

A political system that produces only contentions, allegations, and character assassinations cannot suddenly produce the moral authority to forge new instruments to fight terror's new versions. The divided political leadership is unable even to infuse a sense of purpose in security agencies to move beyond their routine bureaucratic turf battles. Nor are our leaders prepared to recognize the imperative of pooling in a meaningful way the vast resources, national and state – level, in a centralized force dedicated to fighting terror.

Our political leaders and parties must know by now that while it may seem easy, even politically desirable, to win votes by wanting to blame or protect the minorities, it is an altogether different proposition to put in place an efficacious counter – terror strategy, a strategy that is morally defensible, politically fair, and socially

cohesive. The time for argument is over.

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