

## **Clippings On Subject: Terrorism - 4**

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### **Declare 'war on terror' and let the Army take charge**

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Some media reports after the September 13 bomb blasts in Delhi make interesting reading:

The Union home minister, unmindful of the fact that in the 1950s railway ministers used to resign after a single major train accident, has allegedly said that he "has the blessings of Sonia Gandhi to remain in office". This in the face of reports that there were intelligence reports warning about blasts in Delhi.

A senior bureaucrat has been quoted as saying that lessons are being learnt after each incident. In this deadly game of death and destruction, one can only wonder when this bureaucrat's OJT (On Job Training) will be complete and how many more men, women and children will die or be maimed or lose their loved ones before jihadi terror is eliminated.

The Delhi police chief was quoted as saying that he simply lacks the manpower to fight terrorism, and the government has finally sanctioned 7,612 additional policemen and intelligence people. There is a need to investigate why the police and intelligence forces have "insufficient" manpower despite 17 years of terror strikes on cities since the 1991 Bombay bomb blasts. It is also time for the citizens to be extra vigilant and help the police.

Politicians from the NDA and UPA are, of course, busy, gleefully scoring brownie points over each other while citizens cry out for help. There is talk of creating a Central Federal Agency, as if this agency, once set up, will wipe out terrorism in one stroke.

When Simi was being banned, some politicians were reported to be against this step. And when the alleged Gujarat bomb blasts mastermind, Abu Bashir, was finally arrested in Uttar Pradesh, by the Gujarat police, local politicians from various parties went to the residence of the accused to commiserate with his family.

With an angry and exasperated public gearing up for the next elections, the government on September 17 announced that it is considering creating a new post of minister of state for internal security (who will report to the Union home minister), and a new and "strong" anti-terror law, with "strong" safeguards against misuse. The NSA too made an unverifiable claim that a few more attacks, after September 13, have been "nipped in the bud". Also, the Prime Minister and Sonia Gandhi have decided not to attend the traditional Iftar parties in view of the bomb blasts and floods. And the Prime Minister, on September 17, finally admitted that "vast gaps in our intelligence have cost us..."

A TV channel carried clips of an Israeli spokesman and ordinary Israeli citizens advising India to be "firm against terror" and also to use its military.

There is still hope and a grudging realisation that the "draconian laws" passed by the United States in 2001 and the United Kingdom in 2005, showing zero tolerance to jihadi terrorism, irrespective of the charges of racial or religious profiling, have been effective due to a pro-active centralised intelligence system which so effectively infiltrated the jihadi organisations, and an enlightened and vigilant public. Our politicians should emulate the example of these two democracies where all politicians supported the war on terror.

There is also realisation that our politicians are reluctant to act ruthlessly against terrorism, which is striking people only in major cities for maximum impact and publicity, because a majority of the population and "votebanks" (over 70 per cent) live in villages and small towns.

So while TV debates carry on between glib politicians and "experts" and the nation prepares for elections in Kashmir and across the country, the terrorists will be planning their next dastardly acts during the forthcoming festive season and also during the chaos of elections. There is no need to further elaborate on the state of insurgency, Naxalism, LAC violations by the Chinese or Pakistan's LoC ceasefire violations.

Fortunately, democratic and secular India still has a last line of defence, i.e. the armed forces, which have always delivered in times of war, insurgency and peace-time disasters (tsunami of 2004 and the recent floods in Bihar and Assam), despite attempts to lower their morale and status by a scheming and unaccountable bureaucracy. India has the world's 2nd largest Army, 4th largest Air Force and 6th largest Navy. The Indian Coast Guard is the largest such seagoing paramilitary force in the region.

Assuming that no dramatic steps — like implementing a US Patriot Act-type law and setting up something on the lines of the US department of homeland security, along with dedicated fast track courts — can be taken till the completion of general elections, it is time to hand over this war on terror and secession to the armed forces.

I suggest the following measures be implemented till major anti-terror capabilities are made available to civilian agencies:

The government formally declares that India is in a state of war against terrorists in India, and separatists in Kashmir. A military governor be appointed in Kashmir, with all police, paramilitary and intelligence agencies under the command and control of a single Army commander. Army "city commandants" be appointed to the 15-20 metros and cities which are vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Here too, all law-keeping and intelligence agencies be put under army command and control. The 13 major seaports, and related local agencies like the police, intelligence, customs, narcotics and port authorities, be put under the command and control of the Indian Navy. Similarly, the 36 operational minor ports can be put under the Indian Coast Guard.

The command and control of all civilian airports and concerned personnel be put under the Indian Air Force. The military, and other agencies under it, be given full freedom to chase and arrest suspected terrorists all over India. Subsequent detention, interrogation, trials and punishment should be in dedicated military facilities with "fast track courts".

The people of India must ask for accountability from the government, and heads of non-performing politicians, bureaucrats and intelligence and police officials must roll. In the forthcoming general elections, safety of citizens from jihadi terrorists must be the primary issue on which the next government is elected. Remember, the Indian Army chief was sacked after the 1962 Indo-China war, though that debacle was due to the military not getting adequate manpower and equipment from the government. This nation deserves a government and bureaucracy which is accountable to the people, and will deliver or quit.

We cannot import our politicians, bureaucrats, police and intelligence agents, like we import arms and nuclear power plants. Fortunately, we have a first rate armed forces, which must be used decisively in national interest. Vice-Admiral Arun Kumar Singh retired as Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Naval Command, Visakhapatnam

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