



INTERNATIONAL

ISLAMIST TERRORISM IN THE AGE OF OBAMA

Mumbai's outrage sought to fuel hostility between India and Pakistan

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Hotel Taj Mahal in flames. Mumbai (India), November 29, 2008.

Many blamed President George W. Bush for the Islamist **terrorist attacks** in **London** (2005) and **Madrid** (2004). They even blamed him for **9/11** (2001), which took place prior to military intervention in **Afghanistan** (2002) and **Iraq** (2003). The brutal outrages of November in **Mumbai** killed 183 people, and it would have taken the life of thousands had the determination of the Delhi's Government intervention not taken place, rejecting any type of negotiation with terrorists and squarely confronting Islamist terrorist squads. Fortunately dozens of Spaniards managed to save their lives. Mumbai attacks occur already in Obama's age and thus demolish the previous undocumented thesis. It seems Obama does not have the blessing of **Al-Qaeda's** terrorists either. If President Bush was public enemy number one, according to **Bin Laden's** terrorists, his successor will inherit the very same condition. Reason favours those who claim that the enemy of **Islamist terrorism** is none other than the Western world.

The 44th President of the United States of America seems to have set his eyes upon Afghanistan. He has turned it into his number-one priority in foreign policy, setting it even ahead of Iraq. Achieving peace in the Pashtun country is now considered essential to stabilise a world punished by the radicalism and intolerance of Islamist terrorists. Therefore, the idea of the next American Administration is to implement a holistic policy in Southern Asia which promotes a more secure environment in Afghanistan.

“The nationality of the victims (American, Australian, Israeli, British, etc.), the *modus operandi* and the media attention make the Mumbai attacks the new Indian 9/11”

Historically, Pakistan has seen itself threatened from both the North and the South, that is, by India and Afghanistan. While the problems with India are contemporary, those with Afghanistan go back to the 19th century. Thus, since the very beginning, the occupant of the Aiwan-e-Sadr Palace has sought to secure at least one of those fronts in order to be able to take care of the other. President Zardari has recently tried to improve relations with India although he has had no success yet. If an agreement with New Delhi about Jammu and Kashmir were reached, Islamabad would be free to focus its efforts on its other historical enemy, Afghanistan, thus strengthening NATO's current mission there. Pakistani help seems necessary to stop drug-trafficking and Islamist terrorism, as both have their bases set in the Pashtun country. However, this objective crashes head-on with that of the terrorist groups who are making huge efforts to stop India and Pakistan from reaching a peace agreement.

It is in this setting that the latest terrorist attack in India should be placed, where a group of 20 men killed over 180 people, although the plan was to slaughter 5,000. Beyond the personal drama of this, the real goal of the terrorists was stopping the *détente* process initiated by Asif Ali Zardari. The terrorist squad perpetrating the Mumbai outrage left a trail of clues leading to Pakistani groups whose sole end was intensifying the conflict between these two countries.

The Terrorist Outrage of Mumbai

On November 26, 2008, a group of 20 men perfectly trained, launched an attack on the cinematographic city of Mumbai — also known as Bombay — with a double end: harming as much as possible and attaining a large international impact. The attackers divided themselves into two groups: those of the first group stayed at the hotels. They had false identities and credit cards, which gives an idea of their level of organisation. The second group assaulted the city using inflatable boats coming out of two fisher boats — Alpha and Al Kabir — which had been hijacked and their crews killed in Karachi.

During the first phase, the terrorists dedicated themselves to sow panic at emblematic places of the city, such as the Chhatrapati Shivaji station, the

Leopold Café, the Metro Cinema or the hospital Cama Albles. Once they finished with these targets they entrenched themselves at the Taj Mahal and Trident Oberai hotels, previously finding time enough to attack the Jewish Cultural Centre. The idea of the terrorists was to entrench in the hotels and negotiate the release of the prisoners belonging to the organisation Indian Mujahideen, as can be deducted from their clothes. The attackers wore trousers and vests with many pockets where they had large amounts of explosives and enough food to last several days. However, New Delhi's policy is not to negotiate with terrorist groups, something which was already put into practise a few weeks ago sinking a pirate boat in Somali waters.

The outrage ended with the tragic outcome of 183 dead and an indefinite amount of injured. Nevertheless, beyond irreparable personal harm, the target of the terrorists was, on the one hand, to kill foreigners — in fact, they asked what their nationality was before executing them — and on the other, poisoning relations between India and Pakistan. Let us go deeper into these two conclusions.

In the first place, it must be said that the idea set in the perverse mind of the terrorists is this: if the victims are Westerners their actions will get more international attention. This is true to a large extent as, if we pay attention only to the number of victims, India had already suffered other attacks where deaths surpassed those of Mumbai. However, the nationality of the victims (American, Australian, Israeli, British, etc.), the *modus operandi* and the media interest make the Mumbai attacks the new Indian 9/11. The truth is that the outrage nearly killed dozens of Spaniards, amongst them the President of the Community of Madrid, Esperanza Aguirre, and many businessmen.

In the second place, as has already happened in previous attacks perpetrated by Pakistani terrorist groups, the real aim was to generate an atmosphere of distrust between the two countries favouring the outcome of their goals. This hypothesis becomes yet more plausible if we pay attention to the declarations of Asif Ali Zardari where, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, the violent groups of Kashmir were called terrorists. Similarly, Zardari rejected using nuclear weapons as a first option against India. This predisposition favoured regional stability as it opened a door for cooperation in the difficult relations between India and Pakistan, two countries which have already confronted each other in three wars.

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Who is behind the attacks?

A group called Deccan Mujahideen immediately claimed responsibility — by email — for the Mumbai carnage, although the existence of this organisation is being put into question. The literal translation is “South Mujahideen” (Sanskrit), in reference to a plateau located at the centre of India. There are three elements in the text itself which lead us to suspect that the claim is false.

- *The tone* is much gentler than the one used by Indian Mujahideen in their claims.
- *The language*, Hindi with words in Urdu instead of English tries to tell the Government the origin of the group: North of India or Pakistan.
- *The means used to send the claim* — email — is not usual for terrorist attacks in India. Quite the opposite, usually a telephone call is the method used to claim responsibility over such shameful actions.

“According to the terrorist captured, the attack was planned in the Pakistani Kashmir, at a training camp of Lashkar-et-Taiba, where they contacted members of Al-Qaeda and the ISI”

However, the text does give information setting us on the trail of authorship. The first tip is the use of emails to claim responsibility, something typical of Chechen terrorism. Furthermore, according to the secret service of India (RWO), the trail of this mail led to a Russian computer located in Pakistan. It is a well-know fact that in the training-camps of Lashkar-et-Taiba there are Chechens being trained. In fact, the terrorists’ method reminds us of the hijack of the Turkish boat from Trabzon, of hospital Budyonnovsk, of Dubrovka theatre, or of School No. 1 of Beslan. This collaboration should not surprise us, the bodies of several Chechen terrorists were found in the siege of Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in July 2007. Therefore, this first clue would indicate that Lashkar-et-Taiba would be behind the attacks.

In the second place, the way the operation was carried out needs training that in such a region is only given in Muridke, that is, in the headquarters of Lashkar-et-Taiba. Such military training is given by members of the Pakistani secret service (ISI) who have been collaborating for some time with the terrorist groups of Kashmir against Indian interests. Actually, in May 1999, armed militants supposedly on their own initiative, infiltrated beyond the control line with the purpose of fuelling a new war between the two countries. These militants normally receive training and logistic support from army sectors. General Hamid Gul is worth mentioning, he is associated to these groups and was accused by Benazir Bhutto of preparing the Karachi terrorist attack of November 2007.

Furthermore, Lashkar-et-Taiba assaulted the Indian Parliament in 2001. This time, only 10 people died, but the significant part is the similarity of both *modi operandi*.

In the third place, newspaper *Majallah al-Dawa* published that the sole option for Indian Muslims was either *Jihad* or emigrating. It so happens that this paper belongs to organisation Jamat-ut-Dawa, none other than the heir to Lashkar-et-Taiba, forbidden in Pakistan in 2002. Thus, under this new name, Lashkar-et-Taiba has continued operating freely in Pakistan and has even kept its founder, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, as its leader. A few days after the Mumbai attacks, Saeed accused India of blaming Pakistan instead of trying to solve the Muslims' situation.

In the fourth place, out of the 20 terrorists attacking the city of Mumbai, Indian authorities managed to capture one alive, Abu Islami. After questioning him for hours he admitted being a member of Lashkar-et-Taiba, which fits in with the telephone numbers found in his mobile phone: five of them belonged to members of this organisation. According to Islami, the attack was planned in the Pakistani Kashmir, at a training camp of Lashkar-et-Taiba, where they contacted members of Al-Qaeda and the ISI.

It is believed that the terrorists exited Karachi in a merchant ship belonging to Dawood Ibrahim, from where they would have boarded the fishing ships used to arrive in Mumbai. Dawood Ibrahim is the main leader of organised crime in Karachi, he has an organisation named D-Group. Dawood Ibrahim controls the drug-trafficking business coming from Afghanistan and at the same time has important links with Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the ISI.

In 1993, Dawood Ibrahim and his partner, Tigre Menom, organised a chain of attacks which killed over 200 people. He has been hiding in the suburbs of Karachi since then. In fact, his repatriation is one of the tensest elements in the relations between India and Pakistan. Their main goal is destabilizing India, Pakistan and Afghanistan to continue with their illicit businesses. For that reason, Dawood Ibrahim has actively cooperated with terrorist groups like Lashkar-et-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammed to keep the Kashmir conflict alive, preventing Pakistan from implementing the necessary efforts to stabilise Afghanistan. With the Pasthun country deep in chaos, Dawood Ibrahim can keep his drug-trafficking businesses more easily and, thanks to the power he has in Pakistan, he is able to send the drug over to Europe and the US through the Arab Emirates, Iran or Turkey.

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Once the involvement of specific citizens and Pakistani terrorist groups seemed certain, India submitted an extradition request of 20 people allegedly involved in the Mumbai attacks. Among them we can find names as important as Hafiz Muhammad Saeed (leader of Jamat-ut-Dawa), Maulana Masood Azhar (leader of Jaamet-et-Mohammed), Dawood Ibrahim, Tiger Menom or the alleged mastermind behind the attacks, Zakir-ur-Rehman (Lashkar-et-Taiba). Even though hundreds have been arrested — some of them are considered very important like Saeed, Azhar or Rehman —, no extradition has yet been accepted because Islamabad demands specific evidence of the involvement.

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Objectives of the attacks

Several interrelated objectives were pursued by the attacks. The most obvious of them was the need for India and Afghanistan to return to the confrontation which so favours terrorist groups. After the assault to the Indian Parliament in 2001, New Delhi sent troops to the Kashmir area and was promptly answered by Islamabad with a similar deployment. They wanted to sow distrust again and cause a similar reaction to the one in 2001. However, this could be considered an obvious objective this time, as the true and underlying one was none other than stopping Pakistan from sending the four military divisions it had promised to the tribal areas in the border with Afghanistan. The role of these troops was stopping the Taliban insurgency threatening to take a major part of Afghanistan with the assistance of the hard winter there.

This goal is shared by those known as Pakistani Taliban, who seem to be behind the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Thus, after the Mumbai attacks their leader Meshed has stated that if Islamabad declares war to India their organisation will fight beside the Pakistani troops. Something which seems increasingly close.

The weekend of December 27 and 28 the 14th Pakistani division (20,000 men) withdrew from their position at the area bordering with Afghanistan and went to Sialkot and Kasut (Kashmir). Therefore, fulfilling NATO's mission in Afghanistan seems impossible as the insurgents find shelter at the other side of the Pakistani border without the Alliance being able to do anything to stop it. If the Alliance forces are unable to act, the plans to prevent the production of opium in Afghanistan will not be implemented either, which stands as the main problem for the stabilisation of the region. This way a vicious circle is created

that begins with the absence of security, continues with the weakness of the Afghan Government and finishes with the cultivation of opium, which represents the only way out for the Afghan population. In fact, the areas where more drugs are produced — Helmand and Kandahar — are at the same time the areas where the coalition forces are attacked more, thus establishing a direct link between lack of security and drug trafficking.

As long as instability remains, drug business will remain, as lack of security proves to be a *sine qua non* condition for opium cultivation and its ulterior transformation into heroin. In this setting, a triple alliance has been established between drug-traffickers (Dawood Ibrahim), Talibans (Mullá Omar) and terrorists (Bin Laden). Talibans give protection to Al-Qaeda leaders and the latter give the former contacts to buy weapons in exchange. These weapons are paid with the money they get from their collaboration in drug-trafficking, which can be done thanks to the instability generated by their activities. Likewise, the drug consumed in Europe and in the US enables Al-Qaeda to deliver speeches about the corruption of Western societies (*kafirs*) which must be fought against, at the same time they offer themselves as the sole alternative for the young.

Going back to the Mumbai attacks, the main conclusion drawn is that they sought to give some air to the Afghan insurgence distracting the attention of the Pakistani forces over other affairs, such as Jammu or Kashmir. Zardari's new policies and Obama's promises must not go to waste, as peace in Afghanistan depends to a large extent on reaching an agreement in Kashmir. In fact, the President elect of the US has already stressed the importance of Pakistani cooperation to pacify Afghanistan, which today is the main front for the fight against Islamist terror.

A chaotic situation highly eases Al-Qaeda's possibilities of attaining their real objective: gaining control of a State to implement their radical fundamentalist vision and start building a Caliphate (*Al-Khulafa al-Rashidun*) just like the one existing during the reign of the first four caliphs. Once Pakistan and its nuclear weapons were under control, launching *yihad* would be much easier for them (*jihad bil-sayf*) to put an end to corrupt practices — Capitalism, consumerism, corruption, etc... — allowed in infidel land (*dar al-harb*) which must be conquered.

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Thus, if we allow a regional conflict between India and Pakistan to alter the International Community plans for Afghanistan, the terrorists will have succeeded in their objective: establishing regional instability and strengthening Taliban, drug-trafficker and terrorist structures. Nearly a year after the death of Benazir Bhutto, fundamentalists are closer to their goal: gaining control of Pakistan and start building their Caliphate. For that reason, Barack Obama has set his first priority in foreign policy in Afghanistan. Beyond geopolitical considerations, it seems that, just as it happened in 1979 with the Soviet invasion, the Psthun country is a key piece for world stability. Drugs, terrorism and Islamist fundamentalism are in Afghanistan and start expanding around the world as only Communism did in times of the USSR. What will the formula for deterrence consist of this time?