



Countering Al-Qaeda

By S.M. Hali June 10, 2008

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The Global War against Terrorism (GWOT) doesn't appear to be making major headway for a number of reasons. Firstly, global terrorism as a phenomenon needs to be understood in its correct perspective, secondly the difference between Al-Qaeda and Taliban needs to be comprehended, thirdly, the GWOT allies need to pull their act together to counter the menace. First to discern between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda: The Taliban

only operates in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, whereas Al-Qaeda functions globally. Tactically, one of the differences between the two organisations is that the Taliban is prepared to fight conventional battles, whereas Al-Qaeda only uses terrorism to fight its wars.

Now to scrutinise the phenomenon of global terrorism: Firstly, the modus operandi of Al-Qaeda: The use of suicide bombers is apparently its trademark; but while the brand of radical Islam that Osama bin Laden and his like espouse undoubtedly emphasises the role of the "martyr" and gives moral and religious backing to both suicide missions and their murderous results, the demise of the Islamic warrior is not a strategy, but merely a tactical mechanism. According to Emanuele Ottolenghi of the Canadian Jewish News, Al-Qaeda's main goal is to kill and maim in the greatest possible numbers disrupting civilian life in the process. The suicide mission is a technique, a device used to maximise the chances of success of a military operation, a choice of weaponry rather than an ideological imperative, and a choice in which the "martyr" is the cruise control system of a smart human bomb.

The second but crucial aspect of terrorism is public exposure. There is a voyeuristic element in terrorism, in that it needs to make news. Since its aim is to influence an audience, it cannot go unnoticed. As each event raises the threshold of death, every act of terrorism needs to match previous attacks in the magnitude of the outrage it causes. Thirdly, terrorists have adopted their tactics because they assume that their enemies, if bled enough, will relent and go home - in the Americans' case - withdraw from the entire Middle East and Afghanistan.

The fourth aspect is political. Terrorism is not really the mad reaction of the oppressed and downtrodden of the earth, reacting inevitably to despair, as often propagated. That explanation applies to the animal world, where instinct alone, not rationality, determines action and reaction. Human beings are different. Terrorism is a conscious choice, often the result of the combination of ideology - religious or secular - and resources, which seeks to achieve goals based on a rational calculation of costs and benefits. It does, however; exploit the impoverished masses to goad them into committing acts of terrorism.

According to the latest thinking, Al-Qaeda is now more important as an ideology than an organisation, a network than a hierarchy, and a movement than a group. It is

increasingly amorphous, though initially it seemed tightly formed. Rohan Gunaratna, in his renowned book Inside Al-Qaeda, says: "Although founded in 1988, Al-Qaeda merged with and still works with several other extremist groups. Hence Al-Qaeda rank and file draws on nearly three decades of terrorist expertise. Moreover, it inherited a full-fledged training and operational infrastructure funded by the United States, European, Saudi Arabian and other governments for use in the anti-Soviet Jihad."

Let us discuss the ways and means of countering Al-Qaeda in our region. USA, the major player in the GWOT, has lost the meaningful participation of Pakistanis through mistrust and discordant policies like: Threats to unilaterally attack Al-Qaeda targets inside Pakistan; threats to curtail economic and military assistance to Pakistan; a unilateral nuclear deal with India; US allegations of mishandling of \$10 billion received by Pakistan since September 11, 2001 as aid; lack of recognition that Pakistan has captured or killed more than 700 Al-Qaeda operatives and has sacrificed more than 1,000 troops of its own; widespread misperception that the war against terrorism is actually a war against Islam; frequent suicide bombings, which Pakistanis believe are provoked by United States.

Under these circumstances, both the US and Pakistani governments need to adopt a strategy, which encompasses the building of trust among the people of the two sovereign nations; provide meaningful intelligence so that Pakistani troops can deal with miscreants effectively in their own territory; aid the people of the tribal belt to be established commercially and financially as means of sustenance and more significantly, terminate the incessant blame game. Countering the Al-Qaeda requires concerted effort and the use of diplomacy as well as the threat of employment of selective firepower.

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