

# One War, Many Fronts

There is no contender in the political race who is seriously interested in lifting the deadweight of all-pervasive poverty plaguing the society in this terrain of inhumanity. There lies a beautiful world of corporate culture working well for the Indian elite, with below poverty-line ration cards for the destitute. But all are deliberately united on one issue—‘war on terror’. And New Delhi has been in a dilemma for long as to how to win a militarily unwinnable war. What is true of America internationally is equally true of India nationally when it is the question of combating terrorism and insurgency. The reality is that Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Pakistan are just different fronts in the same war. In India Kashmir, North East and other violence-prone areas are just different manifestations with different degrees and ideological orientations in the same war.

After the Delhi blasts in September, Congress Party and the coalition government it manages under the signboard of United Progressive Alliance began to think over how to terrorise the ‘terrorists’ with no solution in sight. And finally they fell in line with the hardliner Bharatiya Janata Party to reconsider the need of a harsh law like the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) that replaced the 1987 Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, in 2004. But there are a number of draconian detention laws to deal with the ‘merchants of terror’ and yet terroristic violence is on the rise despite massive repression of suspects who are in most cases innocent citizens. But law, mild or hard, is meaningless in a situation where lawyers themselves are against it. The reports of pleaders refusing to plead for the accused related to ‘terror cases’ are increasingly pouring in from different north Indian courts, showing a dangerous trend of communalising society and destroying whatever remains of secular fabric of the world’s biggest showpiece of democracy. Nobody is talking of enacting law to punish the lawyers who boycott the accused, simply on assumption that they are terrorists according to police allegations. The maoists are lucky in the sense that they still get lawyers to defend themselves in courts.

If terrorism vanishes from political landscape, security establishments will go bankrupt. They will get less money, less budgetary provisions. In other words vested interests—security bureaucracy including huge administrative set up that controls it—will never allow terroristic violence to subside. In the absence of potential terrorists they will create them as it happens in every underground movement.

To identify the on-going terror campaign in different Indian cities with Pakistan-backed terrorist outfits, particularly LeT, is too old to deliver the goods. True, Pakistan is being utilised by some jihadist groups as a rear but Pakistan’s policy to export terror to India is mainly aimed at destabilising Kashmir. By targeting ordinary people in crowded cities and market places, terrorists, no matter whether they belong to this mujahideen group or that, could hardly gain anything politically. They are in effect alienating themselves from the broad masses of their own community.

Every terroristic violence is a good diversion. Also, fear psychosis built around terrorist groups is a nice tool to silence any voice of dissent. Times change. Political manoeuvrings don't.

The 'war or terror' syndrome seems to have created a situation in which anybody can be terrorised. The authorities do not need logic and accountability to continue their own terror campaign against the hapless and downtrodden.

One reason America is losing war in Afghanistan is Taliban terrorists are not stateless like Al Qaeda. Their road of resistance leads to Kabul. And Kabul is increasingly besieged and Taliban and their foreign associates are consolidating control over an expanding swath of territory sprawling across both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. America cannot win counter-insurgency in Afghanistan despite advanced military technology and superior manpower because there are not enough Afghans ready to fight and die for the kind of regime it wants. This symptom equally applies to India as well. Insurgents or counter-insurgents cannot succeed against the wills of local population and denying a decent livelihood to the poor.

The way India is resorting to counter-terrorism after every terroristic blast only strengthens the philosophy of terrorism. There is no political approach to resolve the crisis by passionately winning the hearts and minds of the masses of the people who are at the receiving ends for no fault of their own, New Delhi possibly cannot win a war against an elusive and mobile 'enemy'. Then it cannot afford to lose it for more than one reason. □□□