

# The Mumbai carnage: Time to go to the roots

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THE carnage in Mumbai is a shocking reminder once again of the fear that few non-state actors can cause, which only full scale wars between nations could in the past. In 9/11 acts of terrorism, it was one score; in the Mumbai massacre, the perpetrators were fewer who actually caused the carnage and mayhem. There are of course many more involved in organizing and executing these acts such as terrorist organizations and nation-states. Pursuing them to root out terrorism has so far been futile as these terrorists and their groups keep on changing strategies as they have done in the Mumbai carnage to escape detection. The Mumbai terrorist attacks, the tragedy and carnage notwithstanding, should therefore lead those pursuing the war on terror to make a strategic shift and deal with the causes as much as the perpetrators. So far, at least since 9/11, the objective has been to pursue the perpetrators with little attention to the causes that breed terrorism.

The events surrounding the Mumbai carnage are still murky. It is evident nevertheless that the attackers came from the high seas after off loading from a larger ship in the Arabian Sea and landing in Mumbai in water rafts. The way they carried the operations at 10 different locations and the ease with which they did so is another mystery for Mumbai has been subjected to terror attacks before and has an advanced security net. It is therefore quite possible that domestic terror organizations and perhaps the infamous Mumbai underworld may have been involved in assisting the foreign terrorists.

India is near another general election. The Mumbai carnage is not good news for the ruling Congress party. There has obviously been a massive failure of security. To counteract political damage, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took the first lead, blaming "foreign hand" for the carnage. Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee made that explicit by naming Pakistan and Pakistan backed terrorist organization Laskar-i-Taibya. Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patel has resigned that brought an instant negative reaction from BJP that said it was "too little too late". P. Chidambaram, widely regarded as one of the architects of India's economic miracle, has been shifted from the Finance portfolio to Home. Initial Government responses in dealing with the carnage have thus been political, aimed at containing the negative fallout of the carnage on the Congress' electoral fortunes. The opposition BJP has likewise responded politically, emphasizing that they had better protected India while they were in power. The two major parties are using the carnage to drum up nationalism and the Pakistan



card to appeal to the masses for votes.

India, as victim of the carnage, must have everybody's support to deal with the issue but has to act with wisdom and its leadership, on both sides of the aisle, must leave aside politics and rhetoric and deal with the root causes of terrorism. The goal of the war on terror must not be a military solution or in this case must not end at putting Pakistan on dock. The goal should be to focus on the causes the terrorists use for their acts. Finger pointing and politics aside, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called for creating an agency similar to the Homeland Security in USA, hoping that like the latter has been able to stop terrorist attacks after 9/11, this new agency in India would succeed likewise. It may not work that way in India for one reason: India has a large sprinkling of home grown terrorist organizations that are Muslim, Hindu and region based where USA has only external terrorists to handle. Without taking away her justified accusation of Pakistan for assisting terrorists against her sovereignty, India has to accept responsibility for not addressing the problems that have given rise to home grown terrorism. The Kashmir issue is on top of the list of the problems, created in 1947 when the 77% Muslim majority princely state acceded to India against

the agreed principles of accession because of its Hindu Maharaja. Instead of resolving the Kashmir problem politically, all Indian Governments subsequently have alienated the majority Kashmiri Muslims from the rest of India. Human rights violation there has been recorded by organizations such as Amnesty International. India's treatment of Muslims in rest of India also has left a lot to be desired. Frequent riots targeting Muslims are both communal and political. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India often escapes serious attention, as is the case of violence against other minorities such as the Christians. In February 2002, the massacre of over 2000 Muslims in Gujarat where the BJP led state government actively abetted the Hindu fundamentalists, has been labeled by independent investigators as genocide. In fact, because of his role in the riots, Chief Minister Narendra Modi was denied US visa after the riots and denied again in 2008, with the Coalition for Genocide urging the US State Department for a lifetime ban on him. As a power now emerging on the world scene among the top few, India needs to show political wisdom in dealing with her minorities to contain widespread home grown terrorist groups whose causes, unless resolved, will continue to draw

overseas terror groups like pins to magnet as well as create home grown terrorist groups. Blaming Pakistan, even when correctly blamed, will appease the masses and win votes but will not even scratch the problem of terrorism.

Pakistan's denial of involvement has serious flaws. With exception of perhaps one, all those who perpetrated the Mumbai carnage are Pakistanis and concrete evidence is coming out about involvement of Laskar-i-Taibya that operated legally in Pakistan till it was banned after 9/11. President Asif Zardari's offer to send his ISI Chief has been downgraded, suggesting that he is not fully in control of either his military or his intelligence. His hold on power is tenuous and he needs USA's full support to hold on to power. It is therefore unlikely that he would sanction a terrorist attack in which his ISI would have a major planning role, leaving implementation to a terrorist outfit like the Laskar-i-Taibya. That would suggest, given the evidence piling up, that Pakistan's ISI may have been involved behind the back of the President or that within the ISI; there are rogue elements that may have helped plan such an operation.

The Indian Government has done the correct thing by handing an official note of protest to the Pakistan High Commissioner in India. India has

also asked that Pakistan should hand over 20 most wanted fugitives hiding in India including the Mumbai underworld don Dawood Ibrahim. Pakistan has offered a joint probe. These leads must be allowed to bring India and Pakistan into serious contact to establish the truth behind the Mumbai carnage to pinpoint responsibility. Given the history of distrust between the two, where they have fought full-scale wars, it is not conceivable that they would be serious to establish the truth. In this instance, with Pakistan's complicity rather obvious in a prima facie way, it would require serious encouragement and pressure. Here the US and particularly the new administration can make the qualitative change. With Barak Obama in charge, expectations are high that the war on terror would be fought unilaterally and not by dividing the world into "you are either with us or against us", or into "axis of evil". World opinion is firmly and unequivocally against terrorism and a lot of what good eventually comes out of the Mumbai carnage will depend on how the new President of US deals with India and Pakistan in the context of the Mumbai carnage. In his efforts, he should keep a few things in mind. First, the US has tremendous leverage over both. Second, the Mumbai carnage can bring India and Pakistan to the table to resolve the causes of terrorism in South Asia given the right motivation. Pakistan's President Zardari's position vis-a-vis the US is palpably evident, having just been given a US\$7 billion life support by the IMF India after signing the civil-nuclear deal needs the US to achieve its economic goals together with a host of other reasons. Third, despite all the blame game, the two sides have not moved towards a crisis situation such as an India-Pakistan war as happened in 2001 after the attack on the Indian parliament. Finally the carnage did not provoke a Hindu-Muslim riot as many apprehended.

The doomsday predictions in the media over the Mumbai carnage seem to have dissipated paving way for India and Pakistan to deal the terrorism issue seriously. The ground is now favourable for US to use her considerable influence on the Pakistan Government and her intelligence to delink from any sponsorship of terror groups and then to isolate and obliterate such groups, urge India to consider the grievances of the minorities, particularly the Muslims, and rising Hindu fundamentalism to deal with domestic terrorism in the country. India will soon start to build dozens of nuclear reactors for power generation that would be very vulnerable to terrorist attacks. This should be an additional motivation for India to contain her homegrown terrorism. Condolizza Rice could start this process during her current visit to India and pave the ground for the new administration to deal with it later.

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## Obama electioneering: Symbolism and substance

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Obama, though being 50% white Kansan and 50% black Kenyan ethnically but 100% Afro-American by choice, presented himself as an all-American candidate to the US electorate. This symbolism was unavoidable. A majority of the voters are white. Unless he got their vote, Obama couldn't have won even if he got overwhelming black and Hispanic support, as these two groups together are a minority.

As it happened, Obama received 43% of the white votes, more than what the successful Clinton and the unsuccessful Kerry got. To attract voters, Obama used another powerful symbol: the idea and need for change.

Most governments, after being eight years in power, usually lose public support because of the cumulative dilatory effect of their sins of commission and omission. By this logic, the current Republican administration would have become unpopular, helping the Democrats. In reality this happened in spades. Bush's popularity spiraled downwards since 2003 to a measly 28%, the lowest of any US president.

The US public considered his administration a failure domestically (mainly because of a sinking economy) and abroad (the disastrous Iraq war, The Patriot Acts, Guantanamo et al.). The electorate was ready for a change in the tone and texture of policies especially on the domestic economy particularly after the financial system's collapse last September. This desire for change was so widespread that Obama's main challengers - Hillary and McCain - both co-opted change in their manifestoes.

But Obama exploited this desire most substantively. He developed a superb organization oiled by vast amounts of money raised online from many small donors. In contrast to McCain, Obama used the pervasive and instantaneous powers of the web to communicate his message nationally and internationally. Though Obama didn't campaign as an African-American, his victory gave the African-Americans a big lift, helped dilute the stain of the original US sin of slavery and showed how much civil rights have progressed since 1960s.

But not too much should be made of this symbolism. US blacks' economic condition will not likely change much under an Obama administration nor will racism go away. But both areas should noticeably improve over time.

Again, the assertion that Obama's victory suggests that any body can rise to the top in the

US should be taken at face value. US society favours the haves. Obama won because he managed the tools - a relevant message and lots of money - used by the previous white US presidents more effectively than his competitors.

Will Obama's colour make it easier for other non-whites to aspire to The White House? In theory, yes. But slavery gives the US white-black relationship a poignant texture that's missing in white America's connection with other minorities. Thus, the reality may be greater resistance from Caucasian America to giving the presidency to another minority any time soon. Can there be too much of a good thing?

Obama's willingness to hold discussions instead of waging wars was a refreshing contrast to Bush's bellicosity that McCain threatened to replicate in his foreign policy. But this doesn't make Obama a soft president. While addressing a rally against the Iraq war in Chicago on 2 October 2002, Obama denounced the impending war as "dumb," "rash" and "based not on reason but on passion."

But in the same speech, Obama said five times: "I don't oppose all wars" and considered the US Civil War, the Second World War and the battle against terrorism after 9/11 as justified. In truth, a dovish president is inconsistent with the innate character of the US as a national security state. It's noteworthy that Obama has called for more resources for the Afghan war.

If Obama's preferred first response is diplomacy that, in and of itself, would be a welcome departure from Bush's belligerency. But Obama is unlikely to be reluctant to use military power - where US has a still distinct but somewhat eroding comparative advantage - in core national interests.

Obama will be a realist rather than an ideologue in foreign policy. In the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, Karl Marx wrote pragmatically: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."

Obama may find that the more he tries to change, the more things remain the same (Alice in Wonderland). Nevertheless, Obama's victory represents a high point in US politics and suggests a more rational approach to US domestic and foreign policy issues. His presidency will enjoy much support inside and outside the USA till he makes mistakes or consistently performs below expectations.

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## The transitional period Israel, Gaza and the challenges of Obama

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DOMESTICALLY, in the Israeli arena, just three months prior to the elections on the 10th of February 2009, many events are occurring in the high leadership echelons of the major political parties. In the Labor Party, Ehud Barak is facing serious challenges to his leadership. All the polls predict he and his party will suffer a real defeat in these next elections. Various political leaders, including Uzi Baram and Ami Ayalon and several authors such as Amos Oz and David Grossman, who identify with Labor, have deserted the party.

Nearly all the surveys predict Labor receiving between 9-11 seats in the next Knesset. The real reason is Barak and his governing style. Although he talks about living modestly, he is currently living in Migdalay Akyrov, one of the most prestigious, expensive and luxurious towers in Tel-Aviv. Until last January, his second wife directed a company, which connected businessmen from abroad with Barak and individuals close to him. When individuals close to Kadima disclosed this scandal, his wife closed the company.

Barak, as the leader of the Labor Party, is seen as a dictator, even among his own friends in the party. This style has angered the members and they have started to feel that he is the single governor of the party. He also neutralized the negotiations with Tsipi Livni and prevented his friends from remaining Knesset members for many months to come.

On the Palestinian front, as the Defense Minister he was accused by some of his colleagues of being the person who purposely violated the cease-fire with Hamas in order to stress his leadership as Defense Minister. The latest incident in which 12 Palestinians were killed in Gaza obviously shows that Barak, using many pretexts, would like to show his authority in security and military affairs by striking Gaza and showing that he is taking the lead in the conflict. However, the launching of more rockets into Ashkelon has neutralized his plan and it seems that he will again agree to the terms of the Hudna. Moreover, his friends in the Labor Party will now hear more about his "deterrence policy".

Barak is losing his perspective and as a result, he is losing his status in the Labor Party. The real core of the Labor Party is moving to other parties or resigning from the political arena. Surveys have been very unfavorable to him. In that sense, the Labor Party will not succeed in making the kind of gains that would enable it to control the next coalition or to contain Benjamin Netanyahu from becoming the next Prime Minister.

Barak does not have many options. He might join Kadima and initiate a merger with this party. After the upcoming Labor Party primaries, Barak could try to unite with Kadima in order to maintain his status in the Israeli political system. In that sense, the Kadima Party and the Labor Party might get more seats as a result of this union by creating an alternative centrist force in the Israeli political system. In addition to strengthening the center it would weaken the right wing parties. However, this centrist party also does not have a proper solution to the Palestinian problem and would engage in endless dialogue and management resolution and not in real conflict resolution.

Tsipi Livni made a strategic mistake when she failed to form a coalition. It will work against her later in any future coalition after the next elections because she will face the same challenges that she faced in September 2008. Tsipi Livni might succeed in getting more seats, but there are great doubts whether she can



really succeed in forming a government and in governing.

Eventually, Benjamin Netanyahu will exploit the comprehensive decline of the Labor Party for his interests. Currently he is promoting highly extremist figures to join to party, including former Chief of Staff Boigi Yaalon, former Minister Dan Meridor and former MK Benny Begin, promising them to be part of his cabinet. All of these figures are right wingers who perceive the Likud today as the best and strongest right wing force that can impose a solution according to Israeli political interests. All of these figures believe in an Economic Peace; a peace that will be signed or imposed according to Israeli national security interests, which means total control of the West Bank and total control of the borders with Jordan, while surrounding the West Bank and Jerusalem with a wall, and at the same time making Jerusalem the capitol only of the Jewish people. Israel will try to be Hegemonic in the region. Netanyahu believes in that and all the new members who join him also believe in that terminology.

It is quite certain that this Economic Peace of Netanyahu will exploit very well the split in the Palestinian camp. Netanyahu will try to continue the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority but with a low profile because he has nothing to propose to them.

The real problem will be in Gaza. Hamas will not agree that Netanyahu impose his will. Conflict with Hamas, therefore, is inevitable. Hamas is currently strong and controlling the Gaza Strip. Hamas has succeeded to some extent to mobilize and recruit people for the sake of the Hamas regime. Hamas seems to agree on the Hudna and the cease fire but conditional on the opening of the entrances and importing goods from Israel or from Egypt. If the entrances remain closed, the rockets will be launched often and will disrupt the normal life of the people in

the southern part of Israel. The mechanism of the Egyptian intervention has failed. Therefore, we can safely say that the current situation will continue to transpire.

Hany El Masri, a political analyst from Nablus, called on the international community and the Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank to change course in the aftermath of Obama's election as the new American president. He asked for change in the Quartet's dynamic of dealing with the Palestinians in Gaza. He also argued that the US and the Europeans should promise to implement the Annapolis Agreement, which would create a Palestinian State. Currently, there is no Palestinian State.

El Masri also asked the current Palestinian leadership to change its way of negotiating and to incorporate both Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah in developing one strategy toward the next US administration. This might be right if the Obama administration is not too weak to deal with all the international situations. Otherwise, Israel will continue to try to contain Hamas, but without much success, and will continue to conduct the policy of "tit for tat" until there will be some kind of decisive solution. This will not happen with the new strategic circumstances and the weakness of the Israeli leadership, which prevents imposing any real solution.

The unrest in the international system, which detracted attention from the Palestinian problem, will continue. The humanitarian disaster in Gaza and the siege policy will also continue to be a threat for further escalation. If the new American administration will not help in settling the issues then we can say that other factors on the ground will continue to effect a possible solution, if there is one.

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