

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## What we have learnt

*Better intelligence and quick response unit crucial*

THE heinous terrorist attacks in a Gulshan café and the subsequent attack on an Eid congregation in Sholakia have brought home the reality of a massive lack of preparedness in dealing with terror operations which started with targeted killings and have now taken on a bigger scale. The Gulshan attack that left 20 hostages killed shows a clear intelligence failure as well as inaction from a trained, quick response unit. In the wake of this new wave of terrorism it is crucial to take account of the lessons to be learnt.

First of all we must set up a well trained, quick response unit that can react efficiently. We know that the DMP has a SWAT team which is supposed to be equipped to take quick and appropriate action in such a situation. This force should be given the legal authority and necessary resources so that they can be ready to respond at the shortest of notice. In fact there is a crying need to massively improve police training to enhance efficiency. The police must also be better equipped to be able to decisively confront terrorist attacks.

Equally important is the need to significantly increase our intelligence capacity. We must both expand the number and quality of trained intelligence personnel and, if necessary, send them abroad for training. There must be a heightened use of latest technology which has now advanced considerably. We also need to improve interagency co-operation by setting up a co-ordinating mechanism. In addition we should be open to accepting help from other countries facing terror attacks, in the form of intelligence sharing and other kinds of cooperation. The government and the nation as a whole must acknowledge the immediacy of such measures and take the necessary steps.

## Poor public health services during Eid

*Why this ritual cannot be broken?*

EVERY Eid, people unfortunate enough to take ill and get admitted to one of the major public hospitals is faced with the same spectacle. The majority of the doctors and other medical staff are on leave. This time round, it is alleged that many inpatients had to resort to bribery to get the basic services (that are supposed to be free) at three public hospitals including Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). We are appalled to learn that this has happened at DMCH on Eid day where a burn victim once shifted to the general ward wasn't visited by a doctor the whole day as there were none on duty.

Everyone is entitled to take Eid holidays, even doctors and nurses. What is unacceptable is the fact that the premier public hospitals, where most poor patients go to receive treatment, should also have medical personnel on station during the festivities. Apparently, this notion is alien in Bangladesh where everyone wishes to go on holiday at the same time. Hence, the running of services is left to staff that can and do take advantage of the situation as hospital authorities bother little about taking contingency measures during such lean periods.

And regular as clockwork, hospital authorities flatly deny there is any problem. Yet, this has been a chronic problem that occurs during important holidays and pretending that they do not occur is medical negligence. They continue to happen because of lack of accountability, and all we can hope for is that the ministry will step up and do something about it before the next Eid festivities arrive.

## COMMENTS

**"Who are they?"**  
(July 4, 2016)

Tahreem Ahmed

It is time to find solutions and not continue the blame game.

Ajit Das

How could they be such heartless murderers? They killed so many people but in the end, they also lost their lives. What is the ultimate gain then?

Jamshyd Jami Osman

We need to find the head of the hydra not just the pawns. They should have been taken alive.

Enamul Haque

Those killers were not human beings; they were monsters.

Shafiqul Islam

It is important that we remain even-handed and objective in addressing such issues. Otherwise, the real culprits will go undetected and unpunished.

# The post-crisis rumour mill

THE MIDDLE PATH



ADNAN R AMIN

**D**URING an unprecedented attack like the one at Holy Artisan Bakery, crisis management is of utmost priority. Looking back, security forces did well to set up cordons to keep at bay meddlesome reporters. The subsequent media blackout, though late, was a good call and could feature in a standard operating procedure. In comparison with regional incidents, commandoes acted with reasonable urgency. However, medical evacuation appeared poorly managed and if not for the proximity of United Hospital, more lives may have been lost.

Now, during a terrorist attack of this scale, crisis management means not only military and logistics, but also the communication/public opinion, aspect. Law enforcement agencies were active on social media, opening channels to crowdsourcing intelligence. This is how three terrorists were identified. Agencies also prevented "uploading, sharing, commenting or liking any video, images or speech in the social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in support of the Islamic State or militancy."

The telltale effects of misinformation linger. Over a week has elapsed, but debates still rage over response time, wasting of night cover, failure to stake out adjacent properties, apparent absence of snipers and overall role of counter-terrorism units. Of course, virtually no discussant has any knowledge of military tactics or hostage situations. But that's the curse/boon of the Wikipedia and social-media combo: everyone is an expert; every stooge with a smartphone has opinions of everything, has high regard for his own opinions and is therefore unable to stop sharing them.

Misinformation feeding the rumour mill has been coming from authorities and armchair experts alike. It started with the initial update that the rescue operation left five persons dead, while all others had been rescued. A CNN analyst, speaking live, was amazed by this feat. But awe was quickly crushed as reports of a gruesome massacre began to emerge from the bakery. Once the amateur video showed hostages being released, official claims about the operation garnered further criticism.

Authorities have insisted that the attackers were homegrown and members of JMB (not a new stance). But in the case of Holy, social media accounts released casualty figures and photos, in addition to tweeting the identity of some terrorists before it all became common knowledge. International security analysts opined that the scale and sophistication of the attacks suggested some level of guidance from international militant groups. The police, however, have time and again reiterated their claim of homegrown terror.

Just as social circles were identifying the terrorists from Amaq agency photos, authorities were disseminating a separate list of names: Akash, Bikash, Don, Badhon and Ripon. With at least three terrorists positively identified, the persistence of these names raised suspicion of political scapegoating. The police have recently argued

that they had been using 'code-names' used by terrorists.

After the horrific attack, some international organisations considered winding up operations in Bangladesh and countries issued travel warnings. International seminars and sporting tournaments were cancelled. Global news sites argued how Bangladesh should have seen the attack coming. They criticised narrowing discursive space and inadequate state response to targeted killings. But a week into the attack, State Minister for Foreign Affairs asserted to the press that the nation's image had not been tarnished in any way by the Gulshan attack.

Leaders and authorities are not setting the best example for reporters and analysts. Official stories keep on changing. This happened when the pizza chef was first touted as a terrorist and then stories of his involvement surfaced, leading to the admission that the

that the terrorists aimed only to kill all foreigners. But during the siege, one or two news outlets published a list of three demands, one involving the release of an incarcerated JMB leader. These reports seem to have disappeared now. But authorities should investigate which outlet(s) published the news, based on what source and to what end.

Small-time online news sites have been advancing all manners of misinformation and conspiracies. For example, one victim was widely touted as a terrorist, despite all evidence being to the contrary. The claims originated from a single, little known site. Another site is currently hypothesising that one of pictured attackers is still alive. The need for sensationalisation has led to unsubstantiated stories about the first responders and the secret videographer. One site has allegedly traced the money-trail back to opposition leaders. This



ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

hostage may have been killed by mistake. In latest developments, police has denied that they are holding any of the hostages for questioning. This comes after a former university teacher and a young student were thought to be remanded, since both are still missing despite being 'rescued' from the bakery. The development also calls to question the story about the sole terrorist captured alive.

Chaos in information management is being reflected downstream i.e. in media reporting and popular discourse. Because no protocol was agreed, the attackers have been variously labelled 'gunmen' or 'Jihadists'. No clear guidance was issued regarding the use of Amaq Agency photos of grinning terrorists or their carnage inside the bakery. Media must be provided with a protocol for using militant propaganda.

There are more serious concerns. It is widely held

unregulated rumour mill ultimately fans the confusion and serves militants' goals.

ISIS and its affiliates thrive on social media propagation. They employ HD quality productions, android apps and secret hashtags for communications. The Holy terrorists had ordered that the restaurant WiFi be turned on so that they could examine their social media impact and share photos of the carnage.

Faced with a media savvy enemy, Bangladesh's response must combine tactics and communications. This is a country where mobs readily believe that a criminal's face appeared on the moon. Therefore, online and offline, a war must be waged against misinformation and rumours. Otherwise, the chaos will be exploited by anti-social elements.

The writer is a strategy and communications consultant.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

## Revisiting the Iraq War

RICHARD N. HAASS

**S**EVEN years, 12 volumes of evidence, findings, and conclusions, and one executive summary later, the Report of the Iraq Inquiry, more commonly referred to as the Chilcot Report (after its chairman, Sir John Chilcot), is available for one and all to read. Few people will get through all of it; the executive summary alone (well over 100 pages) is so long that it calls for its own executive summary.

But it would be a shame if the Report were not widely read and, more important, studied, because it contains some useful insights into how diplomacy operates, how policy is made, and how decisions are taken. It also reminds us of the centrality of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003, and of the aftermath, for understanding today's Middle East.

A central theme of the Report is that the Iraq War did not have to happen, and certainly not when it did. The decision to go to war was partly based on faulty intelligence. Iraq constituted at most a gathering threat, not an imminent one. Alternatives to using military force – above all, strengthening Turkey's and Jordan's lackluster enforcement of and support for the UN sanctions designed to pressure Saddam Hussein – were barely explored. Diplomacy was rushed.

Making matters worse was that the war was undertaken without sufficient planning and preparation for what would come after. As the Report rightly points out, many in both the US and British governments predicted that chaos could emerge if Saddam's iron grip were removed. The decisions to disband the Iraqi army and to bar all members of Saddam's Ba'ath Party (rather than just a few of its leaders) from positions in the

successor government were huge mistakes. Iraq was not just a war of choice; it was an ill-advised and poorly executed policy.

Much of the Report focuses on British calculations and then-Prime Minister Tony Blair's support for US policy. The decision to associate the UK with the United States was a defensible strategic choice for a smaller country that derived much of its influence from the closeness of the bilateral relationship. Where the Blair government got it wrong was in not pressing for more influence over the policy in exchange for its support. George W. Bush's administration might well have rejected such efforts, but the British government could then have exercised the option of distancing itself from a policy that many believed was unlikely to succeed.

Many lessons should be taken from the Iraq War. One is that, because assumptions fundamentally affect what analysts tend to see when they look at intelligence, flawed assumptions can lead to dangerously flawed policies. Nearly everyone assumed that Saddam's non-compliance with United Nations inspectors stemmed from the fact that he was hiding weapons of mass destruction. In fact, he was hiding the fact he did not have such weapons.

Likewise, before they started the war, many policymakers believed that democracy would emerge quickly once Saddam was gone. Ensuring that such fundamental and consequential assumptions are tested by "red teams" – those not supporting the associated policy – should be standard operating procedure.

There is also the reality that removing governments, as difficult as that can be, is not nearly as difficult as creating the security that a new government needs to

consolidate its authority and earn legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Creating anything like a democracy in a society lacking many of its most basic prerequisites is a task of decades, not months.

The Report said little about the legacy of the Iraq War, but it is important to consider. First and foremost, the war disrupted the regional balance of power. No longer in a position to distract and balance Iran, Iraq instead came under

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Iranian influence. Iran was free not just to develop a meaningful nuclear program, but also to intervene directly and via proxies in several countries. Sectarian fighting poisoned relations between Sunnis and Shia throughout the region. The alienation felt by soldiers and officers of Saddam's disbanded army fueled Sunni insurgency and, ultimately, led to the rise of the so-called Islamic State.

The war had a profound effect not just

on Iraq and the Middle East, but also on the UK and the US. The British parliamentary vote in 2013 against participation in any military effort to penalize Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for defying explicit warnings not to use chemical weapons in his country's civil war was surely related to the view that military intervention in Iraq had been a mistake. It is also possible that some of the mistrust of elites that led a majority of voters to support "Brexit" stemmed from the Iraq War experience.

The Iraq War and its aftermath similarly affected the thinking of US President Barack Obama's administration, which had little appetite for new military ventures in the Middle East at a time when many Americans were suffering from "intervention fatigue."

The danger, of course, is that lessons can be overlearned. The lesson of the Iraq War should not be that all armed interventions in the Middle East or elsewhere are to be avoided, but rather that they must only be undertaken when they are the best available strategy and when the results are likely to justify the costs. Libya was a recent intervention that violated this principle; Syria has been even more costly, but in its case for what was not done.

The Iraq War was costly enough without people learning the wrong lessons from it. That would be the ultimate irony – and only add to the tragedy.

The writer is President of the Council on Foreign Relations, previously served as Director of Policy Planning for the US State Department (2001-2003), and was President George W. Bush's special envoy to Northern Ireland and Coordinator for the Future of Afghanistan. His forthcoming book is *A World in Disarray*. Copyright: Project Syndicate (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Families have an important role to play

According to reports, most of the terrorists of the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks were educated young men from well-off families who were missing for months. They were probably being brainwashed and trained inside the country by a terrorist organisation for these operations.

We fail to understand their families' role in their lives. What level of care, concern and persistence they put

behind their misguided children? What actions did they take when they went missing? Disowning their sons now seems to be a poor recompense to their souls which need to be searched in a more comprehensive and rational manner.

Bangladesh is fortunate to have a high level of youth population. But our society and families need to be aware of

any deviant behaviour and action by our youth and must develop systems and procedures to protect them from becoming terrorists. The authorities should take bold actions to support families and educational institutions to track the missing youth before it is too late.

Dr. A.T. Rafiqur Rahman  
New York, US

### Stop these monsters

- These attacks prove that terror can shriek anywhere, anytime. It is absolutely necessary that the nation is united in facing this challenge.
- But we do not see any unity among the political parties to fight terrorism. Despite the assurance from the government that the situation is under control, we feel threatened.
- Luthfe Ali, On e-mail