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Pakistani terrorism

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Speaking on terrorism, the National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon has disclosed in a recent seminar, "It has been brought home recently by what we learnt from Headley which confirms many things we knew before. And it is really the links between the official establishment and with existing intelligence agencies." As is to be expected the Pakistani spokesperson has totally denied the allegation and has termed it a "fabrication". US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has also told the press that details of Headley interrogation had been made available to Pakistani authorities though she did not go into details. Her charge is that in her belief some people in Pakistani officialdom should know where Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Omar were has also brought out a vigorous denial from Prime Minister Gilani who challenged that if anybody had any intelligence on it that should be made available to Pakistani authorities.

Our National Security Adviser and our Home Secretary are not the first to talk about the linkage between the Pakistani establishment (meaning the Army) and terrorism. This has been done earlier by the UN panel to investigate the circumstances of Benazir Bhutto's assassination. The panel concluded: Ms. Bhutto faced threats from a number of sources, these included al-Qaida, the Taliban, local jihadi groups and potentially from elements in the

Pakistani establishment.” But the Pakistani investigation after the assassination focused on pursuing "lower level operatives" and not those further up the hierarchy. The Pakistan's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence conducted parallel investigations, gathering evidence which was only selectively shared with the police. The failure of the police to investigate effectively Ms. Bhutto's assassination was deliberate. "These officials, in part fearing intelligence agencies' involvement, were unsure of how vigorously they ought to pursue actions, which they knew, as professionals, they should have taken.”

The commission urged Pakistani authorities to carry out a "serious, credible" criminal investigation that "determines who conceived, ordered and executed this heinous crime of historic proportions, and brings those responsible to justice". "Doing so would constitute a major step toward ending impunity for political crimes in this country," To address the broader issue of impunity for political crimes, the commission called for Pakistan to consider establishing a "fully independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate political killings, disappearances and terrorism in recent years" and provide victims with "material and moral reparations..... the autonomy, pervasive reach and clandestine role of intelligence agencies in Pakistani life underlie many of the problems, omissions and commissions set out in this report." The Commission urged the government to conduct a thorough review of intelligence agencies "based on international best practices" and reform the police to ensure "democratic policing" and protection of individual human rights.

Though the victim of the terror dealt with in the report of the UN panel was the most charismatic leader of the country - the Chairperson of the party now ruling and wife of the present president, Foreign Minister Qureshi of Pakistan wrote a letter to the UN Secretary-General finding fault with report of the panel. Qureshi took issue with repeated but proof-lacking finger-pointing at the role of Pakistani security agencies and the establishment. In

particular, the foreign minister said that comments and observations about the Pakistan Army, the Inter-Services Intelligence or the so-called establishment, were only the opinions of the members of the Commission. They did not represent authenticated determinations based on any fact or evidence. Qureshi added that the report had a serious flaw because the commission had failed to approach third states to provide some reliable information to unearth, if any, international linkages perpetrating, planning, financing or abetting the assassination of Benazir. In his response to Qureshi, UN Secretary-General Ban -Ki-moon said he fully backed the UN's three-man committee which probed the December 2007 murder, and that it carried out its work 'professionally'. The secretary general underlined that the commission, which was headed by Heraldo Munoz, Chile's former UN ambassador, conducted its inquiry under the terms of reference agreed to between the Pakistan government and the UN Secretariat and noted by the Security Council

This development highlights that the civilian Government in Pakistan is so much under the control of the army that it is compelled to disown the criticism of the army and the Inter-Services Intelligence even in respect of the murder of the ruling party's former chairman, the president's wife and the tallest leader of the country. It is somewhat ironic that Qureshi found fault with the UN panel for not getting reliable information from third countries. That is exactly what Headley's interrogation report provides. Yet Prime Minister Gilani does not find the evidence against the LeT chief Hafeez Saeed sufficient

In this context Nitin Pai of Takshasila Foundation has raised a very pertinent question. The Indian and even the US pressure on Pakistan is based on the assumption that Pakistani Army and the ISI are in a position to take action and suppress the Jehadi elements in that country. Nitin Pai questions whether this assumption is wholly valid. He argues that the Pakistani state and society simply do not have what it takes to dismantle, demobilise and de-radicalise the

hundreds of thousands of militants that operate in that country. In addition, we should also take into account the enormous suicide bomber arsenal Pakistani Army and ISI have permitted the Jehadi organizations to build and accumulate against which they have no adequate defence as was demonstrated in the attacks on the GHq near-by mosque, various Intelligence establishments and other defence installations .

The reluctance of the Pakistani Army to take action against Haqqani faction, LeT and other organizations may not be as the US intelligence maintains, because they constitute 'valuable' assets against India and other countries in the possible post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan scenario of which the Pakistan Army appears to have convinced itself. It may well be they are afraid of the consequences of such action. Reports from Pakistan speak of Army's campaigns in Swat and South Waziristan not having succeeded in eliminating the Taliban and their creeping back into the areas from which they were expelled. Haqqanii faction and LeT are capable of inflicting far more retaliatory damage on Pakistani Army and civil society than the Pakistani Taliban.

While this consideration should not come in the way of India continuing to maintain its communications with Islamabad through dialogues, there is a vital need to assess jointly with US authorities whether Pakistani Army has the will and capability to crush the Jehadis in their country and if they do not have, what effective counter-terrorism strategy the two countries should adopt to contain the terrorism emanating from Pakistan and simultaneously destroying that country?

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