



Americans to blame too

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India has celebrated the 60th anniversary of its independence. Sixty years is a long time in the life of a nation. On August 15, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru announced that India had "awakened to life and freedom". On the same day, Sri Aurobindo noted: "India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom". Sixty years later, the sub-continent is still 'fissured'. The state of Pakistan, born out of a false 'theory', was perhaps doomed, but the entire blame should not be placed on the successive Pakistani leadership alone. Their American sponsors are responsible for the sorry state of affairs in the region, including the current messy situation in Afghanistan.

In this context, it is worth noting the last paragraph of *The Kaoboy of R&AW: Down Memory Lane*, written by B Raman, who worked for 26 years in the Research & Analysis Wing. Raman writes, "An over-anxiety to protect Pakistan from the consequences of its misdeeds still continues to be the defining characteristic of policy-making in the State Department. I do not wish ill of the US, but I am convinced in my mind that if there is an act of terrorism in the US homeland involving the use of weapons of mass destruction one day, it would have originated from the Pakistani territory. Only then the eyes of the State Department would open fully."

Raman has a point. Just days after a CIA document described Pakistan's tribal areas as a safe haven for Al Qaeda terrorists, a

collection of 35 newly-declassified documents were published by the National Security Archive at George Washington University. These secret notes and cables demonstrate the US Administration's concern over Pakistan's close relationship with the Taliban during the seven-year period before 9/11, but at the same time prove the State Department's ostrich-like attitude.

Several interesting points need to be noted. First is the time-span of the documents. While the first document dates December 1994 during the Benazir Bhutto Government, the compilation continues through the Nawaz Sharif regime and ends with Gen Pervez Musharraf's coming to power.

The 1994 document complains that "the GoP (Government of Pakistan) and ISI are deeply involved in the Taliban takeover in Kandahar and Qalat", while the last one stresses that "direct Pakistani involvement in Taliban military operations has increased".

Reading the compilation, it is striking to see that Islamabad's policy towards Taliban and other terrorist outfits remains exactly the same through the three different administrations -- two elected and one self-appointed. In one of the documents, a politician close to Ms Bhutto (presumably the former Interior Minister Nasrullah Babar) complained to his US contact, "The Bhutto Government's efforts in regard to Afghanistan could be criticised on many fronts, but at least the policy was coherent - we tried to build the Taliban up and then tried to push them to negotiations (in October 1996) after they captured Kabul." Under the "Nawaz Sharif Government, there has never been a sustained effort to bring the factions to the bargaining table." Ms Bhutto's objective was to "moderate" the Taliban.

The US source continues: "The result is confusion as evidenced by the GoP's declaratory policy, which is in favour of negotiations, and a countervailing policy of ISI support for the Taliban."

Pakistan's oft-repeated dichotomy (the Government doing one thing and the ISI another) is not credible. An US Intelligence Information Report in October 1996 concluded that the ISI was much more involved with the Taliban than Pakistani officials were telling US diplomats. The question for the US officials was whether Pakistani officials were concealing information, or if the ISI had been keeping its support of the Taliban hidden, causing Pakistani diplomats to pass false information to the US. The latter scenario is doubtful. The CIA knew everything that was going on.

Through the compilation, the general mood about the Taliban in Pakistan (and the Americans believe them) was, "Do not worry, we can take care of them." For the unconvinced US officials, "Pakistan surely has some influence on the Taliban, but it falls short of being able to call the shots."

US Ambassador Thomas W Simons confirmed, "Pakistan has a 'privileged association' with the Taliban, but not control over them". The Ambassador advised, "Our good relations with Pakistan associate us willy-nilly, so we need to be extremely careful about Pakistani proposals that draw us even closer."

In a September 1998 document, it appears that the US refused to believe that Pakistan was putting pressure on the Taliban to force a surrender of Osama bin Laden. A report addressed to Ms Madeleine Albright points out, "Pakistan can do more, including cutting POL (Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants) supplies that mostly flow into Afghanistan from Pakistan."

It even thundered: "Continued Pakistani resistance and/or duplicity may lead the US to push... for the inclusion of India in the negotiations." But the Washington-Islamabad marriage went on, even though the honeymoon had ended. As late as September 2000, the US Department of State observed: "Islamabad may be allowing the Taliban to use territory in Pakistan for military operations... while Pakistani support for the Taliban has been long-standing, the magnitude of recent support is unprecedented." That support is still continuing.

In August 1996, the CIA mentions the link between the Taliban, bin Laden and Kashmiri militants. Though the four-page document is heavily excised, it explains that to avoid being placed on the list of terrorist states, Pakistan had to decrease its monetary support to Harakat-ul Ansar described by the CIA "as Islamic extremist organisation that Pakistan supports in its proxy war against Indian forces in Kashmir".

One remembers that some Americans and Britons had been kidnapped in November 1994 from Delhi in order to get Maulana Masood Azhar released. A year later Western tourists were kidnapped (and probably killed) by an Al-Faran group (another name for HuA). The CIA's concern was the increase of terrorist attacks against Western targets and civilians, but also the HuA efforts to find new sponsors such as bin Laden.

According to the newly-released document the ISI "provided at least \$ 30,000 - and possibly as much as \$ 60,000 - per month to the HuA". Ironically, "Anti- (Pakistan) Government sentiment among HuA leaders is already strong and could grow further", if Islamabad further isolates the group by decreasing support. An obvious terrorist blackmail!

Meanwhile, history is repeating itself. A CIA report released in July states: "Al Qaeda has protected or regenerated key elements of its attack capacity, including a safe haven in the Pakistan Administered Tribal Areas, operational lieutenants and its top leadership."