The Assault on Mumbai: India’s Leaders Need to Look Closer to Home


The terrorist assault on Mumbai’s five-star hotels was well planned, but did not require a great deal of logistic intelligence: all the targets were soft. The aim was to create mayhem by shining the spotlight on India and its problems and in that the terrorists were successful. The identity of the black-hooded group remains a mystery.

The Deccan Mujahedeen, which claimed the outrage in an e-mail press release, is certainly a new name probably chosen for this single act. But speculation is rife. A senior Indian naval officer has claimed that the attackers (who arrived in a ship, the M V Alpha) were linked to Somali pirates, implying that this was a revenge attack for the Indian Navy’s successful if bloody action against pirates in the Arabian Gulf that led to heavy casualties some weeks ago.

The Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has insisted that the terrorists were based outside the country. The Indian media has echoed this line of argument with Pakistan (via the Lashkar-e-Taiba) and al-Qaeda listed as the usual suspects.

But this is a meditated edifice of official India’s political imagination. Its function is to deny that the terrorists could be a homegrown variety, a product of the radicalization of young Indian Muslims who have finally given up on the indigenous political system. To accept this view would imply that the country’s political physicians need to heal themselves.

Al Qaeda, as the CIA recently made clear, is a group on the decline. It has never come close to repeating anything vaguely resembling the hits of 9/11.

Its principal leader Osama bin Laden may well be dead (he certainly did not make his trademark video intervention in this year’s Presidential election in the United States) and his deputy has fallen back on threats and bravado.

What of Pakistan? The country’s military is heavily involved in actions on its Northwest frontier where the spillage from the Afghan war has destabilized the region. The politicians currently in power are making repeated overtures to India. The Lashkar-e-Taiba, not usually shy of claiming its hits, has strongly denied any involvement with the Mumbai attacks.

Why should it be such a surprise if the perpetrators are themselves Indian Muslims? Its hardly a secret that there has been much anger within the poorest sections of the Muslim community against the systematic discrimination and acts of violence carried out against them of which the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in shining Gujarat was only the most blatant and the most investigated episode, supported by the Chief Minister of the State and the local state apparatuses.

Add to this the continuing sore of Kashmir which has for decades been treated as a colony by Indian troops with random arrests, torture and rape of Kashmiris an everyday occurrence. Conditions have been much worse than in Tibet, but have aroused little sympathy in the West where the defense of human rights is heavily instrumentalised.

Indian intelligence outfits are well aware of all this and they should not encourage the fantasies of their political leaders. Its best to come out and accept that there are severe problems inside the country. A billion Indians: 80 percent Hindus and 14 percent Muslims. A very large minority that cannot be ethnically
cleansed without provoking a wider conflict.

None of this justifies terrorism, but it should, at the very least, force India’s rulers to direct their gaze on their own country and the conditions that prevail. Economic disparities are profound. The absurd notion that the trickle-down effects of global capitalism would solve most problems can now be seen for what it always was: a fig leaf to conceal new modes of exploitation.

P.S.

* From Counterpunch:

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