

The Real Danger Subversion from Within

Since Black Tuesday the whole world has been glued to television, transfixed by the horror unfolding in front of their eyes, thanks to endless replays of the gruesome tragedy. The American response was even more fascinating. Initially there were signs of panic and confusion. Quickly they gave way to order, and a cold fury and cries for resolute action. Blind rage and demands for 'bombing Afghanistan to stone age' are replaced by more measured, calibrated responses. The system found effective direction and leadership. The investigative agencies quickly got into the act and are gathering and sifting mountains of evidence. The rescue and relief operations were orderly and meticulous. Instead of apportioning blame, the Congress and the president showed admirable unity of purpose. The flames of bigotry and prejudice against Islam are being doused by the appeals for calm, reason, understanding and tolerance. Justice and courage are the watchwords, not hatred and revenge. American society and institutions have once again demonstrated to the free world why that nation has become great. We should measure a nation's strength and greatness not by its vulnerability, but by its mature response.

Obviously the world has to brace itself for a prolonged and costly war against terrorism and its sponsor-states. It is a war like no other fought before. This war has to be extremely precise and must be well-targeted. Decimating civilian populations or propagation of hatred against Islam will be both inhuman and counterproductive. World opinion and modern civilization cannot and will not tolerate brutal killings of innocent people or religious persecution in modern-day crusades. At the same time the challenge of global terrorism has to be met squarely, and the agents of terror and merchants of death and devastation should be eliminated.

India has a lot at stake in this war. Over the past 20 years we have had more than our fair share of terrorism. The nation's unity came under severe strain. Our preservation of unity has been more due to the resilience of society and good sense of people than the strength of our state institutions and the quality of our leadership. The remarkable courage and tolerance displayed by the people of Mumbai in the wake of the blasts in March, 1993 were an astounding testimony to this innate strength of the people of all persuasions and creeds.

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The question now is, does the Indian state and its institutions have the strength and resilience to face the hard times ahead. Our parties are in disarray. All they are concerned about is to win elections by hook or crook, and for that purpose display brute force, and unbelievable money power in a poor country. Once in office, their sole obsession is to retain power at any cost, and plunder the exchequer and fleece the people.

Our investigative agencies have no capacity to bring terrorists to book. Political interference in crime investigation and abuse of police forces for private gain have enervated them. All they know is third degree and brutal torture. Our worst mafia dons and national enemies who find safe havens in hostile neighbouring countries are alleged to have business links with our leading politicians! Our healthcare system is in disrepair, and the educational infrastructure is in a state of collapse. The justice system is in shambles, and there is no realistic hope of dispute resolution through law courts, and no hope of justice to the victims of violent crime. There is a growing market for muscle men and mafia to provide rough and ready justice.

If we have to win the war against terrorism, the nation has to address these institutional maladies swiftly. There are practical, elegant, acceptable, democratic solutions to resolve many of our dilemmas. But the national leadership and the political class have for long exhibited an appalling propensity for status-quoism. Our economy is in difficulties, and we cannot give it a real and enduring boost without putting our state institutions in order. Already the gulf between China and India in economic terms is very wide, and the disparity is growing. Time is running out, and the rest of the world is not going to wait indefinitely for India set its house in order.

The critical challenge faced by our polity on account of increasing misgovernance resulting from legislators acting as disguised and unaccounted executives has to be addressed. Huge expenditure in elections, high monetary returns in politics, constant intervention of legislators in purely administrative decisions including transfers and postings, influence-peddling in contracts, tenders and even crime investigation, and undermining governments which refuse to yield to pressure have led to a vicious cycle of corruption and misgovernance. No wonder, a customs official could take a hefty bribe and allow RDx and other dangerous explosives to be

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imported to blast Bombay city. Our real dangers are not from external threats and global terrorism. India is subverted from within. Lack of direction and failure of institutions pose the greatest threats to our democracy. Political uncertainty, leadership vacuum, endemic corruption and administrative paralysis are eating into the vitals of our society. If peace, freedom and unity are to be preserved, we have to act fast. The people are ready for this real battle for rejuvenation of India. The elites of India dominating politics, bureaucracy, business and professions must summon the will and courage to face our challenges squarely.

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