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FBI in New Delhi

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Fri, 09/21/2012 - 07:31

Note No.36

[Some may have missed the Hindustan Times front page story by Jay Raina on 22 September 1999. It is reproduced at the end.]

The story is too brief and does not give much details, but it is probably due to the nature of the story. It may also be due to the fact that the country is in what is quaintly described as "election mode".

My first reaction is some concern at implied definitions of certain terms. For instance, "anti" in the title and "counter" in the story seem to be treated as synonymous and interchangeable; similar is the case with "terrorism" and "insurgency". "Anti", as used in anti-terrorism or anti-corruption, refers to steps taken by state authorities to combat the disruptive activities when such are already in motion. "Counter", as in counter-insurgency, counter-espionage or counter-intelligence, involves steps to prevent the concerned disruptive activity before it happens and to take the "anti" steps if it does.

"Insurgency" is normally a mass-based or at least mass-backed movement, in reaction to perceived specific grievances. We saw glimpses of it in Nagaland, Mizoram and Naxalbari. It may include terrorist acts against symbols of established authority and some high-profile individuals. On the other hand, "terrorism" is basically a cowardly act. Many innocent people and many infra-structural entities are the targets merely because they are there. Essentially, terrorism starts when the proponents cannot muster a mass base or mass support for their objectives and actions.

Osama Bin Laden is known more for his mercenary militancy than for insurgency or terrorism as such. He does not need a specific cause (other than furthering his brand of Islamic fundamentalism) or grievance to exercise his "skills". His disruptive activities are almost always trans-national and have no respect for accepted (or unaccepted) international borders. Bin Laden is

quite capable of biting the hand that feeds him if that is what he feels impelled to do. His activities would erupt into terrorism (as in the USA) only when he is unable to generate adequate local mass support for his "jihad". Osama Bin Laden and his ilk are called "international terrorists" and their disruptive activities termed as "international terrorism" for want of better descriptive terms.

International cooperation to meet challenges and threats from outfits like that of Osama Bin Laden is essential, as the source of threat does not respect national boundaries and is trans-national in its character and activities. Collaboration between countries which face a common threat is a natural defensive development. USA and India have been declared by Bin Laden to be targets of his "jihad". Lack of cooperation and collaboration between the security forces (charged with meeting the threat) in the two countries would be quite imprudent. It is therefore a good development if the two governments have agreed to set up a standing mechanism to engender such cooperation and collaboration; the shape, scope and extent of which should be carefully worked out in detail.

Raina's story mentions training to Indian security personnel in sophisticated counter-insurgency combat. I doubt if India needs the US Federal Bureau of Investigation to provide training in that specific area. There is enough expertise in our Army and the specialised National Security Guards to train state level personnel as required. It may, however, be worthwhile for our planners and trainers to be given further training and support in planning and setting up (including equipping) outfits like the US Delta Force and SWAT teams. This may not by itself require a permanent FBI presence in India.

Counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism, particularly to meet trans-national threats and challenges, would involve the infiltration of the terrorist outfits and the pooling of all available information about them – to devise coordinated counter-actions and responses. It would also be necessary to develop the capability to use such pooled information as evidence in cases to be tried in either country or even in an international tribunal. These can be achieved only through either a continuing presence in New Delhi of the FBI (or any other designated US authority) or a similar continuing Indian presence in Washington or both, established by legally acceptable agreements. The details would have to be discussed and outlined by the concerned organisations in the two governments at the working level. The Indian negotiators should ensure that the FBI office in New Delhi would not be permitted to raise sources amongst Indians and that the office would have no investigatory authority of its own on Indian territory.

The matter of cooperation and collaboration to meet the new international terrorist challenges and threats should not be made a political issue, however tempting it may be to do so. In such a matter of national security, it would be the responsibility of the government-of-the-day to share its information and concerns with major political parties (which are not part of the government) and to evolve a national consensus. The government should be able to ignore the time-honoured custom of classifying as "Secret" or "Top Secret" all information relating to national security and overcome the inhibition against sharing any such information with parties outside the government; especially so in our present "coalition mode" in politics.

There have been many precedents in international relations for such cooperation and collaboration to meet a common threat and for the establishment of "offices" of a security agency of one country in the territory of another country. The best known such instances would include the British Army of the Rhine, US bases abroad, the NATO and measures to counter the international trafficking in narcotics. More specific to India, concerned US security agencies had a continuing presence in India immediately after the Chinese incursions in the autumn of 1962 – to help establish, equip and train specialised agencies like the Aviation Research Centre, the Special Service Bureau, the Special Frontier Force and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. Much later, when there was a serious threat to the life of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and other Indian government leaders from misguided Sikh protagonists in India and abroad, the US Government accepted the regular presence in Washington of a senior Indian security official for liaison with the FBI, the US Secret Service and the Executive Protection Service. There is no loss of sovereignty or territorial integrity in accepting the presence of a foreign security establishment on our soil for the specific purpose of meeting an identified or perceived common challenge and threat – as long as the role of that "office" is clearly defined and circumscribed, is monitored for compliance and periodically reviewed for its usefulness to us.

(R.Swaminathan, ex-Special Secretary, Directorate General of Security, Govt of India)

{The Hindustan Times : Wednesday, September 22, 1999, New Delhi}

US offers anti-terrorist training : Jay Raina (New Delhi, September 21)

The US is understood to have offered to train Indian security personnel in sophisticated counter-insurgency combat following the open declaration of jihad against the two countries by internationally-wanted Islamic terrorist Osama bin Laden.

India would not be averse to acceding to the US's long-standing plea to have a permanent presence of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) in New Delhi. An agreement on these two crucial issues is reported to have been firmed up last week during US coordinator for counter-terrorism Michael A. Sheehan's visit here.

Sources said even as a broad agreement had been reached between the two countries to collaborate in meeting the challenge from terrorist outfits, a formal announcement was withheld following a request from India. Indian officials are reported to have requested the US to await the installation of a popular government after the completion of the ongoing LS elections.

The sources said that broader contours of the "collaboration" would be made public immediately after the new Government took over. "Whatever be the form of the new Government, clinching of a formal agreement between the two democratic countries would not pose problems in the light of a broad-based consensus among the various political parties in India over the issue," they averred.

India's readiness to permit the opening of FBI office in New Delhi follows the US's keen desire to evolve an international legal framework among the targeted countries to punish terrorists.

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