

## Mumbai Terror Attacks - Needed: a mature and wise response

*29 December, 2008 - Published in The Asian Age*

The Prime Minister's statement that nobody wants war, echoed by Pakistan's Prime Minister Gilani, has come not a day too soon. I have been aghast at the manner in which, over the last few weeks, a virtual war hysteria has been worked up, mainly through television news channels. Our media is certainly one of the most dynamic anywhere in the world, and we are proud of this, but in this particular instance our anchors, many of whom are personal friends, seem to be trying to outdo each other in war like programmes. One of the straw polls purported to show that 70 percent of Indians were in favour of war with Pakistan, while in others, various retired defense personnel have held forth upon the options before us and generally supported 'surgical strikes' which could well lead to an all out war.

Nothing can assuage the terrible trauma caused by the fidayeen attack in Mumbai which cost so many precious lives, Indian as well as foreign, and held the nation in horrifying thrall for three days. No words are too strong to condemn this gruesome attack and certainly we have every right to press that the perpetrators and planners of this event, all of whom undisputedly belong to Pakistan, should be brought to book. It is also true that Pakistan's attempt to deny any responsibility, direct or indirect, for the attack is disappointing and extremely irritating. This said, however, we need to maintain a sense of balance in our response. We should certainly try and mobilize international opinion in our favour, and the UN Resolution has been an important achievement in this regard. The United States, Great Britain, Russia and even China have supported us in our insistence that Pakistan must act to dismantle the terror groups function from its soil. However, talk of an all out war or for "surgical strikes" that could well spark of a massive conflagration, is unwise.

Do the people who talk of war have any idea of the sort of consequences that could flow from an all out conflict between two nuclear and missile armed countries? Do they have any idea of the unimaginable risks of such a conflict which could destroy large parts of both the countries, jeopardize millions of lives and destroy all our efforts for economic growth and poverty eradication? Does the chatterati in Delhi really grasp the outcome of what could result from an all out war between India and Pakistan? Regretfully, it seems to me that the answer to all these questions is in the negative.

The irony is that the terrorist infrastructure has become even more of a threat to Pakistan itself than to India. The situation in that country, particularly in Baluchistan and the Frontier Provinces is spinning out of control and the Taliban are threatening not only Kabul but also Peshawar. It is they, not India, who are threatening the sovereignty of Pakistan. In such a situation, one should hope that instead of a media war between us, Pakistan would take urgent and effective steps to rein in the terrorists operating from their soil. Without going into details, the UN Resolution specifically names four persons in Pakistan whom it holds responsible for the Mumbai terrorist attack. We should press that these four should be tried in the International Court of Justice in The Hague, so that the broader infrastructural details can be unraveled. If there is no response from Pakistan at all, we could consider a break of diplomatic relations and also some economic sanctions, but the loose talk of war going around needs to be firmly checked.

Finally, it needs to be restated that if India is to attain its full stature as a world power it will have to sort out its problems with its neighbours, particularly Pakistan. As I said in my intervention in the Rajya Sabha debate, the peace process should, under no circumstance, be jettisoned despite a serious set back. In the final analysis, the destiny of India and Pakistan remains intertwined, and it is only if we are able to build up a harmonious and mutually supportive relationship that both countries can hope to flourish in the years and decades ahead.

© Copyright 2008, Dr. Karan Singh