

INDIA AND THE STATUS QUO: KUMAR KETKAR

The American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is both incompetent and inefficient; alternatively, it has been in secret collaboration with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). There is no other explanation for their combined "intelligence failure" in pointing out the presence of America's most wanted quarry, Osama bin Laden, for six years in a bungalow at Abbottabad, just 60 km. from the capital city of Islamabad.

If one gives the Americans the benefit of the doubt (with regard to the CIA being hand-in-glove with the ISI), then it's clear that they are neither efficient nor competent. Abbottabad is not a small city; it's as big as say Aurangabad or Kolhapur, though not in terms of population (it is home to about 500,000 people), and is a city of the military elite. Yet, both agencies failed to locate him.

Therefore, if both the Pakistani army and its intelligence are inefficient, then the Americans are even worse because they have been trying to find Osama for ten years. Further, the American intelligence mechanism and its network in Pakistan are extremely weak, or they have been helping a section of the Pakistani ISI in keeping Osama there.

The consequences of the current situation (arising out of the killing of Osama bin Laden) are quite apparent. America will never give up its strategic alliance with Pakistan because it serves its interests. And any number of terrorist attacks on India will not move the Americans unless such attacks are directed at American interests, such as its consulates, establishments, MNCs or individuals.

In other words, the killing of Osama bin Laden is hardly likely to change the ground situation; the relations between India and Pakistan will remain the same as before, given the nuclear weapons parity between them. A crucial point to note is that though India has declared a policy of "No first use" of nuclear weapons, Pakistan has refused to do the same.

Mr. Kumar Ketkar, Chief Editor of *Divya Marathi*, belonging to the "Bhaskar" Group, who made the above points at the last meeting while speaking on "The end of Osama – Implications for India and relations

with Pakistan", made yet another pithy observation when he pointed out that even though Laden was not around, the innumerable "franchises" of his organisation, al-Qaeda, were unlikely to cease their operations.

"The world is in a dialectical fight between material growth on the one hand and, on the other, those who disdain material growth and want to create a world full of chaos and anarchy. It's progress versus anarchy, democracy versus fundamentalism, dialogue versus conflict. We have to be ready for conflict and simultaneously keep up the dialogue (with Pakistan); and that, perhaps, is our only option."

Mr. Ketkar, who was introduced by Dr. Aashish Contractor, has been a journalist for 40 years and has served as Chief Editor of *Maharashtra Times* and *Loksatta* (both leading Marathi dailies) and as Resident Editor of *The Daily Observer*. He was Special Correspondent of *The Economic Times* for 18 years and has covered six US Presidential elections.

Decorated with several awards, he was conferred the *Padma Shree* in 2001, the *Maharashtra Bhushan* in 2010, and the C.D. Deshmukh Award for Excellence in Economic and Financial Writing in 1999.

Aashish said that Mr. Ketkar had a reputation of being a fearless writer because of which he had experienced his own share of terrorism. In 2007, his house was attacked and he almost lost his life because he wrote against communal forces which were upset and tried to extract revenge.

"He has been a patient at the Asian Heart Institute for the last one year, ever since he underwent a bypass surgery. I have been seeing him at our cardiac rehabilitation centre and he has displayed great courage in his fight against heart disease, as he has done as a writer."

Mr. Ketkar started by pointing out that there had been only muted celebration at the killing of Osama (mainly in the print and electronic media) because most people were apprehensive about the likely backlash.

At the same time, there was an amazingly superficial discussion in which the proposition was that if America could do it, then why could



How did it happen? How did Osama bin Laden live just 60 km. from Pakistan's capital – and nobody knew about it? Mr. Kumar Ketkar, eminent journalist, speaks at the last meeting

India not do it (that is, infiltrate stealthily into Pakistan, kill Dawood Ibrahim, Hafiz Saeed and other wanted criminals and return before the Pakistani authorities were roused from their slumber)?

This was a naive and simplistic suggestion and the purported answer was also quite hilarious, viz., that India was too weak and too timid or not brave and strong enough to take such audacious measures.

Mr. Ketkar made a comparison between Dawood Ibrahim and Osama bin Laden. Dawood, the son of a policeman, was a petty criminal in Bombay in the 1980s. He was arrested in 1974 for picking pockets and no one had any idea that he would rise swiftly to become the leader of a gang involved in smuggling and other activities. But soon his crime syndicate extended all over India and Pakistan; he had gone underground to escape the long arm of the law.

Osama, on the other hand, was neither a criminal nor a smuggler. He was an affluent Saudi Arabian and related to the ruling family. His first rebellion was against his own people, thus marking him out as a maverick. But no one could say that he was a born terrorist.

He was not fighting to protect a criminal empire; he was not fighting for a particular country; he was not even fighting for the sake

of Islam because he did not enjoy the full support of the Shias; nor was he fighting for the Sunnis because all Sunnis were not supporting him (only a very small segment of the Sunni population in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and a few other countries supported him). Thus, Osama was not even a pan-Islamic leader.

As for the al-Qaeda, it was set up only in the late '80s. What were the circumstances that led to the birth of the al-Qaeda and the emergence of its hated leader, Osama?

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Forthcoming meetings

May 17, 2011

Public Holiday. There will be no meeting.

May 24, 2011

"The challenges we faced," a presentation by Mr. Dhruv Lakre who initiated a courier service for the hearing impaired.

May 31, 2011

Mr. Suresh Prabhu, former Union Minister, to speak on "How much growth can India's maximum city sustain?"

'It's not right to call someone a villain, destroy him and then say that everything is going to be fine'

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"I'm not saying Osama is a hero; but it's not correct to call someone a villain, to destroy him and then say that everything is hunky dory now and the world is going to be fine. We have to find out why he was created and who created him."

Mr. Ketkar said that apart from a handful of journalists and some political and foreign policy experts, no one had heard of Osama till September 11, 2001.

One day after 9/11, when the then US President, Mr. George Bush, made a globally televised speech, he named al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, as being behind the attacks on the World Trade Centre buildings and on the Pentagon; that was the first time that the world learnt that there was such a villain operating from somewhere.

The world also learnt that despite its huge intelligence network and its massive war machine, no one in America had ever visualised that a group of 19 completely unarmed people could throw dust in the eyes of the security and surveillance at four different airports, hijack four planes and commandeer them in different directions. And that two of those planes would be used to conduct "precision bombing" of the WTC towers and one made to crash on the Pentagon.

Had the fourth plane not gone down in Pittsburgh after a mid-air scuffle between the hijackers and passengers, it would most probably have crashed over the White House or Capitol Hill.

Recalling that he was watching Peter Jennings (who died recently of cancer) reading the news on ABC at 8.45 that morning, Mr. Ketkar said he had shouted, "My God! A plane has crashed into the World Trade Centre building!" Jennings could see it from his window. For the first few minutes most people believed that it was an accident (an accident that was waiting to happen, given the low altitudes of tourist planes in New York City).

"But within 45 minutes a second plane started going towards the second WTC tower – and by that time word had come that four planes had been hijacked and that perhaps (the first plane that had crashed into the WTC) was a terrorist attack.

"Within 20 minutes, the possibility of a terrorist attack was identified and before anybody could see (or do anything), the second tower was also attacked; this clearly proved that there was a plan behind it... About 28 minutes later, the world came to know
May 17 to May 23, 2011

that even the Pentagon was attacked. And the whole world felt terrorised even though the attack was only on America.

"Why was the whole world terrorised? There were many terrorist attacks in Bombay and all over the world before 9/11. Why did nobody think the world was unsafe till 9/11? That was because nobody had imagined that something like that would happen on the soil of America. America had never before experienced war on its soil. Even the Pearl Harbour attack of 1941 was outside mainland America. The Second World War was fought in Europe and other parts of the world. No war had taken place on American soil."

Mr. Ketkar pointed out that the first war on American soil was launched not by an army, navy or air force, not even by guerrillas, but with American planes hijacked from American airports, breaking American security and intelligence systems and entering American towers and establishments – the symbols of American wealth (the WTC towers) and of American military power (the Pentagon).

The 19 people who had hijacked the planes were suicide bombers who were killed in the operation. There was no one left to reveal the story of how they had carried out their strike. Interestingly, none of them belonged to Afghanistan or Iraq. They belonged to Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan and Yemen.

Yet, when Mr. Bush spoke the next day and named the al-Qaeda and Osama, he spoke of Afghanistan and Iraq and said that Iraq's Saddam Hussein was the main terrorist who had to be silenced.

That marked the beginning of the second Gulf war in 2001.

The first Gulf war took place in 1991 when Saddam Hussein had attacked and captured Kuwait; in turn,

the senior George Bush had attacked and defeated Iraq and liberated Kuwait. Exactly ten years later, when the junior George Bush announced that Saddam was behind the 9/11 attacks, the world believed him, assuming that Afghanistan and Iraq could have done it to avenge their defeat in the first Gulf war of 1991.

"And so all the theories of weapons of mass destruction were invented; the UN did not vote for it, but the US said it had identified the enemy; it attacked Saddam, managed to capture him after a few years and hanged him – all in the name of restoring democracy and destroying the weapons of mass destruction which were never found. But democracy is still not restored in Iraq and Afghanistan still continues to be rocked."

Having touched on the two Gulf wars of 1991 and 2001, Mr. Ketkar went back in time to explain the rise of "fundamentalism" and "terrorism".

No one had heard those expressions till 1979. But when Ayatollah Khomeini took over in March of that year from the Shah of Iran, who was seen as an "American stooge", the word "fundamentalism" was first heard as a threat.

A few months later, the then Soviet Union, which was "the real antidote to American power", invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet Union was a superpower and was said to have more nuclear bombs and missiles than America, the other superpower.

When Afghanistan was partly taken over by Soviet forces, America realised that it was going to lose another phase of the Cold War. It had lost the first phase in 1974-75 when Vietnam had defeated it after 13 years of war and its forces had had to run away. It was the most humiliating defeat that the Americans had suffered.

Four years later, when Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviets, Ameri-

can scholars, pundits and media started asking questions. They said the world seemed to be under the control of Communism; not only had Communist forces in Vietnam defeated America, their forces had now entered Afghanistan. If South Asia went the same way as Vietnam, where would that leave America?

Internally, America was undergoing tremendous tension. In 1974, the year in which Vietnam was liberated, Richard Nixon became the first President of the United States who had to resign or face impeachment. Soon after the loss in Vietnam and news of the march of Communism, came the 1979 war between Iran and Iraq.

In the same year, by sheer coincidence, occurred the hanging of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto by the then Pakistani President, Gen. Zia ul-Haq, and complete domination of the military over Pakistan.

Stating that all these diverse developments appeared to be interlinked, Mr. Ketkar said perhaps it was the Americans who had helped Zia ul-Haq consolidate his hold over Pakistan, because they then sought his help to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

By then the Americans had realised that it was not possible to defeat Soviet forces conventionally as they had attempted in Vietnam. There had to be a "local" fight. Just as it was the native Vietnamese who had fought the American forces, the Americans would have to create their own Vietcong and raise their own local Afghan people to fight the Soviet forces.

"That's how the Americans, through Pakistan, created the force called *Mujahideens*. The leader of those *Mujahideens* was Osama bin Laden. He was helped with arms, with ideology and with dollars by the United States to defeat the Soviet forces, to defeat Communism in South Asia.

"At that time, Osama was the darling of the United States. By 1989 they saw that the Soviet forces were being defeated and were going to withdraw. The Afghan forces won.

"But who actually won? It was Muslim 'fundamentalism', promoted by the Americans out of their self-interest to defeat Communism, that won. The Americans were not interested in promoting Islam; they were only interested in defeating Soviet Communism."

Just as America was weak between 1974 and 1979, the Soviet Union was also weak between 1987 and 1989. The defeat in Afghanistan and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 made the Soviet Union extremely shaky.

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It will be foolish if India attempts a copy-cat operation to try and take out Dawood Ibrahim and other wanted criminals. Mr. Kumar Ketkar is greeted by Programme Chairperson Dolly Thakore, President Pradeep Saxena and Director Shailesh Haribhakti

The USA's role in turning Pakistan into an anarchic society with unlimited arms and money

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"And suddenly we found that both the superpowers, despite appearing strong globally, were actually very weak."

Mr. Ketkar said that once the Soviet forces were defeated, American aid, which was primarily meant for that purpose, was stopped. All the *Mujahideens*, the terrorist groups that had been created to defeat the Soviets, were suddenly orphaned, left without money, political support and the "blessings" of the United States.

It was at that time that people like Osama felt that they had to establish their own Islamic identity. They had found the Russians to be enemies; they had thought that the Americans were friends; but even they had become enemies. Therefore, the time had come to defeat the entire "Western ideology".

Turning to India, Mr. Ketkar said that this country was not on anyone's radar. Till 1988-89, Kashmir was a tourist haven for the Indian middle-class.

But the international scenario started changing around that time. The Iran-Iraq war, in which America had helped Saddam Hussein defeat Iran, ended in 1989. Soon after came the total collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of Mikhail Gorbachev from the political scene – and the feeling grew in the United States that it was the only world power.

It was in the same year, 1991, when the Soviet Union disintegrated and America declared itself as the only world power, that liberalisation was started in India and the Sensex started rising. The Indian economy was in crisis in 1991-92 till Dr. Manmohan Singh arrived on the scene and liberalised the economy. The middle class, industry and the liberalisers, especially the media, welcomed America as the only superpower which stood for a free market and democracy.

For ten years between 1991 and 2001, when 9/11 occurred, the bubble of American supremacy prevailed, with nobody challenging it. Till suddenly it found that it was quite weak before just 19 terrorists who bombed their towers with their (American) planes.

"This, in short, is how Osama grew. Osama would not have grown had Soviet forces not entered Afghanistan; and that would not have happened had the Cold War not occurred; thus, Osama was a product of the Cold War.

"In the first phase of the Cold War, the enemies were the United States and the Soviet Union. In the second May 17 to May 23, 2011

phase, it was the United States versus the so-called ("fundamentalist") Islam, the forces created by the US to fight the Soviet Union. And now we have this strange Cold War in which even the Islamic countries are not united and are also threatened."

Mr. Ketkar said that while talking about the events of 26/11 in Bombay when about 189 people had died, it was worth remembering that ten times that number had died in terrorist attacks in Pakistan since then. Super bazaars, shopping malls, schools and hospitals were bombed and even President Asif Ali Zardari was lucky that he survived the bomb attack on Hotel Marriott because he had left just before the blast.

More people had died in terrorist attacks in Pakistan than in India. Thus, it was not as if Pakistan was free of terrorist attacks.

But Pakistan was a completely ungovernable and non-governing country where the state had withered away. There was no control, no integration of powers, no civil society, nothing.

America had played a major role in turning that country into an anarchic society by financing and supplying arms to the Pakistani army to fight the Soviet forces from 1979. And when America attacked Afghanistan in October, 2001, it once again had to take the help of Pakistan to move its forces, agents and equipment, its war machine, into Afghanistan. Thus, Pakistan was an ally not out of choice but by compulsion.

Majority American opinion was against friendship with Pakistan, but the US State Department felt that its global strategy depended on Pakistan's geographical location. It had China on one side, Afghanistan on another and India on the third. America needed Pakistan to keep a watch on China. America also needed Pakistan to keep the route open for ingress into Afghanistan.

America didn't trust India and despite liberalisation a majority of Indians also didn't trust America; of course, most of the middle class dreamt of migrating to that country. But so far as American foreign policy, American values and American culture were concerned, even those Indians who were settled in the USA opposed them.

"Indians have a very schizophrenic approach towards America and Americans also have a similarly schizophrenic response to Indians; therefore, they, too, don't trust India too much."

In the same way, a majority of Pakistanis also dreamt of settling

down in America but were against the Americans because they felt that they were victims of American shenanigans. They were offended by the curbs on their entry into that country. They were also upset by the fact that Indians with their software and other skills were welcomed and accepted in the USA.

Returning to his theme, Mr. Ketkar said the question was being asked, how come Pakistani intelligence, the Pakistani army and Pakistani society did not know that Osama had lived so close to a military academy in Abbottabad for many years?

But he would ask the same question of the CIA. How come the CIA did not know of his hideout for seven years? If he was supposed to believe that it did not know, then he would have to conclude that the CIA was inefficient and incompetent.

(It was at this stage that Mr. Ketkar made the comments that have been reproduced at the beginning of this report.)

As for all the brave talk about India attacking the so-called terrorist training camps in Pakistan, it was possible that such an attack would boost the country's self-confidence, but it could also prove to be counter-productive. In case of an all-out war, everything that India had achieved, 8

to 9% growth in GDP, the surge in new jobs, a huge middle class of 35 crores, all of it would go for a toss.

"The avoidance of conflict is necessary but it is not necessarily inevitable. It will have to be a consciously planned decision. The natural consequence of Osama's death will be that all those al-Qaeda groups who feel humiliated by his death and who feel that India's joy and pleasure at Osama's death is actually an insult to them, will attempt some kind of attack somewhere.

"Those groups that were operating completely autonomously for the last six or seven years... they will continue their activities. (We can say that) al-Qaeda has adopted a new kind of franchisee system, perhaps from American multinational companies. If there are regular MNCs doing products and services, there are other MNCs called 'terrorist groups' who have also given their franchises," Mr. Ketkar added.

When the floor was thrown open for questions, PDG Manibhai Doshi asked whether the solution to the problem was a direct attack on Pakistan.

Mr. Ketkar said there was no escaping the fact that India was sandwiched between Pakistan and the USA.

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'The killing of Osama could be the beginning of a new era... of peace'

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But it had only two options: Either to go to war or to engage in dialogue with Pakistan.

In case of war, India had to remember that Pakistan had not committed itself to the policy of "No first use" of nuclear weapons as India had done. Therefore, if Pakistan used a nuclear bomb first, India would have to respond and a full-scale nuclear war would ensue. America wouldn't care, Europe wouldn't bother and the two countries would destroy each other.

The victims of such a war would not be terrorists or communalists; they would be the ordinary, peace-loving people on both sides.

The option of war was open till 1998 when the two countries attained nuclear parity and due to which the entire game had changed.

As for dialogue, it was possible that even as talks went on there would be low-intensity conflicts and terrorists attacks. But then even America had not been able to protect itself from terrorist attacks, nor had England, Spain and Indonesia.

"It is not as if India is weak vis-a-vis terrorism, the whole world is weak vis-a-vis terrorism because terrorism is not defending any country, and it is not even defending faith in the real sense because all people of that faith are not necessarily supporting terrorism.

"But if it is not defending faith, if it is not defending a country, then what is it defending? And what are the terrorists ready to die for?"

"Similar steps were taken by Prabhakaran in Sri Lanka. He also had suicide bombers, he also killed about 34,000 people and Rajiv Gandhi. It's possible that when the head of such a force dies, the organisation becomes weak. We can only hope that they become weak even if they have been able to franchise some of their terrorist activities."

Mr. Ketkar said that with the killing of Osama the beginning of a new era seemed possible. But it would take many years, perhaps a decade, before the dust finally settled and the world became free of terror.

However, he did not believe that terrorism would end till such time as the problem of Israel and Palestine was resolved. The majority of Arabs supported al-Qaeda with a view to liberate Palestine which had nothing to do with Kashmir, Pakistan, India or nuclear bombs. But so long as the Palestine issue remained and Israel's approach towards Palestine was hawkish, the world was not going to be safe.

When (Dr.) Saryu Doshi wondered whether President Obama had timed the attack (on Osama) keeping next year's elections in mind, Mr. Ketkar recalled that when the senior George Bush attacked Iraq in 1991 and won the war over Kuwait, he had lost the next elections in 1992.

It was during his term that the Soviet Union had disintegrated, the Berlin Wall had fallen and the Cold War ended. He was the darling of the so-called free world and yet had lost to Bill Clinton. "I don't think you can win elections with such acts."

Burjor Poonawala asked whether India needed to be more wary of Pakistan, of China, or both.

Mr. Ketkar said there was no need for India to worry about China. There could be some minor scuffles on Arunachal Pradesh and so on, but China did not harbour any jealousy towards India.

But Pakistan seemed unhappy that although both countries became independent on the same day, India had marched far ahead. During the 63 years that India had been a democracy, for 45 to 50 of those years Pakistan was a military dictatorship.

Pakistan's economy had not been growing and there was far more poverty in that country.

"Pakistan is our enemy because the Pakistani state considers India as its enemy, the Pakistani people don't.

"The Chinese state and people want to become a world economic power by 2020 and don't want war to take them a few years back. China is not interested in war. But Pakistan's interest is to have conflict so that it stalls our growth and brings down our growth to their level, which is low growth. China is much ahead of us in every respect," Mr. Ketkar concluded.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Nandan Maluste.

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May 17



Partha Ghosh
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