

## **MYTHS & REALITIES OF SEPTEMBER 11**

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'The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated of dead and living. Not the intense moment. Isolated, with no before and after ....

Burnt Norton by T.S.Eliot.

This paper aims at best to search for alternatives against the conventional morality and perceptions. With the basic premise of Sept. 11 being a turning point in human history for demystifying inherent shortcomings and failings in hyper power perceive the emergent contours of dialectics of self appraisal, introspection and dissociation from the preconceived and the predetermined. The attack on the huge twin towers at World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon near Washington D.C. sledged at the symbols of American dream - urbanism, modernism, affluence and invulnerability. More Americans died on September 11, than died in any single battle in US history.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time in the modern history since that US becomes the target of a foreign attack on home soil. The weapons used in the attack was unconventional and menacing - passenger aircraft manned by suicide bombers. The victims were of different nationalities and thus not all of them were American.

The shock and grief of American echoed throughout the world due to the sheer magnitude of the happening. The world expressed solidarity and condolence to the government and people of United States. In the United, President's wartime strategy of waging a War against Terrorism" was fully supported within twenty four hours of

terrorist attacks. The UN General Assembly and Security Council adopted two resolutions unanimously condemning the barbaric act, and voting to support the actions that would bring them to justice.<sup>2</sup> The international conception of terror attacks initially echoed State Departments stance that terrorist activities were carried out by those who hated American because they hated 'freedom of religion, speech, popularly elected democracies and right to dissent.'<sup>3</sup> This view interestingly mirrors the traditional concept of terrorist before Sept. 11, which believed that terrorism occurs "at most exclusively in democratic or relatively democratic societies in an attempt to destabilize them"<sup>4</sup> contradictions persisted. While initial reaction of the world was of grief and sympathy, voices of dissent expressed misgivings about 'War against Terror'. A Nigerian columnist captured the essence when he work, "For the citizens of much of Africa, Asia the Middle East and Latin America, Sept. 11 represented pretty little change in their lives. (They remain) nasty, brutish and short..... Thanks in no small measure ... to US government's record of commitment and support to military and economic terrorism ... and unimaginable genocide".<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, the people of United States also expressed concern about the beating drums of war<sup>6</sup>, thus ironically echoing the feelings of people all over the world. The decision between the world opinion and the official policies of United States was further highlighted by the coming in action of Bush doctrine of 'pre-emption'. The pre emptive war<sup>7</sup> against Afghanistan and Iraq further polarized the world and triggered a debate on terrorism and the means to fight it. The debate in a post Sept 11. world seemed to be influenced by the dynamics of the contrapuntal, the ideological balkanization - East vs. West, Islam vs. Christianity, West vs. the rest, Unilateralism vs. multilateralism, conformism vs. dissent, good vs. bad, freedom vs. fear - list could go for eternity. Yet, despite the

feeling of inhabiting a flophouse of postdated ideas (that sadly persist since times immemorial), Sept. 11 managed to leave a tender after glow of skepticism and remorse. In the wake of unimaginable terror of 9-11 and post 9-11 events, the cost of human suffering on both sides evoked the question of ideological pre conceptions and policy imperatives superior than human life - while the need of the world is a candid reappraisal of the justification of a blind terror attack and the myopic and jingoistic reaction of the world's sole hyper power, the unfolding events seem beyond our grasp. The stakes are high the events spinning out of control, yet it is imperative to not let the debate flounder in the quick sands of time.

The crux of the discussion revolves around the conclusion that while there appear to be no change in the conception of terrorism before and after Sept. 11, the war tones like almost tunes playing with persistence after Sept. 11 too in US policy imperatives, the world has matured precociously after Sept. 11. The foot fall of Sept. 11 will be heard for a long time especially in United States and the Muslims world, notably Pakistan. While United States reeled from the inexplicable brutality of Sept. 11, Pakistan had to strike a precarious balance between providing assistance in bombing a Muslim country while pursuing its defense imperatives and national interest. Pakistanis also had to make peace with the realities of aberrant patterns made prominent by the links of extremist jihadis in Pakistan to Al-Qaeda and other organizations.

In this frame of reference the writers aim at presenting an analysis on the implications of Sept. 11 for United States and Pakistan.

## **PRE AND POST SEPTEMBER 11 - SHATTERING OF OLD PERCEPTIONS**

The concept of terrorism has been synonymous with civilization. As early as the First Century the Jewish Sicarii and Zealot movements employed it against Romans. The Assassins in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries is another example. Later examples include 19<sup>th</sup> century European Anarchy and Revolutionaries, Ku Klux Klan in US, terrorist activity in Latin America following Cuban Revolution and Palestinian movements in middle-east.

Yet endless debate over terrorism and its dynamics has failed to reach a consensus on definition of terrorism, not even in the United Nations.<sup>9</sup>

However common ground has been reached as a consequence of research on terrorism the phenomena, motivations and modus operandi. The emergent contours of the phenomena are as follows:

1. The problem of value-neutrality in defining terrorism as terrorism by one group may be variously regarded as heroism, foreign policy or justice by other. Hence the term cannot be used as a behavioral description.<sup>10</sup>
2. Systematic use of murder and destruction and threat of murder and destruction in order to terrorize individuals, groups, communities or governments into conceding to terrorists' political demands.<sup>11</sup>
3. The impact of terrorism is more psychological than physical. The psychological impact of terrorism with its unpredictability and violation of civilized norms, on general public and through it on government leaders has been strong enough to initiate policy approaches to solve it.<sup>12</sup>

Cast in another light, terrorist can be the 'unwitting agents'<sup>13</sup> providing justification and opportunity for increased sphere of influence of governments and security forces.

4. Terrorists seek publicity in order to provide exposure to their acts as well as a desire to be heard. The impact of terrorism thus "extends for beyond the immediate victims and the moment"<sup>14</sup>.
5. Terrorist violence has following characteristics.<sup>15</sup>
  - a. It is inherently indiscriminate in its efforts.
  - b. It is essentially arbitrary and unpredictable both in minds of victims and audiences and thus upon individuals and society.
  - c. Terrorism exhibits denial of all rules and conventions of war.
6. Terrorism produces chaos, is feared and hated. So while to some it may appear as objective driven or a reaction to repression and marginalization, it has a limited following.

A deeper probe in the history of terrorism and the perpetual debate about the phenomena helps deconstruct the puzzle. Two schools thought with diametrically opposed views have always existed. One school of thought presents terrorism as a tight construct of "mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive characteristics"<sup>16</sup> and can be termed as the Traditional school of thought. The other school of thought dissenting in nature essentially views Terrorism as a backlash, the voice yearning to be heard.<sup>17</sup>

The Traditionalists essentially treat Terrorism as phenomena in itself lacking any serious motivations, be they political religious or social. So in essence, Terrorism represents aberrance that must be curbed, but not probed into. A leading intellectual, Eqbal Ahmad called it "suspension of any inquiry into causation"<sup>18</sup>. Even the



proponents of this paradigm accept the fact that most definitions of Terrorism tend to be generic, "mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive characteristics."<sup>19</sup> The dissidents challenge the view of restricting the concept of terrorism on ideological grounds to "retail violence of those who oppose established order"<sup>20</sup> and confining it to being "just a bad crime"<sup>21</sup>.

Traditionalists portray Terrorism as a threat mainly to democracies of Western Europe where both formal recognition and implementation of human rights are inherent features<sup>22</sup>. USA, the symbol of capitalist imperialism, freedom and democracy is a target of terrorist while terrorist activities occur almost exclusively in democratic or relatively democratic societies<sup>23</sup>.

The dissidents poke holes in the theory by citing support of one or the other super-powers (during Cold War) to repressive regions in Indonesia, Zaire, Iran, South Korea and elsewhere that committed terrorist violence on large scale<sup>24</sup>. To the argument that US and other countries have sought to expand both domestic and international legal sanctions against terrorist acts<sup>25</sup>, dissidents quote US policies in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Latin America and Middle East<sup>26</sup>. The main contention is that while one school of the thought portrays US as a victim, the other holds US responsible for repressive measures and manipulation for protection of its agenda of world supremacy.

Another interesting fact of the debate is the conflict over the psychology of Terror. Traditionalists represent terrorists as mad man, driven by pathological aberrations<sup>27</sup>, traditionally belonging to "strong quasi-religious, fanatical elements" that provide justification for tacking lives<sup>28</sup>. The views of dissidents are best illustrated in the words of Friedrich Hacker who wrote

"...this psychologizing of the problem produces an immunization strategy. By making the accusation of mental illness stick, everyone else is acquitted of guilt or participation. The social, legal economic and other bases of all these movements need no longer be considered"<sup>29</sup>. This debate between these two schools of thought culminated into balkanization of a deeper kind, with ramifications of inter-social and intercultural dialectics after the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

### **PATTERNS OF CONTRADICTION - SEPTEMBER 11, THE TRAGEDY**

'As the smoke was swallowing Manhattan and the buildings fell and the terror spread into the further estrecesses of you land and your hearts, my hopes for you America. A chance to grow America that was my hope.

Dust and Ashes and the memory of the twin towers were all that remained after the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001. The world's hyper power had been challenged on home soil by an act that defied imagination of the real - more that 6000 lost their lives, not all of them American.

The symbol of the American dream was replaced by the fear of the unknown. Yet Sept. 11, would remain as one of those rare moments in history that challenged established norms and order while un-advertently helping the states to enlarge their sphere of influence.

In its aftermath, Sept. 11, has left us to introspect deeply and attain self-knowledge even it means breaking away from traditional morality.

The quintessential response to Sept. 11, echoed perceptions regarding the attack on World Trade Centre as being the ultimate fight of good and evil, "backwardness vs.

Modernity"<sup>30</sup> and an attack on "freedom itself"<sup>31</sup>. However, it prodded Americans to analyze the root cause of anger of rest of the world against America which is a resultant of "policies of successive US governments that are so hated"<sup>32</sup> of US obstructing freedom and democracy<sup>33</sup> by supporting despotic regimes for its own interests. Some have pointed to the "rage at the persistent asymmetry of suffering"<sup>34</sup> of guns now being pointed the other way<sup>35</sup>.

Yet paradoxes remain the leading attribute of the post 9-11 world. Official versions have swung from "Terror attack" to "America Fights Back" to "Operation Enduring Freedom", from "Crusade" to "Counter-terrorism". The chief aim appears to be anticipation of enemy punishing the terrorists but strangely not bringing them to trial to probe into the justification of acts of terrorism.

The differing views persisted in claiming veracity of their perceptions regarding the causes of Sept. 11 acts of terror, attributing it to US policies and interventions in other countries. Thus an emergent polarization of views inhabited the fabric of a post Sept. 11 world.

Strangely enough, the even evocative of globalize terror and sufferance quintessentially provoked a reappraisal of two concepts that formed the backdrop of Sept 11, itself: Islam versus the west and unilateralism and self-appraisal has led to insight by examining the concepts on subterranean levels too, the general trend has restricted to polemical beliefs, sweeping generalizations turning the tables on the people while enhancing states spheres of influence at the same time.

## **ISLAM VS THE WEST**

The debate of Islam versus the West is not new and the misconceptions prejudices and polemical arguments have



been a recurrent pattern in both sides' perceptions. While the west often perceived Islam as a threat or equaled Islamic world with "Catchwords the 'militant Islam', 'Islamic fundamentalism' and 'terrorism'"<sup>36</sup>, the Muslim world also identified the west with the Western threat of "Political and religiocultural imperialism, a political occupation accompanied by cultural invasion"<sup>37</sup>.

Yet, these are tunnel visions of superficial nature and fallacious errors of treating Islam and West as monolithic forces bereft of rich cultural traditions and history. Interestingly, the specter of Islamic revivalism and extremism in Middle Eastern countries and notably in Pakistan and Afghanistan in South Asia have been fuelled by neo-imperialist policies of the west, particularly United States. Much to the discomfort of the general public in these Muslim countries, the clergy has emerged as a force, either as a reaction or consequence of opportunistic policies wielded by the free world.

This conflictual stake of Islam and West that was a murmurous turn in a pre 9-11 world took an ugly turn after 9-11. Francis Fukayama expressed a myopic vision of the threat of Islamic radicalism and its "hate" for the West's dedication to "religious tolerance and pluralism"<sup>38</sup> to forming the backdrop of grievances of Muslims in general and the struggle between west and the rest. However moderates also persisted by presenting alternatives of dissociating the religions from terrorism that represented forces of "dis-integral tribalism and reactionary fundamentalism"<sup>39</sup>.

Yet while Huntington's overrated thesis of clash of civilizations was proved wrong by the support of Muslim countries of the 'War against Terror' against fellow brethren of Afghanistan - a direct refutation of 'kin country syndrome'<sup>40</sup>, Muslims all over the world were haunted by

the unspoken world.

American Muslims faced direct insults, ostracism and implicit jibes about fanaticism, extremism and religious bigotry. Muslim all over felt the need to exonerate their faith from stereotyping of religious fundamentalism. The basic paradigm of West versus the Rest persisted often insidiously and implicitly in discussion since September 11.<sup>41</sup>

The state of affairs had been muddled further by the chaotic rush of media in void created by the fall of twin towers. There was no "detached point of observations"<sup>42</sup>, no serious attempt to "transform these images of honor into responsible discourses of reflection and action"<sup>43</sup>. The American society's myth of invulnerability was not only broken, the blame game kicked in by perpetually senseless stream of images and commentary of the media "immersing the views in a 24/7 cycle of tragic images of destructions and loss"<sup>44</sup> provide the enemy - Muslims.

While the American society convalesced to normalcy after 9-11, the conflict of Islam versus the West had been given new lease of life. The recourse to deeper analysis in causes and motivations of alienation, anti-American (not the way of life, but certain American policies) and a general feeling of discontent of not being understood - was again trivialized into pointless subtleties of intellectual debate on Islam opposed to West.

#### **THE REALIST APPROACH: MULTILATERALISM VS UNILATERALISM**

Idealism is dead. The dynamics of International Relations exhibit cold pragmatism - norms, beliefs, cultural heritage and values are treated in a parcelized manner. Ethics are

drawn in sands of time by those powers that wiled supremacy, or so it seems. What may be right today may be fallacious tomorrow.

The bearded men from Afghanistan were "moral equivalents of America's founding fathers"<sup>45</sup> for Reager administration. In the wake of Sept 11, they turned into deranged terrorists representing the forces of darks, perpetrating an act incomprehensibly gruesome and blind. Now the terrorists had to be brought to justice, in essence retributive in nature, thus violating norms of putting them to trial.

It could be argued that the nature of the atrocity had motivated a retributive response instead of distributive justice. Yet, it provides only that United States had acted in the light of its norm of practicing exclusive multilateralism or unilateralism, as was necessitated.

Yet the case for unilateralism was weak in a pre 9-11 world. Ambitions of changing the world and redrawing boundaries<sup>46</sup> were reined and displayed caution. There was also mounting pressure on American government to condude the ABM Treaty and the growing domestic criticism on Missile Defence System kept the government cautious. Come Sept. 11 and American Foreign Policy had to be redrawn in the light of realities of vulnerability and the scourge of terrorism. It would have been understandable if the American ambitions remained in check. Yet, there was a "planed 40% real increase in US defense spending 1998-2007"<sup>47</sup>. The ABM Treaty was sidelined and Missile Defense System was reconsidered.

The attacks of Sept. 11 deepened the realization that America needed ally states to help in its 'War against Terror'. There was a buoyant sense of facing the dangers together in a world bereft of predictability and

invulnerability. The world community drew closer and Multilateralism seemed to dominate the pattern of relations between the countries.

However, unrolling events displayed the unilateralist approach of US for while it mobilized significant support, the campaign itself remained unilateralist in character with Washington being the "Chief Architect"<sup>48</sup>.

Thus, the concern that United States seeks to remain unfettered of multilateral constraints was vindicated as a result of post Sept 11 US moves. Some critics go to the extreme of terming the UN as the "legitimizing institution for an essentially unilateral effort by the US"<sup>49</sup>.

The unilateralist debate has been reinforced by the much troubled 'preemption' theory a bleak reminder of the Munroe Doctrine. The National Security Strategy of United States of America Sep. 2002 boldly declares the free will of US to strike at any and every adversary, assuring the reasons of actions to be clear "the force measured and the cause just"<sup>50</sup>.

Conversely, it could be argued that the bias of favor went to government's essentially right wing, and against the people. The anti-war movement, even if feeble could not obstruct the cold bureaucratic and elitist analysis.

A big casualty of a post Sept 11 world was the freedom to dissent for anti-Americanism became equivalent of militism pro-terrorism or disloyalty.

## **PAKISTAN - AWAKENING TO REALITY - POST SEP. 11**

By a devious twist of circumstances, Pakistan a moderately Islamic underdeveloped country in South Asia became embroiled in the post 9-11 situation. Not given much of

choice, Pakistan became a frontline ally of US in its "War against Terror". According to US Departments of State and Defense, Pakistan afforded the United States "unprecedented levels of cooperation"<sup>51</sup> by allowing use of bases, identifying extremists, tightening border between India and Afghanistan and doing joint operations with US Intelligence to arrest terrorists.

However despite Pakistan's collaboration with US in cracking down on militants<sup>52</sup>, Pakistanis found themselves accused of breeding radical Islamists. Although even in the past, Pakistan had come under world criticism for tacitly supporting Jihadi outfits in Kashmir, the dynamics of post Sept 11 world jogged Pakistani and world community to the grave threats of pockets of extremism operating in Pakistan. As early as 2000 US State Department reported that South Asia had replaced Middle East as the leading locus of terrorism in the world<sup>53</sup>.

Pakistan, as a nation has been facing rise of religious militism, sectarianism and an effective pressure group in the form of religious parties and their militant wings. In the 1980s, the United States fought a proxy war with the Soviets with the help of Muslims mercenaries from the world over, trained by CIA and Pakistani Intelligence Agencies. Trained by the Pakistan agencies and CIA while given generous U.S military assistance, the mujahideens (holy warriors) waged a jihad (holy war) against the government in Kabul and its Soviet allies.

After the war in Afghanistan and with the US assistance gone, the religious extremists entrenched in Pakistani policies (sustained by the Zia regime for his domestic agenda of Islamization and marginalizing serious political opposition and international agenda of helping US in the Proxy war in Afghanistan) represented schisms in the political culture and society. Sectarianism, intolerance and



a parallel madrassa culture that sprung as a viable alternative for a huge layer of urban and rural poor represented the religious make up of Pakistani society. Religious extremism has always benefited from the state's political expediency to invoke religious and promise promulgation of Sharia. While this has strengthened the religious forces by serving their class interests it has instilled a sense of security and invulnerability due to the state-religion bind. Paradoxically, the status of religious forces has remained as an underclass, for it seeks donations from public money and is the last rogue of a huge section of urban and rural poor for free education and basic amenities.

Among the many divides of post-colonial Pakistan, the aberrant state-society pattern exemplified by the growth of the underclass the imbroglio of vague, controversial interpretations of religion, seminaries thriving on the state support, foreign patronage and growing strata of poverty, stricken masses - came to the forefront in the aftermath of Sep. 11. The former minister fore religious affairs put the figure at 10,000 for madrassas, though he acknowledged it could be higher, with as many as 1 million to 1.7 million students attending them<sup>55</sup>.

US - the avowed seeker of truth and justice garbing, retributive justice in 'War Against Terror' helped create a "Jihad Culture"<sup>56</sup> by helping Afghan mujahideens during the war in Afghanistan in 1980s, ignoring mujahideens production and sale of opium and heroin to finance anti-soviet operations<sup>57</sup>. The successive Pakistani government with exception of democratic governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif who tried to curb religious extremism<sup>58</sup> incurred backlash from religious parties. Thus, a hitherto moderate country like Pakistan today presents a contemporary facade of secular moderate forces against religious parties.

The post Sept 11 world posed a dilemma to Pakistani government to curb religious extremism while complying with President Bush's vociferous demand of being with United State or against it. It helped the Musharraf government to attain much needed legitimacy and badly needed American foreign aid<sup>59</sup>. Thus democracy was sacrificed at the alter of US opportunism and ironically the beacon of democracy joined forces with a non-democratic government for an agenda of preserving freedoms, democracy and justice<sup>60</sup>. While democracy in Pakistan became a casualty, so did the moral authority of US in promoting and nurturing democratic forces.

Despite being a frontline state in 'War against Terror', Pakistanis could not clear the tag of being a state that bred terror by tacitly supporting it. This was exemplified by the newly-instituted US policy of finger printing and photography all Pakistani men who enter the United States.

Thus the implications of Sep. 11 have been as grave for Pakistan as the United States. Pakistan has had to forego democracy in the name of circumstantial compulsions. The state-society dynamics face a threat from militant religious extremists and foreign mercenaries that cannot be as effectively reined in as the local outfits. The *raison d'être* of Pakistan - Islam and its role in Pakistani policies remain an issue generating controversy. The political debate of moderate secular forces claiming to uphold Jinnah's concept of secularist Pakistan (expressed in his first speech to Constituent Assembly) versus the religious extremism and a permanent constituency in the form of madrasa culture.

Contradictions remain the only permanent feature of a post Sept 11 world.

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