

## Chapter 3: Vulnerabilities

India and Pakistan were born as post-colonial states with wounds of partition. Fifty-five years later, India is searching for its destiny and Pakistan its identity. On periphery, it appears that they are in a conflict over Jammu & Kashmir, one province that could not make up its mind at the time of partition. However, a closer look would reveal a kaleidoscope of conflicts in areas that have apparently never been disputed.

India's search for destiny and Pakistan's exploration of its identity have exposed both the countries to various vulnerabilities. If the two nations had normal relations since their birth, it would have been possible for both of them to address internal weaknesses. Instead, Pakistan has defined India's failure as its own success and therefore tried to accentuate it. India, until recently had not sought its destiny by rising above the regional rivalries. As a result, it has allowed itself to be consumed by the animosity of the most hostile elements in its neighbourhood. As a consequence, the two countries are involved in a violent chess game all across South Asia, far away from their borders and the Line of Control.

### India's North-East

One of the most significant theatres of India-Pakistan conflict is the north-eastern Indian state of Assam, which along with its neighbouring states, has witnessed insurgency for over three decades. It began with resentment of the local people against refugees from Bangladesh. Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) has taken advantage of the conflict to penetrate several of the secessionist organisations in the state to stoke fires. Between 2001-04, more than 100 organisations in the Indian north-east were involved in launching approximately 5,200 attacks on civilians, militants, security forces and others.

For years, ISI used the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) as the main interlocutor in the region. Lately, it has expanded its network to cover and create several organisations. It has reportedly provided several passports for Paresh Baruah, the head of the military wing of the ULFA, and other cadres. He has visited Pakistan, particularly Karachi, several times during 1993-2003. At least 200 ULFA activists have taken training in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The training included courses in the use of rocket launchers, explosives, assault weapons, disinformation and counter intelligence. ULFA has been buying arms from Cambodia, Thailand and other South East Asian countries through *madrassas* in Sylhet and Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh. It has also established a commercial network with LTTE of Sri Lanka, whereby the latter has undertaken to transport arms for a fee to the former. In April 1996, the Government of Bangladesh seized more than 500 AK-47 rifles, 80 machine guns, 50 rocket launchers and 2,000 grenades meant for ULFA from two ships off Cox Bazaar. In 1999, at the time of India-Pakistan war in Kargil, ULFA openly supported the Pakistani position in its newsletter, *Swadhinata*. ULFA has been involved in sustained attacks against police and civilian targets in Assam.

While ULFA began with an anti Bangladeshi agenda, it shifted its policy to secession from India. Besides the training received by top ULFA cadres in Pakistan, the organisation has entered into a collaboration with HUJI for training a large number of cadres in Bangladesh. The HUJI training camps, typically impart skills in the use of sophisticated arms and explosives in Rangamari, Sundermari, Masaldanga, and other villages of Bangladesh.

Besides supporting ULFA, ISI is also involved in providing specific kind of assistance to several other terrorist groups in the North-east. In Meghalaya, it has focused on circulation of fake Indian currency using Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council and Achik National Volunteer Council. It has provided finance and logistic support to the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), All Tripura Tiger Force, National Liberation Front of Tripura, People's Liberation Army (Manipur) and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO). ISI plays a critical role in building networks and linkages between the terrorist organisations in India's north-east, Nepal, Sri Lanka and also uses ULFA to establish linkages with People's War Group in the Indian States of Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar. Thus, ISI has created a huge conglomerate of terrorist groups in India's north, east and north-eastern states. While the organisations mostly came into being on their own, ISI's role has been to strengthen them through training, networking and material support.

An important target where India is vulnerable is the Siliguri corridor of West Bengal that has a very narrow width

of 22 miles. A serious terrorist attack and the capture of the corridor by militant groups can undermine communication links between the North-east and the rest of India. The ISI and ULFA have particularly backed the KLO to concentrate its activities in Jalpaiguri and Siliguri subdivisions of Darjeeling, very close to the “Chicken's Neck.”

ISI does not completely depend on ULFA and other ethnic militant groups in the North-east. It has developed a new strategy to create religion-based Islamic organisations. There are reportedly around 15 Islamic extremist organisations operating in Assam and other north-eastern states. These include the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), People's Liberation Front (PLF), Islamic Liberation Army (ILA), Muslim Security Force (MSF), Liberation of Islam Tiger Force (LITF), Muslim Security Council of Assam (MSCA), United Liberation Militia of Assam (ULMA), Minority People's Action Committee (MPAC), Muslim Volunteers Force (MVF), Mujahid Vahini and Jubo Command. All of them have links with terrorist organisations outside India for moral and financial support.

The ISI has also been attempting to organise a grand alliance, namely All Muslim Liberation Forum of Assam (AMULFA), by unifying several small Islamic fundamentalist organisations under one banner. In fact, MULTA, MULFA and LITF have already started operating under the AMULFA. This body in future would be part of a greater unit called United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters (ULFSS). Two Manipur-based Islamic organisations, i.e. People's United Liberation Front and Islamic Liberation Army already operate under the ULFSS.

### **Heart of India**

Besides the North-east, India's communal fabric has become the target of terrorist organisations in Pakistan. In addition to its Jihad-e-Kashmir operation, LeT launched a Jihad-e-Hind operation in early 2003, signifying a shift of focus from Kashmir to the rest of India. HUJI has used its clout with ULFA and AMULFA to establish linkages with Maoists in Nepal and through them People's War Group in Central India. There is a growing effort to build mosques and *madrassas* in the Terai region in Nepal bordering India. Between 1984 and 2004, approximately 275 mosques and *madrassas* have come up in the districts of Rupandehi, Banke, Kapilvastu, and Bardiya. The estimate of *madrassas* on the entire Indo-Nepal border is not available. However, Arun Shourie, an eminent Indian columnist and Husain Haqqani, an eminent Pakistani columnist, have both placed the estimate at around 1,000 in their various articles. Also, many Muslim youth organisations have been promoted in Nepal, particularly in areas bordering India. These include Nepal Islamic Yuva Sangh, Nepal Muslim League, Nepal Muslim Ekta Sangh, All Nepal Anjuman Islah Samiti, Nepal Muslim Seva Samiti, Jam Serajul Alam, All Nepal Muslim Sudhar Samiti, Muslim Jan Kalyan Samiti, Millat-e-Islamia, Nepal Muslim Sangh (NMS), and the Bazm-e-Abab. Considering that only 4 per cent of Nepal's population is Muslim, it is odd to see the growth of so many Islamic organisations. It is even more odd that most of these organisations have found homes in areas bordering India and that they have all come up in the last 20 years.

There are reports indicating that ISI has established about 60 modules in nine states across India. Most of them are “sleepers”, springing to action only when directed. Many of these centres are in Uttar Pradesh, which borders Nepal and also in neighbouring Bihar. The centres in Uttar Pradesh have been found to be in Muzafarnagar, Saharanpur, Bijnor, Muradabad, Bareilly, Kanpur, Varanasi and Azamgarh. The centres in Bihar and Jharkhand are found to be Siwan, Madhubani, Purnia, Kishanganj, Katihar, Gaya, Sitamarhi, Patna, Hazaribagh, Giridih and Jamshedpur. Another state, which has many ISI cells, is West Bengal, particularly the Siliguri area.

It is estimated that there are approximately 10,000 workers and agents of ISI in India. According to Pakistani scholars, if ISI manages to persuade even 1 per cent of 150 million Muslims in India to take up arms, these 1.5 million would be a formidable force to foment turmoil in India. The theory is that with increasing Muslim militancy, India would find it difficult to contain communal conflagration. This would provide an incentive to the jihadi groups in Pakistan to fight for the cause of Indian Muslims.

However, this theory has not found practical application, since most of the Muslims in India have opted to live in communal harmony. There have been incidents such as the carnage in Gujarat in 2002 and communal riots in the early 1990s, when India's social fabric was severely strained. Whenever such eruptions have taken place, most of the leaders of Hindu and Muslim communities have attempted to build bridges between communities. Nevertheless,

ISI continues to be active and transfers approximately Rs.600 million to illegal *madrassas* in India, with a hope to gain foothold.

## **Pakistan's Provinces**

If India suspects the involvement of ISI in India's north-eastern, and northern states, Pakistan suspects the involvement of Indian intelligence agencies in the strife being witnessed in Pakistan's Balochistan and Sindh provinces.

Since 2000, soon after General Musharraf took over as the Chief Executive, Sindh and Balochistan have seen the flame of secession growing into a fire of moderate size, which can transform itself into a full-blown inferno in 3-4 years if the events of 2004-05 are any indication. At the beginning of 2005, the military leadership introduced a fresh division of the districts of Sindh. On the surface, this is meant to be an administrative arrangement. Beneath the surface, it is a ploy by the military rulers to divide Sindhi leaders and break the Sindhi nationalist agitation. Instead of creating conflicts between Sindhi leaders, it appears that this strategy is likely to backfire and bring together the separatist leaders with a much greater resolve. In particular, the issue of the division of Hyderabad district is very emotional. The agitation in Sindh against Punjab's domination is driven by shortages of water, General Musharraf's proposal to construct Kalabagh dam and Thal canal and skewed fund allocation. Between 2001-04, the supply of water to Sindh was cut by 30-40 per cent every year. Due to an increasingly weak flow of Indus, the sea has been intruding in parts of Sindh causing salinity and other environmental problems. Since General Musharraf took over as the Chief Executive, he has proposed plans to establish Kalabagh dam, which will further affect the flow of water in Sindh. This issue is discussed at length elsewhere in the publication. However it is sufficient to note here that water is the source of Sindhi discontent.

In Balochistan, people are incensed by discrimination by the federal government, cantonments in Gwadar and Dera Bugti area as well as those in Kohlu, lack of returns for its natural gas supply to Punjab and the construction of the Gwadar Port, which has led to immigration of outsiders. They are worried that cantonments and mega projects would turn them into a minority in their own province. Also, Balochis are upset about water shortages and the plans to construct the Kalabagh Dam. Finally, they perceive the military's actions in the name of war on terror as an excuse to change the social landscape of the state by converting autonomous B areas into federally managed A areas.

These grievances have led to demonstrations for autonomy and even separation since 2003. In most of these demonstrations and rallies, speakers compare the situation to the one prevailing in 1971, when Pakistan was bifurcated. There are growing incidences of violence involving killings, kidnappings, bomb blasts and shelling of gas pipelines. The slogans of Sindhudesh Zindabad and Independent Balochistan Zindabad (Long Live Sindh, Long Live Independent Balochistan) have become commonplace. It is not only the leaders of separatist and regional movements like Jiye Sindh, Pakhtoonkwa Milli Awami Party and Pakistan Oppressed Nation Movement (PONM) who are comparing the situation to 1971, but also many independent columnists do so.

There are also reports of some of the separatist groups preparing for a violent confrontation. For instance, Dr Chisti Mujahid has suggested in many of his columns (*Akhbar-e-Jehan*, August 13, 2004) that there are 60 terrorist training camps in Kharan district of Balochistan. He estimates that about 250-300 militants receive weapons related training at each of these camps, which would bring the total to somewhere above 15,000. He also reports that there are about 500 terrorists running various camps in Kallanch mountain range near Gwadar.

Dr Chisti Mujahid is amongst those analysts who ascribe the growing terrorist networks in Balochistan to Indian intelligence agencies. In an article in *Akhbar-e-Jehan* on June 16, 2004, he has quoted a confidential report of the Pakistan intelligence agencies addressed to General Musharraf giving details of Iranian, Indian and Afghan intelligence support to the insurgency movement in Balochistan. Mirza Aslam Baig has added CIA, Mossad, KGB and MI6 to the Indian and Iranian intelligence agencies as operating from Afghanistan to undermine the security of Balochistan (*Jasarat*, August 6, 2004). Other columnists have mentioned external intelligence support to camps in Dadu area in Sindh.

Pakistani sources blame Hindu families in Zilla Bola Khan, Zilla Ahmad Khan and Kotri for indulging in arms smuggling at the behest of the Indian intelligence. On the other hand, several Pakistani scholars suggest that the Hindu families are only accused of connivance with India to justify the killings of young men in these families so

that the local vested interest can take control of the Hindu-owned businesses.

Pakistani political parties and the media openly debate the issue of Indian intelligence support for insurgency in Balochistan and Sindh. Whereas columnists such as Dr Chisti Mujahid and former army officials are convinced of the Indian involvement, many others believe that the bogie of Indian intelligence is being resurrected after a long time merely to whitewash the failure of the Pakistani army to contain violence in provinces outside Punjab. For instance, an article in *Jasarat* (September 6, 2004), a newspaper owned by the hardliner Jamaat-e-Islami party, Shahnawaz Farooqi, squarely blames General Musharraf for raising the Indian bogie.

Balochistan Chief Minister, Jam Mohamad Baloch, ISPR Director, Shaukat Sultan, and Punjab Rangers Director, General Hussein Mehdi, are some of the Pakistani officials who have gone on record in their public speeches to blame the Indian agencies for turmoil in Pakistan. Similarly, the Institute of Strategic Studies, which is known for its proximity to the Pakistani government, has published a report blaming India for setting up training camps in Pakistan and Indian Punjab on the border of Pakistan.

Whether and to what extent India is involved in Pakistan's internal strife, is difficult to say due to views supporting and challenging this theory expressed by various Pakistani analysts in the country's public discourse. The government of Pakistan has not provided any proof, merely adding to speculation. If it is assumed that there is no such involvement, there are at least fears in Pakistan that it is feasible in the future. Intelligence and counter-intelligence activities create a vicious cycle, which drag the victims into an endless downward spiral.

## **Neighbours**

The fires lit in India and Pakistan due to their bilateral animosity have spread to neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. The presence of ISI-sponsored groups in Nepal and the HUJI base in Myanmar has been discussed earlier. In the case of Afghanistan and Bangladesh, India-Pakistan rivalry has affected the very core of the body politic of the two countries.

In Afghanistan, Pakistan first supported Mujahideen and then created Taliban to achieve strategic depth against India. Several jihadi groups ranging from Jaish-e-Mohammad to HUJI have conducted training camps in Afghanistan for preparing militants to be despatched to India. Since 2001, many of these camps have closed down. Instead, the Pakistan government has used diplomatic skills to facilitate gradual induction of Taliban or sympathisers of Taliban in the political system.

Since India has good relations with the Northern Alliance leaders, one of Pakistan's strategies has been to use the international community to sideline the Northern Alliance from the Afghan government. This has been gradually achieved, though at the cost of growing polarisation in Afghanistan and concentration of Northern Alliance in the northern part of the country, where they have base. If the trend continues, it can sow the seeds of ethnic division in the country, once international security forces leave in response to some other crisis in the world, or they simply atrophy.

India-Pakistan rivalry has also contributed to polarisation in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is perceived to be close to Pakistan. Sheikh Hasina, the leader of opposition, is known for her desire to improve relations with India. The rivalry between Begum Khaleda and Sheikh Hasina is largely based on domestic issues. It has its roots in the history of Bangladesh in the last 20 years and the conflict of egos between the two women leaders. They had collaborated in the agitation to restore democracy during General Irshad's period. They fell apart as soon as they had to compete for power. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to ascribe their rivalry to either India or Pakistan.

Nevertheless, once the bitterness of the Khaleda-Hasina competition was established, it is argued that Pakistan and India offered sympathies and support to them on a competitive basis. The regime of Begum Khaleda is seen to be turning a blind eye to the presence of HUJI and other terrorist organisations on the Bangladeshi territory. Some analysts even suspect active cooperation between Pakistani and Bangladeshi intelligence agencies.

The experience of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal suggests that the hostility between India and Pakistan is

spreading far and wide. Almost a fifth of India in northern and north-eastern states and a third of Pakistan in parts of Balochistan and Sindh provinces are affected by conflicts, which are being increasingly intertwined with the India-Pakistan hostility. At least three countries in the neighbourhood are being drawn into this fire. If the deterioration continues thus, the future of a large population of over 1.5 billion people of these countries will be at risk. Once a fire is lit, it is impossible to predict its reach, pace or direction.