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Whose Vengeance and Unholy Wars are These?

Israeli Embassies Attacked

by FARZANA VERSEY

Monday, February 13. 3.54 pm. A bomb explodes in the car of an Israeli diplomat. Three people, including the defence attaché's wife Tal Yehoshua, are grievously injured.

30 minutes later, embassy officials are examining the remains of the vehicle in an area that has been cordoned off by the police.

Within three hours, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accuses the Hizbullah and Iran: "Iran, which stands behind these attacks, is the largest exporter of terror in the world. The Israeli government and its security forces will continue to work together with local security services against these terrorist actions."

He is pre-empting the inquiry, and the media is already talking about "Hizbullah in Delhi" and "Israel targeted in India". We are calling ourselves a soft state when our own hardliners and security forces have been killing citizens inside the country.

The question is not whether global terror is being fought on Indian soil but how much of it is being arranged here. If it is legitimate to ask about the role of local handlers, then why has there been no concern about the incident of a planned vengeance by Israelis?

Cut to a report a few days ago when there was palpable revenge. The couple, Shneor Zalman and Yaffa Sheno, arrived in India on a multiple-entry visa in March 2010. After the visa expired, they went back and returned within a month. What was their purpose that they paid a "disproportionately high rent" of Rs. 50,000 a month for a house in Fort Kochi, Kerala? A senior official was quoted in a report saying: "Central intelligence got an alert about a covert operation being carried out by suspected Israeli agents after the 26/11 Mumbai terror strike in which south Mumbai's Chabad House came under attack and six Jews, including a Rabbi and his pregnant wife, were killed. We have traced the couple's financial transactions. They will be questioned before they are deported. Preliminary investigations suggest some Israelis are camping in various parts of the country."

This comes from official sources and all that they think of is deporting the couple. There has been complete silence from the usually active dispensers of opinion, too.

Let us return to the scene of Monday's crime. The Indian and international media have gone ballistic about it without a shred of evidence. If the argument is that the Indian prime minister's house is in the vicinity and reveals lapses in our security, then why is no one apprehensive about our situation? It raises questions beyond safety measures. Why are we falling in line with Israeli rules? What is the American effort in this proxy war? It is not Hizbullah that is fighting in India, but Israel.

With the top leaders' comments, Israel is not only holding India to ransom but also trying to play its victim-aggressor game here. A bomb that went off simultaneously in Georgia was defused, for it does not resonate well with the anti-Arab/Iran narrative. One is not condoning any such attacks, but this most certainly does not look like a war against Israel, a state that has got its armour in place. Mossad is as pervasive as the CIA.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said, “It just shows that Israel and its citizens face terror inside and outside of Israel. We deal with it every day. We know how to identify exactly who is responsible for the attack and who carried it out. We will not allow this to affect our agenda.”

Has anyone questioned the agenda? The identification process assumes reprisal.

Blindly accepting the Israeli version of domestic links with groups will obviously lead to the blanket indictment of ‘jihadi’ organisations, many of them imagined entities of the right-wing parties. Is it not possible that some Hindutva terror groups now openly asserting themselves and held culpable for such activities could be used for Israel’s covert operations? Israel does not have suicide missions, but it understands the masochism paradigm only too well.

The revenge space is never empty. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum has written:

“The primitive sense of the just...starts from the notion that a human life...is a vulnerable thing, a thing that can be invaded, wounded, violated by another’s act in many ways. For this penetration, the only remedy that seems appropriate is a counter invasion, equally deliberate, equally grave. And to right the balance truly, the retribution must be exactly, strictly proportional to the original encroachment. It differs from the original act only in the sequence of time and in the fact that it is response rather than original act – a fact frequently obscured if there is a long sequence of acts and counteracts.”

We need to look at a few examples to emphasise our vulnerability.

Members of the orthodox Jewish Chabad India Trust have moved out of Nariman House and are residing in an unknown location due to security reasons. Soon after the Mumbai attacks, six members of a group called Zaka (acronym for Zihuy Korbanot Ason – Disaster Victim Identification) arrived in the city to collect and arrange the body parts and blood of Jews so that they could be returned to family members and were afforded a dignified burial according to Jewish law. The police investigations were not completed.

More recently, Israeli national Nurit Toker was booked by the Mumbai police under the Arms Act, 1959, for carrying two live cartridges in her backpack while travelling from Mumbai to Kathmandu. In her petition she mentioned that she had completed her compulsory three-year training in the Israeli army and these were her personal ammunition, compatible with the M-16 assault rifle acquired during her military training. She had not carried the rifle, though. Sec. 3 clearly states “there is no requirement of use or intention to use the arm or ammunition” to pursue the case. Yet, the Israel Consulate intervened to say that the accused had accidentally left bullets in her bag.

This is not the first such instance. In 2006, Noa Haviv had cleared customs at Mumbai airport as well as the security agencies of Israeli airline El Al at Tel Aviv and arrived with 16 bullets and a magazine in her check-in baggage. The Israeli consul general had stated then: “We have every reason to believe that it was an innocent mistake. She had borrowed this suitcase from her brother, who is a licensed weapons holder. She was not aware of the bullets inside when she packed her bags.” Amazingly, only the airline filed a case and not the Airports Authority of India or the security agencies of the government.

In a country that arrests whole families on mere “tip offs”, this leniency is alarming. Worse, all 171 passengers on the El Al flight had walked out of the green channel and cleared customs in 15 minutes. Why this express service? Even Indians returning from a holiday take longer. The customs official at the time had said, “...this was a flight coming from Israel, where security measures are stringent.”

Are we to depend on another state’s security assurances? Israel is not above suspicion. No country is.

The attack on the embassy staff took place in India. We cannot allow investigations to be outsourced. Hillary Clinton offered US assistance to probe into “these cowardly acts” because the “scourge of terrorism is an affront to the entire international community”.

In an editorial, The Pioneer uses this incident for its grand-standing: “Governments around the world are mindful of such occasions when Israelis, both diplomats and civilians, are likely to be targeted; sadly, the Government of India chooses to ignore them, busy as the Home Minister is defending himself in a corruption case while intelligence agencies are pre-occupied with snooping on the Congress’s political opponents and conducting ‘surveys’ in election-bound States”. It adds, with alacrity, that at least the people should be agitated “if not the Government whose Ministers are at the moment unabashedly pandering to Muslim extremism in Uttar Pradesh”.

Are we to be on our toes for Israel? Why did the papers not write editorials when suspicious activities of Israelis were noticed by these intelligence agencies? Why suppress those?

As expected, Pakistan and its Inter Services Intelligence are used as an example. There has been no proof. Israel is using Indian susceptibility with regard to relationship with Pakistan. There is an indeed an insurgency problem and the recent history of the Mumbai attacks. The fact that the Jewish Chabad House was one of the targets makes it appear as a legitimate connection. But Pakistan has closer ties with Saudi Arabia and is inimical to Iran, which is the current bone stuck in the throats of the western powers and Israel.

There are cursory references to the four Iranian nuclear scientists who were killed in the last two years. Instead, the bomb blast is being touted as revenge for the death of Hizbullah’s military chief Imad Mughniyeh in a car explosion. What is so important about the fourth death anniversary? Do also note that he was killed in Syria, so Israel has a virtual buffet meal at its disposal to point fingers at.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said. “Israel perpetrated the terror actions to launch psychological warfare against Iran.”

There are sniggers, but Israel has every reason to perpetuate such mind-numbing ideas, if not actions. In 1948, Menachem Begin’s unit slaughtered the inhabitants of Deir Yassin. In 1953, Ariel Sharon led the slaughter of the inhabitants of Qibya, and in 1982 arranged for their allies to butcher around 2,000 in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla. He had declared, “We must hit, hit and hit them incessantly – not by means of large-scale war. Suddenly someone disappears there, someone is found dead here and somewhere else someone is found stabbed to death in a European nightclub.”

The history of Israel is as damning as it is damaged. It has flouted every rule and yet got the benefit of protection.

India is most certainly not a soft power that some of our own commentators are shamelessly projecting it as. It is a bit obsessed and still suffers from a colonial hangover. It has created its cocoon of goodwill based on the flimsy delusion of being a developed nation where hybrid progress is sustained in a greenhouse. In that, it is not too different from some of the wealthy Arab states that are only concerned about how they sell their oil and for how much. Just as they have their pecking order, India maintains a stoical distance from the larger pool of South Asian countries by virtue of its “close relations” with those who matter.

Self-preservation is the goal of any society, but when it becomes opportunistic it is difficult to demarcate the lines of control and of control freaks. By a process of natural selection that imbues it as a ‘doctrinaire liberal’ society, India is being co-opted in an unholy war

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