



Obama's Asian challenge

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The Massacre in Mumbai

Praveen Swami



“CRUSADERS of the east and west”, the Lashkar-e-Taiba’s supreme *amir*, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, said at the end of October, “have united in a cohesive onslaught against Muslims”.

Less than four weeks later, around 9:00 PM on the night of November 26, a woman in the *kolivada*—or fishing village—off south Mumbai’s upmarket Budhwar Park area saw an inflatable dinghy nudge up against the beach.

Ever since the massacre that followed, the world has been debating just how to ensure the attacks do not degenerate into a large-scale conflagration between India and Pakistan.

India’s strategic community is divided on the utility of missile or air strikes on Lashkar facilities in Pakistan. But there is little doubt further attacks on its cities, a real risk as long as the infrastructure of groups like the Lashkar is still intact, will settle the debate. In the long-term, India could also unleashing of a covert campaign of counter-terrorism in Pakistan, of the kind which New Delhi exercised to good effect in the 1970s and 1980s—a prospect its National Security Advisor, MK Narayanan, hinted at in a television interview earlier this year.

President-elect Barack Obama’s administration now confronts an enormous challenge. Despite considerable international pressure—not to mention the imposition of United Nations Security Council sanctions on the Lashkar—Pakistan is yet to prosecute its leadership under its national counter-terrorism laws. Neither the USA’s Federal Bureau of Investigations nor the Mumbai Police have been granted access to suspects held in Pakistan; the prospect of extradition has been ruled out by President Asif Ali Zardari.

Given its strategic equities in Afghanistan, the USA has good reason to avoid actions which could lead to the deterioration of its relationship with Pakistan—the sole viable route now available to support the campaign in Afghanistan.

However, the failure to contain jihadists in Pakistan and their patrons within its military—specifically, elements of still unknown influence within the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate—will also have serious fallouts. First, a policy of inaction will empower organizations like the Lashkar, who have already demonstrated their transnational ambitions and reach through operations in Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA. As important, it will have a corrosive influence on ties with India, threatening a strategic critical strategic relationship—and, in the short term, making it more likely New Delhi will use the coercive instruments at its disposal.

The problem isn’t new. Both India and the USA have increasingly collaborated to defend themselves from the jihadist threat emanating from Pakistan. India’s external intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing, is reported to have received two warnings from the USA in September, both pointing to Lashkar plans to stage an attack in Mumbai. If correct, the reports

1 Decision to use leverage to compel Pakistan to act against jihadists cannot be deferred

2 Failure to dismantle jihadist structure in Pakistan will raise global threat; corrode India ties

3 Attempts to resolve the Kashmir conflict have a low probability of success



suggest that the USA's covert services had picked up the movement of the ten-man assault unit from Muridke, near Lahore, which arrested terrorist Mohammad Ajmal Amir Iman—widely known by his caste-name Kasaab—has stated began on September 15, to meet a subsequently-deferred launch date of September 27.

Earlier, the USA had passed on warnings of an imminent suicide-bombing targeting the Indian Embassy in Kabul—information which saved dozens of lives, since defensive counter-measures were put in place at the mission. The *New York Times* had reported that the USA was able to gather evidence that the suicide bombing was carried out on the instructions of the ISI.

It is unclear, however, why the USA was unable to exert pressure on Pakistan to terminate both plots before their execution. From New Delhi's point of view, the sequence of events makes it clear that the USA's Afghanistan concerns triumph its counter-terrorism concerns.

Several commentators have, in recent weeks, suggested that that road for progress could lie through accelerating the pace of India-Pakistan dialogue on the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. More likely than not, though, efforts in this direction will prove still-born.

For one, it is unclear that an India-Pakistan deal on Jammu and Kashmir will in fact deliver peace. Organizations like the Lashkar see India and the west as existential enemies of Islam. There is no reason to believe that an agreed deal on Jammu and Kashmir will lead them, or their patrons, to scale back their terrorist campaign.

Second, the legitimacy crisis faced by President Zardari's regime makes it more than likely a large section of Pakistan's public would see an agreement as a sell-out—defeating its very purpose. Last year, negotiators for India and Pakistan had succeeded in arriving at a broad, five-point formula for resolution of the conflict. However, further work on these broad-brush plans were deferred because of the weakening domestic position of President Pervez Musharraf; his successor has shown no enthusiasm about resuming the dialogue.

Third, India would see efforts to push forward dialogue on Jammu and Kashmir as rewarding terrorism—making it domestically unacceptable. The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government faces elections, and in any case does not possess the two-thirds majority needed to push an agreement through Parliament.

All of this suggests the Obama administration will no longer have the choice of differing difficult choices in South Asia—decision that its predecessors avoided for the good reason that their outcomes are, necessarily, unpredictable. The administration will have to use its financial and political leverage in Pakistan to contain the military and its jihadist clients, while at once ensuring that President Zardari's fledgling regime is not undermined. Pakistan could respond by denying the USA access to Afghanistan—but that decision, more likely than not, will involve costs Islamabad is simply in no position to pay. •

South-East Asia's War on Terror

Jennifer Widjaya Yang Hui and Kumar Ramakrishna



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While Afghanistan deserves Obama's attention, it would be folly to relegate South-East Asia to the back-burner

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There is the real danger of the conflicts in Thailand, Mindanao and Indonesia coalescing

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South-East Asia straddles key global trade routes, and is home to important progressive Islamic traditions

It is clear that President-elect Barack Obama Obama has set his sights on gradually drawing down the US military presence in Iraq and focusing instead on Afghanistan, where a resurgent Taliban—al-Qaeda coalition appears to be rebuilding and reconstituting.

While stabilizing Afghanistan and shoring up the fledgling democratic government in Pakistan rightly deserves the new President's attention, it would be folly to relegate South-East Asia—at one time considered the Second Front in the War on Terror—to the back-burner.

South-East Asia will remain a critically important theater in the war against radical Islamist terror in an Obama presidency for three good reasons.

First, the collapse of peace talks in Mindanao on October 14, 2008 after the Supreme Court pronounced the draft agreement between the Philippines government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front [MILF] unconstitutional is a serious blow. The possibility of renewed Islamist violence is real, especially as foreign jihadists from Indonesia and Malaysia are able to penetrate the porous maritime borders of the southern Philippines and further destabilize the situation.

Second, although the threat from the Jema'ah Islamiyah [JI] network in Indonesia has been significantly reduced, a new danger has arisen from a plethora of smaller organizations and fringe terrorist factions. To date, several autonomous JI operatives with bomb-making skills are still on the run, the most dangerous being the Malaysian Noordin M. Top and the Indonesians Umar Patek and Dulmatin. The arrests of terrorists linked to JI in Palembang, Sumatra in July 2008 revealed the latent capacity of previously unknown fringe factions in Indonesia to carry out bombing operations. While there has been no JI bomb attack since the October 2005 blasts in Bali, there have been a number of near-misses.

Finally, the violent conflict in southern Thailand—which enter its fifth year the month Obama assumes the presidency—shows no sign of abating. Postings on Indonesian language extremist websites with regards to the persecution of Muslims in Southern Thailand and calling for help there have significantly increased since May 2008. There have also been credible reports of contacts between jihadists in Mindanao and Southern Thailand. In short, there is today a real possibility of the localized conflicts in Southern Thailand, Mindanao and Indonesia gradually coalescing into a single geo-strategic unity.

The new Obama administration can ill afford to permit such a destabilizing development to materialize for two reasons. First, it is worth remembering that South-East Asia straddles sealanes of communication crucial to global trade and the energy supplies of key US strategic partners in North-East Asia. Second, South-East Asia is home to traditions of Islam that can serve as a theological and ideological counterweight to violent Islamism worldwide. For these reasons, South-East Asia deserves a spot high up on the new administration's counter-terrorism to-do list. •

Towards a New Afghan Policy

Hekmat Karzai



The historic election of Barack Obama has captured the attention and imagination of people all over the world. President-elect Obama ran on a platform of change, and promised a departure from the failed policies of the Bush Administration. That message of change resonated in an international community hoping for a transformation of US foreign policy that might end to unpopularity and disdain in which it was held during the Bush administration.

Nowhere is the resulting sense of optimism and hope greater than in Afghanistan, where many believe that an Obama victory will bring a renewed focus on efforts to deal with the alarming deterioration of internal security in the face of a resurgent Taliban that is increasingly active in many parts of the country. The situation in Afghanistan is currently dire, but a window of opportunity for turning it around remains open. The Obama administration enjoys the goodwill and credibility necessary to affect positive change, provided President-elect Obama takes early steps to follow-through on its promise to reinvigorate the US commitment to bringing increased stability and security to Afghanistan.

Criticism of the Bush Administration's decision to go to war in Iraq was an early centerpiece of the Obama campaign. Iraq, he charged, distracted the United States from the real battleground of the war on terrorism, the borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan that had provided safe haven for al-Qaida and its allies. In a foreign policy speech at the Wilson Center, Obama stated that the US "did not finish the job against al Qaeda in Afghanistan." The first step toward correcting that mistake "must be getting off the wrong battlefield in Iraq, and taking the fight to the terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan." Obama has pledged to shift at least two combat brigades from Iraq to Afghanistan to reinforce coalition troops. He also plans to urge NATO to increase its efforts and lift some restrictions on how and where European troops can be employed. These early indications of Obama's new Afghan strategy have been widely popular in Afghanistan, where many feel their country has played second fiddle to Iraq. Afghanistan is larger in size and population than Iraq and labors under a much more deeply degraded infrastructure after decades of war. It also suffers from a much weaker economic base, lacking the store of valuable natural resources that Iraq's oil reserves provide. Still, it lags far behind in foreign assistance for reconstruction of economic and security infrastructures. The necessary first step toward economic and political stability is to build a credible national security capability, yet while the Iraqi National Army is currently estimated to be at 254,000, the Afghan National Army has struggled to reach its current troop level of 80,000.

Obama has also emphasized that solution to Afghanistan's problem is not, in the end, a military one. Progress is urgently needed on the political and economic front as well. To this end, the President-elect has proposed to increase non-military aid to Afghanistan by \$1 billion—money that should go⇒

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The situation in Afghanistan is dire, but there is an opportunity to turn it around

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Helping Afghanistan's development will help undermine the Taliban

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United States must take action against terror sanctuaries in Pakistan



towards development projects that improve the lives of ordinary Afghans and create alternatives for Afghan farmers currently dependent on opium production for their livelihood. The lack of development in the country since the overthrow of the Taliban is a source of deep disillusionment for many Afghans who were promised strong support from its international allies but have seen very little change in their day-to-day lives. Extreme poverty, especially the insurgency-racked areas of the country, has made it easier for the Taliban – flush with drug profits and contributions from outside supporters – to recruit fighters looking to support their impoverished families. Helping the country's development efforts and winning over the Afghans by materially improving their standard of living will go far toward undermining support for the Taliban across the country.

Obama has been critical of the performance of the Afghan government, calling for greater accountability and stronger anti-corruption measures to improve government effectiveness and legitimacy. He has also called for increased international support for Afghan institutions struggling to establish the rule of law across the country. The importance of reform in this regard cannot be overstated. For many Afghans, the lack of confidence in the rule of law and the mistrust of a corrupt justice system has undermined confidence in the government—something the Taliban has skillfully exploited by promising, and often delivering, swift (if extralegal) justice in areas under their control. Rampant corruption in the distribution of foreign aid has led to skepticism concerning both the Afghan government and the international aid community. Ordinary Afghans see a well-positioned elite get wealthy while most ordinary Afghans still struggle for access to basic services like health-care and electricity. To regain the Afghan people's confidence in the government, rapid implementation of the type of reform that Obama has advocated is a necessary first step.

Perhaps the most crucial element of Obama's proposed strategy—and certainly the one that has been most popular in Afghanistan—has been tough stance regarding the elimination of militant sanctuaries in Pakistan. For Afghans, the issue of outside interference in their internal security is a sensitive one that has received inadequate international attention and action. Afghans believe they have unfairly suffered the brunt of violence that has its roots in the instability of neighboring countries –especially Pakistan—that turn a blind eye or actively enable the training grounds and sanctuaries that insurgents in the country have been using. A stronger regional effort that holds Afghanistan's neighbors accountable and puts pressure on the militants from all fronts is the only way to deal a decisive blow to the insurgency. The fact that Obama has made strong statements condemning the activities of al Qaeda in Pakistan has made many Afghans optimistic that he will take the tough stance necessary for real progress toward regional stability in South Asia. •

The Path to Peace in Sri Lanka

Shanaka Jayasekara



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LTTE had hoped for succor from Sri Lanka's military offensive—but none is likely

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Sri Lanka must work on a political package to resolve ethnic tensions and also address human rights concerns

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Success in Sri Lanka will demonstrate that even the most intractable conflicts can in fact be solved

During the United States of America's Presidential primaries, elements of the ethnic Tamil diaspora had begun hoping the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam would receive more sympathetic treatment than Islamist terrorists.

Much of the optimism was prompted by an October, 2007, interview, in which Hilary Clinton argued that "what the Tamil Tigers are fighting for in Sri Lanka, or the Basque separatists in Spain, or the insurgents in al-Anbar province may only be connected by tactics. They may not share all that much in terms of what is the philosophical or ideological underpinning".

Even this thinnest of straws was seized on by the feared terrorist group, which has been pushed to the edge by international isolation and a successful Sri Lankan counter-offensive. Several organizations believed to have LTTE sympathies threw their weight behind the Clinton campaign, in an effort to purchase political leverage. In one case, the Clinton campaign returned a US\$ 2,300 donation made by the coordinator of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization in New Jersey. Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary was concerned enough about the course of events to make a special visit to Washington, D.C., in February, 2008, to discuss the issue with Clinton's foreign policy advisor, Andrew Shapiro

It is profoundly unlikely that the coming to power of President-elect Barack Obama's government will give succor to the LTTE. It will, instead, provide both Sri Lanka and the United States new opportunities to build a positive relationship. Relations between the two countries were strained by Senator Patrick Leahy's amendment to the Department of State Appropriations Bill of 2008, which introduced restrictions on United States defense cooperation with Sri Lanka unless it meets human-rights conditionalities. While the United States is unlikely to constrain or inhibit Sri Lanka's government's military offensive against the LTTE, it will be looking for progress on a political package to address the long-running ethnic conflict. Sri Lanka will also have to reflect on its human rights record.

President-elect Obama, for his part, will have to consider how best the United States can further the peace process in Sri Lanka. In the past, the four co-chairs of the Sri Lankan Peace Process—Norway, the European Union, Japan and the United States—met regularly to coordinate their position. However, Norway and European Union seemed to guide the course of these deliberations. Strong critics of the Sri Lankan government, like Erik Solheim of Norway and E.U. External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner strongly influenced the outcomes of the Co-Chair meetings. Former US assistant Secretary of State Richard Armitage was a counter balance to the Norway-EU influence. However, his successor Richard Boucher proved more accommodative of the Norway-EU influence.

Progress towards peace in Sri Lanka will demonstrate that even the most intractable conflicts can in fact be solved—good enough reason for the Obama administration to take the challenge seriously. •

Great Expectations in Japan

Katsuhisa Furukawa



In Japan's conception, the risk of potential military confrontation among the states in North-East Asia is ever more salient, as exemplified in the increasing capability of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction as well as the increasing tempo of Chinese military modernization. Japan is also concerned with the resurrection of Russia which has demonstrated hegemonic posture increasingly. As such, the Asian regional security landscape contrasts sharply with the one in Europe where the threat of traditional military confrontation among the major powers has almost faded away. And even while North-East Asia struggles to contain these risks through multilateral frameworks, it is confronted by emerging challenges posed by non-state actors such as terrorists and criminal networks.

Japan's security community, therefore, has several expectations of President-elect Barack Obama's administration.

First, the Obama administration must ensure the credibility of US extended deterrence for its allies in Asia, and consult them in the course of the next Nuclear Posture Review. Discussions with allies should also inform US approach on nuclear disarmament and arms control.

Second, the US engagement with China should be closely coordinated with its allies in Asia. The US and Japan should closely coordinate with each other to guide China to become a responsible global stakeholder

Third, existing Asian multilateral institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and APEC should be strengthened. The US must not fear that new regional institutions are intended to counter its interests, and instead encourage the formation of bodies such as ASEAN plus 3 and East Asia Summit

Fourth, the United States should consistently sustain its commitment in the process of dismantling North Korea's nuclear weapon programs in a consistent manner, while at once addressing human rights concerns there.

At a wider level, the Obama administration would be well advised to encourage Asian countries to assert their influence in the middle-east, and address questions like the Iranian nuclear problem, given their dependence on oil from the region. It should also encourage Asian states to engage in stabilization programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where their post-World War II experience is of relevance.

In addition, efforts should be made to build bridges which would enable US allies in Asia and Europe to jointly engage Russia, thus increasing pressure on it to behave in a responsible manner consistent with international norms.

Finally, the US must promote both inter-agency cooperation and international cooperation among the Asian countries to address the non-traditional security threats, including natural disasters, infectious diseases, man-made accidents, and terrorism. •

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Asia's security environment is characterized by the risk of military confrontation

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The Obama administration must ensure the credibility of extended deterrence in North-East Asia

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US should closely coordinate regional security policies with allies like Japan

A Note From the Editors

Caroline Ziemke



This is the first edition of *Asian Conflicts Reports*, a monthly collaborative product of the Council for Asian Terrorism Research (CATR). CATR was founded in 2005 to promote specialized research drawing from the diverse expertise and perspectives of think tanks and resident experts across Asia.

Asian Conflicts Reports represents the commitment of CATR's member institutions to engage in ongoing programs to develop deeper understandings of the conditions that give rise to terrorism, insurgency, and other politically motivated violence and to forge more effective national and regional responses and share best practices in countering terrorism and political violence. This electronic journal is one of many CATR efforts to share its unique insights.

CATR's mission is to build a sustained network of Asian researchers that combines specialist country-based expertise in terrorism and political violence, specialist language and cultural skills, and career experts from a range of governmental and non-governmental disciplines. It's goal is to produce high-quality, collaborative publications on topics related to terrorism and political violence, conduct bi-annual regional forums for in-depth discussion of topics and themes of shared concern and interest, provide a venue for building collaborative relationships between senior counter-terrorism policymakers and subject matter experts, and publish analytical products that provide policymakers around the world with access to alternative analytical perspectives.



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