

Afghanistan: It is Time the World Woke Up

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Al Qaeda leader and Osama bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri has issued his first guidelines for *jihad*. This commentary proposes to analyse his guidelines, aims and strategy in Pakistan and Afghanistan and how it is likely to affect the region post US withdrawal in 2014. It is also proposed to briefly reflect on the larger issue of global terrorism in the light of his directives.

Al Qaeda's Vision

The Al Qaeda leader has endorsed the right of militants to fight the Russians in the Caucasus, the Indians in Kashmir and the Chinese in Eastern Turkistan (Xinjiang). Philippines and Myanmar too find a place in the list. He asserts the inevitability of confronting Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Algeria, the Arabian Peninsula, Somalia and Syria. His rationale for fighting in these countries reveals his mindset. In Iraq, it is liberating the Sunni territories from the Shias. In Algeria, the attempt is to weaken the country and spread *jihadi* influence in the Islamic Maghreb (Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania), the West African coastal region and the countries of the southern Sahara. The Arabian Peninsula is a target as he considers the countries of the region US proxies. He believes that Somalia is the spearhead of Crusader occupation and the Syrians are stubborn about resisting the existence of any Islamic entity, least of all the *jihadi* variety in their territory.

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Writing about Pakistan, he states, “In Pakistan, the struggle against them complements the fight for the liberation of Afghanistan from American occupation; then it aims at creating a safe haven for the Mujahideen in Pakistan, which can then be used as a launching pad for the struggle of establishing an Islamic system in Pakistan.”

The Al Qaeda chief Ayman Al-Zawahiri has presented his envisioned model for the state of Pakistan in his book *Sapeeda-e-Sahar Aur Tintamata Chiragh*. This book reveals the challenges to the constitutional institutions, Parliament, the armed forces and the judiciary. He writes: “The state called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is, in no way, an Islamic state; neither in terms of the ideological base (its Constitution) nor its practices....The time is not far away when Islam will gain dominance in South Asia in general and Pakistan in particular.” He goes on to state, “No reforms could be made in Pakistan through elections or bringing about a change in the political leadership through political means. First of all, its ideological base, on which the state has been established, needs changes, as this base, the Constitution, is in conflict with Islam.” Al-Zawahiri rejects the democratic process for making laws, and terms it unIslamic. He contends in his book: “It is very clear that approving or rejecting any proposed Bill is the prerogative of the two-thirds majority of the parliamentarians under the Constitution of Pakistan. But this Article of the Constitution is totally in violation of the *Shariah*....Islam tells us that every command of the *Shariah* should be accepted without even an iota of hesitation; and every law, order, or binding should be rejected that tends to go against the *Shariah*. Nobody could be given the authority to make a decision in violation of the *Shariah*, no matter if the decision is made by the two-thirds majority, or the whole Parliament.” His goal is unambiguous.

It, therefore, follows that the evolving Al Qaeda operations in the Af-Pak region, are to weaken Pakistan and establish a militant base in the country besides bringing about ‘*Sharia Rule*’ as a part of global *jihad*.

The operations in Afghanistan are part of Al Qaeda's larger aim in the region in conjunction with its hold in Pakistan.

The Architecture of Terrorism in Af-Pak Region

The militant organisations operating in the Af-Pak region can be broadly classified into three broad entities. The Tahreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an affiliate of Al Qaeda referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, is the umbrella outfit controlling operations in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban control operations in Afghanistan along with the powerful North Waziristan based Haqqani network. These groups are supported by Pakistan and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the rogue intelligence agency working under the Pakistan Army. The third group consists of those operating against India under Hafiz Saeed's Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) based in the Punjab province and is again supported by Pakistan and the ISI. The militant groups under this dispensation include the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT), Tareeq-ul-Islami and Jaish-e-Mohammed, the group involved in the kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl, besides other smaller groups. The Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), a group led by a Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) based militant of Kashmir origin, Syed Salahuddin, coordinates its operations with those of Hafiz Saeed. Though it is often said that there are differences between the two Taliban groups, they share an ideology and a dominant Pashtun ethnicity. The larger aims are common to all the groups, including those operating against India which is the ushering in of Global *Jihad* and *Shariah* Law. Evidence to link these militant groups with Al Qaeda is aplenty.

The Pakistan Situation

As of today, Karachi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are reeling under crimes, killings and terrorist attacks while Punjab has a number of militant groups growing steadily unchecked. The number of militant outfits in Pakistan is estimated to be around 68. The peace effort

of Nawaz Sharif, the newly elected Pakistan Prime Minister and the cricketer turned politician Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) had a disastrous start with the TTP projecting two demands for participating in the All Party Conference (APC) approved and military-backed dialogue process. The demands included the release of all its members held in Pakistani prisons and the complete withdrawal of government forces from the tribal areas along the Afghan border that are its stronghold. The Pakistan government, on the other hand, had laid down no conditions. A dialogue within the framework of Pakistan's Constitution had also not been accepted by the TTP. The collective will of the people of Pakistan expressed through the APC decision was, thus, ridiculed.

Twenty-four hours after the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government announced that the withdrawal of the troops from Malakand division would begin next month, the TTP responded with an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast on September 15, 2013, killing Maj Gen Sanaullah Khan, the General Officer Commanding SWAT Division. The twin suicide bombing outside a church in Peshawar on September 22, 2013, followed. A spokesman for the Jundul Hafsa, an affiliate group of the TTP led by Asmatullah Muavia claimed responsibility. Five days later, on September 27, 2013, a bus carrying government employees was targeted. Then came the Qissa Khwani Bazar car bomb explosion, killing 40 persons, including 18 members of a single family and injuring 100 others on September 29, 2013. The arrogance of the TTP and the vulnerability of the Pakistan government were clearly on display.

On the Balochistan side, the relief work in the areas of Awaran, Mashkay and Kech following the earthquake on September 24 and 28, 2013, was also not spared. The help of international agencies for relief work could not be sought as their safety could not be guaranteed. The military threatened to retaliate if attacked but remained a mute spectator even after multiple attacks on the Pakistan Army and the Frontier Corps.

The inaction only further weakened the credibility and standing of the Army and the government. The Army's capability and its will to stand up to the militant threat came under serious questioning.

The escape of 400 odd prisoners from the Bannu jail (Pakistan) in April last year and the flight of over 300, including hardcore militants of the TTP, from Dera Ismail Khan prison (Pakistan) in July 2013 are yet other signs of Al Qaeda's plot to weaken the Pakistan government in power.

The killings, jail breaks, the open insolence of the TTP and the inability of the state to control the unabated sectarian violence in the country provide adequate signals to show that Al Qaeda is working full throttle to weaken the Pakistan government. The TTP's defiance of the government's proposal for talks is nothing but the reflection of its belief that dialogue would be meaningless in the light of its overall scheme of things. If indications are anything to go by, the present phase is nothing but the weakening of the Pakistan government as a prelude to the establishment of a militant base in Pakistan along with its effort to establish a *jihadi* government in Afghanistan. Despite having a majority, the government seems to appear the weaker one of the two, with the TTP calling the shots and making demands.

The Double Game and Its Logic

The Al Qaeda leader's pragmatism is reflected when he says, "Further, wherever we are afforded the possibility to pacify the conflict with the local rulers so as to avail the opportunity for propagation, expressing our viewpoint, inciting the believers, recruitment, fund raising and gaining supporters, we must make the most of this opportunity; for our struggle is a long one, and *jihad* is in need of safe bases and consistent support in terms of men, finances, and expertise." He goes on to confirm, "Yes, this policy in no way contradicts with giving these local regimes –the proxies of the Crusader onslaught– a clear message that we are no easy

prey, and every action will meet an appropriate response, even if it comes after a while. This rule should be implemented in every front according to what is appropriate in the given circumstances”. Note the words “even if it comes after a while” justifying temporary concessions and delayed responses keeping in view the long-term goals.

The double games played by the Afghan Taliban termed the ‘Good Taliban’ the powerful North Waziristan based Haqqani network, and the Punjabi Taliban that include some sectarian and anti-India militant organisations such as the Sipaha-i-Sahaba (SSP) now resurfaced in the name of the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, and Harkatul Jihad-i-Islami are unambiguous. The Punjabi Taliban are part of the Pakistan Taliban’s organisational set-up and take active part in the Taliban-led terrorist attacks on the urban centres, government installations and personnel. This deception needs to be viewed in the context of the Al Qaeda leader’s guidelines to its affiliates on being pragmatic while pursuing their goal, as mentioned earlier. The support provided to these groups by the Pakistan government and ISI are the incentives for these organisations for appearing to be supportive of the Pakistani government. The switch over by these groups to Al Qaeda’s ways openly in unison is likely to show up as the ‘establishing of a militant base in Pakistan’ phase comes to an end and full-fledged war efforts to spread *jibadi* militancy in the region begin, in all likelihood after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Pakistan government has not lagged behind in this double game. Even though Pakistan is in the process of being consumed by terrorism with innumerable terrorist attacks against the Shias in the Balochistan province by the SSP, an anti-Shia militant group, the Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah in the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML – N) ruled Punjab province had campaigned openly with Maulana Ludhianvi, a leader of the SSP, for a by-election in a Punjab Assembly seat.

Terrorism in India

Hafiz Saeed carries a \$10 million bounty on his head and his outfit the LeT was banned in Pakistan in 2002. He, however, continues to move around freely in Punjab and has been provided state security. He has been allotted \$6.1 billion by the Punjab government run by Nawaz Sharif's PML (N) in its budget. The LeT training camp Markaz-e-Tayyeba in Muridke, about 30 km from Lahore, is a part of Hafiz Saeed's set-up. It provides the initial sectarian religious training, *Dawra-e-Sufa* to the militants. The LeT's self-professed goal is to create an Islamic state in all of South and Central Asia, not just Kashmir. The Jamaat-ud-Dawa and its affiliates too are linked to Al Qaeda and this has not been fully recognised by Pakistan as well as most of the Western analysts.

Writing for the Brookings Institution, William Dalrymple in his article titled "The Indian-Pakistani Conflict over Afghanistan" asserts, "The hostility between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of the current war in Afghanistan." Obviously, the Western press and the world have gone wrong in their assessment. Does anyone think that terrorism in the world or the Afghan problem will get solved if India and Pakistan resolve their dispute over Kashmir? Is this the right environment for settling the Kashmir issue? Will resolving the Kashmir issue end cross-border infiltration and violence in India from across the border? The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not about Pakistan or Afghanistan. It is about the larger aims of Al Qaeda. It is about Al Qaeda gaining roots in strategically vital areas providing access to South Asia, Central Asia, China, the Gulf region and Iran to spread its global *jihadi* movement. The miscalculations of Pakistan to consider some of the terrorist groups as 'strategic assets' and employ them against India will prove a major self-defeating exercise in the times to come. Its support to the Afghan Taliban too will fall in the same category.

The Spread of Al Qaeda: The Warning Signs

The Al Qaeda linked militant organisations have flooded the world. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), an Egyptian Islamic group, has been active worldwide, including in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and Albania. This group formally merged with Al Qaeda in June 2001 into a body formally called Jamaa'at Qa'idat al-Jihad. The TTP and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have a long history of collaboration. As late as December 3, 2012, ten alleged members of a group that sent tens of thousands of euros to the IMU, went on trial in Paris. The suspects, mainly of Turkish origin, are alleged to have collected funds in mosques in various French cities to send to the IMU between 2003 and 2008. They were detained in a 2008 sweep that included arrests in eastern France, the Netherlands and Germany. Nine out of the ten were convicted on January 08, 2013.

The Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (HSM) the Somalia-based cell of the militant Islamist group and the Ansar Dine faction based in Mali which has aligned itself with the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Meghreb (AQIM) too are affiliates of Al Qaeda.

The situation in Africa is slowly but surely slipping out of control. Boko Haram, a northeast Nigeria based terrorist organisation and an affiliate of Al Qaeda has been slowly grabbing territory in Africa and has been killing Christians in Nigeria. Al Shabaab in Somalia and AQIM in Sahel have been very active. The AQIM's growing influence in Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Algeria has far-reaching consequences for the region. The Middle East story is no less significant. The narrative is endless.

The Future

How is Al Qaeda's *jihadi* movement likely to evolve in the future? Pakistan is likely to be weakened considerably and will witness violent militant attacks to subjugate the moderate elements within Pakistan to fall in line with the *jihadi* elements and to usher in *Shariah* Law.

Afghanistan may well see the formation of a *jibadi* government at least in parts of the country with the participation of the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. If the Afghan Taliban give an impression of being moderate in the ensuing days, that will be solely with the aim of gaining power so that their aims can be achieved more easily with the power of authority and the state machinery in their command. Cross-border infiltration and terrorist attacks inside the Kashmir Valley and different parts of India will increase substantially. The *jibadi* movement will see itself raising its head in Xinjiang province (Kashgar) and Caucasus Russia. Once the Pakistan issue is settled, Iran and Iraq are likely to witness unprecedented violence while the challenges posed to the Gulf countries and demands for financial aid from them will increase manifold. The Central Asian Republics (CARs) too will over a period of time be sucked into this battle.

Terrorism is an industry. The beneficiaries are far too many. While the killing or the capture of a militant leader may raise the morale of the troops involved and the people affected, it does not hurt the organisation to the extent of forcing it to put an end to violence. Though there may be some power struggle or minor infighting, a new leader gets installed almost immediately. Like in an industry, finances, regular supply of raw material and essential infrastructure comprise the life line of terrorism. Raw material includes arms, ammunition and equipment while training facilities, communication channels and resources form part of essential infrastructure. To put an end to *jibadi* terrorism, the world will have to come together to target these vitals. Money supply channels will have to be choked. The focus needs to shift to preventing recruitment, transportation of recruits and cross-border movement of terrorists besides destruction of terrorist training infrastructure and camps. Above all, the beneficiaries of the blood money will have to be targeted, their properties seized and the guilty brought to book.

It is time the world recognised this global movement as a menace to humanity and deals with it with the firmness and resolve that it deserves. The time for viewing terrorism as a situation limited to the Af-Pak region is over. The target of *jihadi* terrorism is aiming to create an Islamic world with a strict form of *Shariah* law in force. No nation within the region, including China and the CARs or Russia and the Western world can remain detached or cut off from the effects of terrorism that is likely to unleash itself in the times to come. The Western world and its citizens will continue to remain the sought after targets. The possibility of chemical biological and nuclear weapons falling into the hands of these forces needs to be taken seriously before it is too late. Hoping to employ terrorist groups as strategic assets or employing Al Qaeda backed forces to quell situations or change governments as in Syria is likely to backfire. Providing finances to these outfits will be yet another blunder. A realisation needs to strike the powerful that once a monster is created and employed, it is unlikely to die down without taking a toll of the creator.