



## The true messages of Bombay attacks

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If terrorism is a medium of communication what was the message that those who attacked Bombay's railway system on Tuesday wished to pass on? Also, to whom was the message addressed and who was sending it?

As in all terrorist operations, the message of Bombay was multilayered.

The outer layer consisted of a reminder to India and Pakistan and, beyond them, the rest of the world that the recent thaw in relations between the two neighbours has not ended almost sixty years of terrorist tension. The terrorists wanted to say they were still around and active. This, in diplomatic language, is called *un acte de presence*.

The next layer of the message was addressed to mainstream Kashmiri organisations that , having fought

against the Indian government for decades, are now part of the political process in the disputed state. Those who carried out Tuesday's attacks wanted to show that even if such armed groups as Lashkar Tayyibah (The Army of the Good) and Jaish Muhammad (The Army of Muhammad) recycle themselves into political organisations, there would always be others to continue the violent struggle against India.

The message had a third layer, addressed to Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf who has put his career, not to say his life, on line in the hope of achieving lasting peace with India. The terrorists are telling Musharraf that the monster largely created by Pakistan will not always obey its creator.

Tuesday's message is, in part, also addressed to the small but significant constituency in Muslim coun-

tries, and Islamic communities in the West, that still supports terrorism, albeit with some ifs and buts. The message is: keep collecting those donations for the "cause".

The Bombay attacks may have been timed to coincide with this weekend's G-8 summit in Saint Petersburg, where India will be present as a guest. Last July's suicide attacks on London's transport network were also timed to coincide with the G-8 summit at Gleneagles, hosted by Britain. For weeks, the Islamist terrorist outlets in cyberspace have been abuzz with threats of another attack to coincide with the G-8. Was India targeted because the terrorists could not organise an operation in Russia or in other full member-nations of the G-8?

Having said all that, the message of Tuesday can also be seen as one of desperation. In the past three years, the Islamist terror movement has suffered one setback after another.

First, it lost its principal base (Al Qaeda) when the Taliban were overthrown in Afghanistan.

Next, it was chased out of safe havens in Sudan, Somalia and Iraq.

In Algeria, the decade long war against Islamist terrorism succeeded in breaking the back of the terror organisations.

In Egypt, almost all terror organisations have admitted defeat, and some are trying to join the political process.

The Islamist international of terror also suffered a setback in the Indonesian province of Aceh, where the leaders of the insurgency reached a compromise with the government.

The terror movement has also lost in the Philippines because the Muslim minority is no longer prepared to support a violent struggle against the state.

In Thailand, efforts by Al Qaeda to foment a full-scale war between the Muslim minority and the authorities in Bangkok have borne no fruit, despite foolish mistakes made by the former Thai government.

The Islamist terror movement has also failed in Uzbekistan and Chechnya. The reason for the failure is simple: in their use of violence, the terrorists transcended all limits, thus forcing the local population to side with the ruling order as the lesser of the two evils.

Since 2003, the terrorist movement has devoted much of its resources to fighting the emerging democracy in Iraq. It has used every tick in the book and cynically tried to foment sectarian war. And, yet, it has failed to disrupt the Iraqi political process for a single moment.

The campaign that the terror movement launched against Saudi Arabia in 2003 has also suffered major setbacks. Saudi security forces have killed almost all the terrorists named on the police wanted list, and captured hundreds of others, including non-Saudi militants. More importantly, the Saudi public has begun to show revulsion against

those who preach violence in the name of religion.

The terrorists have had a bad time in many other countries.

In Morocco, the quiet war that the security forces have waged against Islamist terrorism has led to the capture of over 700 militants, many of them with long criminal records.

For its part, Pakistan has intensified its attacks on terrorist hideouts and safe havens in the Waziristan region, killing or capturing hundreds of militants in the past year alone. According to Pakistani and western intelligence reports, the terrorists have been "combed out" of some 60 per cent of Waziristan.

Libya's decision to end decades of support for terror movements has also come as a blow to militant Islamists, both in terms of morale and of funding.

The terror movement is coming under pressure in the Afghan province of Hirmand, on the Iranian border, where the remnants of the Taliban, supported by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb Islami (Islamic Party) and the Uzbek Islamist Tahar Yuldash, have had shelter since 2002. A British contingent in Hirmand has just arrived in Hirmand to flush out the terrorists and engage them in a contest they cannot win.

Dozens of terrorist operatives and sympathisers have also been seized in Spain, France, Italy, Holland, Germany, Belgium and Britain, to name but a few of the countries en-

gaged in the global war against terror.

Throughout last year, the terrorists were unable to bring any of their many plots to fruition in any of the Western democracies. Despite efforts to organise another spectacular attack inside the United States, the terrorists have not been able to strike citadel America since the 9/11 tragedies.

In recent weeks some of the iconic figures of the terror movement, notably the Jordanian Abu-Mussab al-Zarqawi and the Chechen Shamil Basayev, have been killed or captured while several others have been seized in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In both military and political terms, the tide may have already turned against the Islamist terror movement.

Osama bin Laden's strategy of spectacular attacks in the West has produced few results. His top aide Ayman al-Zawahiri has fared no better. His strategy of seizing power in some vulnerable Islamic countries has also failed.

Where they can still launch attacks, the terrorists are forced to look for softer targets. Provoking a bloodbath at airports, parliaments, and major industrial and business locations, is becoming harder and harder. It is also more difficult to organise assassination attempts against major political and other public figures.

This is why the terrorists increasingly have recourse to suicide attacks for random killings against soft targets such as transport networks, street markets, school buses, and mosques.

All this does not mean one should underestimate the ability of the terrorists to inflict more tragedies on societies they choose to target. Cha-

sed out of one country the terrorists will regroup in another. Then recent discovery of Islamist terror cells in incubation in several Latin American nations shows that no part of the world is safe. The monster may be dying but it still has enough life to cause more tragedies. And that was the most important message of the attacks last Tuesday in Bombay.

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