

# From Twin Towers to Mumbai

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**September 11, 2001, was to figure once again in a major way in the India-Pakistan-US discourse. It was the Mumbai terrorist strike of November 26, 2008, that came as a reminder of the Twin Towers tragedy to those interested in making the comparison and the connection.**

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, had a consequence that few would have contemplated some time before. It made both India and Pakistan members of a same US-led alliance against “global terror.” Predictable, if paradoxical, was what followed. The avowed allies against terrorism were soon more implacable adversaries than ever before, each seeking to turn the alliance decisively against the other.

The then rulers of both India and Pakistan fell over each other, trying to forge this alliance with the world’s sole superpower under warmongering George W. Bush. India’s then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee minced no words about the motive of his regime and the far right camp it represented.

In an address to the nation on September 14, 2001, just three days after the Twin Towers tragedy, he said: “...no region is a greater source of terrorism than our neighborhood. Indeed, in our neighborhood — in this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century — religious war has not just been fashioned into, it has been proclaimed to be, an instrument of state policy....That is why the United States and India have begun to deepen their cooperation for combating terrorism.”

On November 20, 2001, Pakistan’s then President General Pervez Musharraf said: “Following the September 11 attack on the USA, we took a decision in the best national interest... motivated by the concerns of security of Pakistan and its core interests .... We have saved our core interests, the nuclear assets and the Kashmir cause.”

The quotes bore clear testimony to the conflicting expectations of New Delhi and Islamabad from the alliance. For India, under a coalition government headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 9/11 served as the starting point of a “strategic partnership” with the US. For Pakistan, under a military dictatorship, the day of deadly terror promised a very desirable future as a “frontline state” of the US preparing for a series of pre-emptive wars.

The conflicting expectations led rapidly to a confrontation that threatened to trigger off South Asia’s worst man-made disaster ever. On December 13, 2001, an intriguing and still inadequately investigated terrorist attack was made on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi. This was the day the hawks in both India and Pakistan were waiting for, ever since the more infamous date of 9/11.

The attack served as a signal for massive deployment of India’s troops along the border with Pakistan, mainly in disputed Kashmir. Musharraf’s Pakistan with its new-found confidence as a special US ally, responded in kind. The summer of 2002 witnessed a nerve-racking standoff between the two nuclear armed neighbors, with an estimated one million troops in an eyeball- to- eyeball engagement, preparing with pent-up fury for full-scale hostilities backed by reckless media

propaganda on both sides. Several threats to employ the ultimate weapon were exchanged. The two nations seemed to move towards the brink of a nuclear war, with imponderable consequences for the region and the world.

The disaster was averted thanks to international diplomatic efforts, mounted under pressure from the peace movements in both the countries and in the West. The danger, however, has not been eliminated. The US-India "strategic partnership" has since then produced a nuclear deal, which threatens to escalate the deadliest kind of arms race in the subcontinent. The special US-Pakistan relations, meanwhile, have only made it more difficult to quieten world apprehensions about nuclear weapons passing into terrorist hands.

September 11, 2001, was to figure once again in a major way in the India-Pakistan-US discourse. It was the Mumbai terrorist strike of November 26, 2008, that came as a reminder of the Twin Towers tragedy to those interested in making the comparison and the connection. Even as the country watched it all on the television for the next four days, the Indian media and establishment pronounced 11/26 as "our own 9/11."

The comparison was claimed to be based on the scale and savagery of the two incidents. It also rested on the fact that a target of the terrorist ferocity was the famous Taj Hotel of more than five-star splendor, as "iconic" for India's financial capital as the World Trade Center for New York. As iconic, some might add, as the Marriott Hotel, blasted by terrorists on September 21, 2008, was for Islamabad. No one, however, is talking of 11/26 as India's 9/21. Such a comparison could, after all, amount to a dangerous suggestion of common India-Pakistan interests in dealing with terrorism.

The comparison actually concealed a hope for similarity in the consequences for the two terrorist strikes. Security expert B. Raman, formerly of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of India's External Affairs Ministry, wrote: "A war of civilization between the Muslims and the infidels has begun in Indian territory - so said the first statement issued in the name of the so-called Indian Mujahideen (IM) in November 2007, after the three orchestrated explosions in three towns of Uttar Pradesh outside local courts. We saw the latest round of this war in Mumbai on the night of November 26, 2008..."

Another former RAW man, Anand K. Verma, chimed in, "Time has come for the unspoken to be spoken: radical Islam is at war with India." If the script since then has not unfolded the way such worthies wanted, the credit should go to the peace-loving majority of the people of India and Pakistan.

The people in both the countries have been hoping for a change in the "anti-terror alliance" of an ironically opposite import. The hawks of the region, however, have hardly given up. They are waiting for President Barack Obama's planned South Asia visit in November, when they hope to convince him of the need to let them continue with their nuclear and other games in the guise of combating terrorism.

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