

Osama's Death in Pakistan: Advantage India

Subhadeep Bhattacharya

Osama bin Laden is killed and in Pakistan. It's a loss for the country both ways. The Operation Geronimo (the operation that killed Osama) conducted in the neighbourhood of Islamabad, under the nose of the Pak military has not gone down well with the extremists of the country whereas, the same fact has risen question about Pakistan's credibility as a trustworthy ally in the global 'war on terror', the British Prime Minister Cameron has already remarked that Pakistan has a lot of questions to answer (www.telegraph.co.uk, 03 May 2011). Many in Pakistan are calling it an embarrassment for the country. Although both US and Pakistan are iterating the ignorance of Pakistan military establishment about the Operation, it is hardly to relieve the latter. If the extremists are not buying this, the rest of the world is convinced about State-terrorist nexus in Pakistan. So Pakistan has landed in a difficult situation today. Will it help India to gain what she desires from her case against Pakistan?

The news of Laden's death on Pak soil in US operation must have caused jubilation in New Delhi. The major political parties here wasted not time bashing Pakistan over the issue with a note of self complacency with their accusation finally proven. And they have reason to act this way. It is anything but a secret that Pakistan provides tacit support to these fanatics. The military and the intelligence are the decision makers in the country and they can hardly give up their long friendship with the fundamentalists who play a vital role in Pakistan's internal and external (especially India related) policy. It is not possible for any ruler there, civilian or military, to ignore the extremists. So giving asylum to Osama was a duty for Pakistan. Now when Osama is dead, fingers are rising against Pakistan & India is delighted. It may seem that, with Pakistan unmasked, the world, especially USA, would side with India now & Pakistan can be cornered. But the case is not that simple. In USA's 'war on terror', Pakistan's help is indispensable. Even when Osama was found residing in Pakistan (the fact repeatedly uttered by the world & denied by Pakistan), the Obama administration was very protective of Pakistan's image as an ally & even thanked Islamabad for its 'contribution' in the anti terror missions. It is not possible for USA to abandon Islamabad, since Pakistan's strategic importance to Washington is immense. Death of Osama does not conclude the 'war'. The American leadership cannot risk its alliance with Islamabad as they know that the hardliner-military adjustment in Pakistan is an undeniable fact which started taking shape in the late seventies during general Zia's rule. We should not forget that in the early years of his 'career', Laden lived in Peshawar. And, in the aftermath of the fall of Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan is the seat of global terrorism. Today, the military-extremist alliance got too crystallized to deny. And USA also knows that either to get the extremists to dialogue table or to finish them, they need Pak military. So, giving shelter to Osama is not too much an offence of Pakistan in the eye of USA to be penalized. So, we have little reason to celebrate.

In this situation how is India going to fight her case? Mere discovery of Laden in Pakistan will not alter much in US policy towards the country is well known in the corridors of the South Bloc. The American attitude towards Pakistan both during the cold war and afterwards has never been too hostile to rely on. It was well exhibited during the Kargil war of 1999 when, although critical of Pak role in the war, Washington refrained from being too much tough with Islamabad. The Pak indispensability for USA is a fact India has to accept. But the cloud has a silver lining. That Laden was living in Pakistan & the rulers there were lying to the world is proven. Certainly the issue has upset the 'anti terror warriors'. Pakistan's involvement in global terrorist activities (including Mumbai attack) has already blacklisted the country. The world's growing distrust & suspicion against Islamabad's capacity & will to combat the terror is observed from denying the country to host any multinational event like ICC cricket world Cup recently concluded, which the country co hosted in

1996 with India. Pakistan has become the 'bad boy' who needs to be kept an eye on. In the post Laden period, USA has been tough with the Pakistani terrorists as apparent from the charge sheet filed by US government against the 26/11 plotters which include a Pak army officer. It seems that US will no more turn a blind eye to military-terrorist nexus in Pakistan since they know that Pakistan is the current stronghold of the terrorists. India's decades old argument about the evil nexus is now getting endorsed. Buying the 'good Taliban-bad Taliban' theory of Islamabad until recently, the Afghan President Hamid Karzai is also pointing finger at the State-extremist rapport after Laden's death in Pakistan. There is growing demand in the American political circle to suspend providing aid to Pakistan. A private bill in this regard has already been tabled in the US Congress's lower chamber. So USA is determined to show some action otherwise President Obama's achievement will lose significance since Obama has punished Laden but not his patrons. Meanwhile, 26/11 conspirator Hafiz Sayed holding prayer openly in Pakistan for 'martyred' Laden was reported worldwide. Already uncomfortable with the Pak Talibans' vow to avenge the death of Laden, such a report is an additional pressure on Pakistan. And their target will not be America alone, but her allies also including some Gulf States. India should capitalize this situation without suspending the dialogue. Continuing dialogue with the government will not only give legitimacy to the democratic set up there but will also establish India's commitment to peace. The post Laden period is critical for Pakistan since now the military might be asked to choose between the fanatics & the 'warriors'. So they have to take the dialogue seriously & through dialogue & global diplomacy, India can persuade Pakistan to comply with global demands. It is difficult for Pakistan to launch another terror attack on Indian soil as that will add to its wounds. India should play both ways. She must engage Pakistan in dialogue & should gather world opinion against the military-extremist nexus which is ruining Pakistan. Osama's death has put Pakistan at a turning point & catered to India with an excellent opportunity to set things in her favour.

[Subhadeep Bhattacharya is an M.Phil scholar at the Institute of Foreign Policy Studies, Calcutta University.]