



Indo-Pak intelligence cooperation **By** **Amarjeet Singh Dulat and Asad Durrani**

Post-9/11 and post-26/11 Mumbai, one would think that exchange of intelligence information among friendly agencies was occurring as a matter of course—to help fill information gaps, to verify sources and substance, and to get a ‘second opinion.’ However, as any report on intelligence reform or failures shows, the absence of coordination, even among their own agencies, remains problematic. Those in the business know why it is so rare. Intelligence agencies are possessive of turf and sources. They are reluctant to part with potentially valuable leads. Very often, though, doubt about the quality or veracity of information deters an agency from sharing it, to avoid embarrassment. Intelligence cooperation is an exception.

However, despite the valid questions, doubts and apprehensions, one can also envision conditions when such cooperation is thinkable. When countries are faced with common external or internal threats, exchange of mutually beneficial information not only might be thinkable but also desirable, even prudent.

Intelligence services could provide an ideal back channel to pave the way for political dialogue—with the added advantage of discretion and deniability. It cannot harm anyone and may even help. If the governments concerned are not in a position to embark upon a “peace process” due to political constraints, they may ask their premier agencies to establish links. (In rare cases, the agencies may even do so on their own initiative.) By the time, the environment has become favourable for the dialogue to be brought out of the basement; the secret channel would have prepared necessary ground, identified contacts, and may even recommend an out of the box approach. If war is not a serious option, then dialogue—away from the public glare and therefore under less pressure—makes plenty of sense.

Cooperation can also help to guard against panic reactions; for example, unintended mobilisation of forces or possible nuclear alerts. Some intra- or extra- regional forces could cause crises that might spin out of control, with possible nuclear consequences. While the nuclear bogey should not be exaggerated, for these and other reasons it is advisable to establish a preventive mechanism; intelligence cooperation indeed being its lynchpin. Even in the worst days of the Cold War, the CIA and KGB never ceased contacts, even through open declared officers in each other’s capitals.

Our two countries, India and Pakistan, have all the above reasons for covert, even overt intelligence cooperation. Indeed the two countries have taken related measures of a non- intelligence nature; some of them before going overtly nuclear in May 1998. During the Pakistan Army’s multi-corps exercise in 1989, Zarb-e-Momin, India did not move its troops to the borders since its ambassador and military attachés in Islamabad were informed and observers invited. Similarly, when Indian security forces were wrapping up Sikh militancy in the Punjab in 1992, Pakistan was duly informed, and perhaps even offered facilities to do ground checks. Post-nuclearisation, to avoid misunderstandings about their nuclear alert statuses, both countries have developed a reasonably functional system of exchanging information; including importantly forewarning of missile testing.

One would have reasonably assumed that post 9/11, with so much trouble on Pakistan’s western borders, the country would have reached some understanding with India to prevent tensions in the East. Post-26/11 Mumbai, it seems that it had not. During the Cold War, the USA was notoriously less than generous when sharing information with NATO allies (post-9/11 its interest in information sharing increased). If that be so amongst allies, what are the prospects that India and Pakistan, with long standing ill-will, would engage in any meaningful cooperation? And, even if they could, would either side trust the other?

Maybe. Notwithstanding their differences, neighbours understand each other better than distant powers. It is not very likely that the two antagonists would agree on a common approach to address regional security. Past baggage and divergence in their views on how best to resolve, for example the problem of Afghanistan, argue against it. They however might have a common interest to prevent another incident of the kind which occurred in Mumbai in November 2008 Mumbai-like incident—India for obvious reasons, and Pakistan since it can ill-afford to be distracted from its internal front and the fallout from the ongoing War in Afghanistan. Also, since the perception that GHQ rules the roost in Pakistan is widespread, intelligence cooperation may be one way to reach out to people who matter.

A Joint Anti-terror Mechanism (JATM) agreed upon after the 2006 NAM Summit in Havana hardly moved forward, leave alone achieve any success, especially given the Indian concerns in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai carnage. Terrorism cannot be addressed by a panchayat (committee); intelligence agencies are much better equipped to deal with it. At the very least it needs to be improved to ensure sharing of intelligence at least on groups operating from

either side of the borders. In case of an incident, it must provide for joint actions, like investigation and interrogation of suspects. Bureaucratic and political reservations are expected; some of them are even legitimate, such as concerns about “sovereignty” and intrusion in sensitive matters. However, if these were not overcome, endless exchange of dossiers, a la post-26/11-Mumbai, is unavoidable. A revolutionary step like JATM will only work gradually, starting with areas of critical interest for both India and Pakistan; for example against a group out to embarrass both or start a war between them. Once rapport was established, we might expand cooperation. As the two sides develop trust and rapport its canvass is bound to expand. One day, even joint trials might become possible.

Intelligence links between neighbours are obviously desirable. It is better to institutionalise them now, rather than trying to activate them in times of crisis (that is why they failed in 26/11 Mumbai). In due course both sides would understand the need for ‘open’ intelligence posts in diplomatic missions. In the meantime, petty harassment of each other’s officers and staff could end. Intelligence links can succeed where all others fail. What agencies can achieve is not at times even conceivable in political or diplomatic channels.

This is a joint paper by two former heads of intelligence — Amarjeet Singh Dulat of RAW and Asad Durrani of the ISI — discussed in a Track II setting with current and former policy makers from July 1 to July 4 in Berlin, at the 59th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs. It now appears simultaneously in *The News International* and *The Hindu*.

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