

DANGEROUS PORTENTS

In a dastardly militant attack, militants attacked passengers in a bus in Business capital of Pakistan, Karachi, killing more than three and a half dozen innocent passengers instantaneously. All these passengers belonged to minority Shia Ismaili sect of Muslim community. A militant group, Jandullah, affiliated to ISIS, later claimed responsibility for this barbarous act. The minorities of all hues have been regularly targeted by militants and their massacre is a regular feature of Pakistan society now. However, the involvement of ISIS in this mayhem is a new feature of militant violence in Pakistan.

Sometime back, the news of ISIS entering South Asia and setting up bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan had made headlines. The present incident clearly establishes the fact that they have already formed their base and are operating in cohort with other militant groups in the region. In fact, some militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan have publicly announced with pride their affiliation with ISIS. This dangerous development which would push the entire region in turmoil and unleash barbarity is a serious existential threat to the states and societies in the states of this region.

The immediate need of the hour is that the states in the region, particularly Afghanistan, Pakistan and India should come closer and devise effective strategies to deal with this challenge. It is unfortunate, and there is a host of available evidence to support the observation that some countries in the region have been using militant groups to settle their strategic scores with their neighbors. Whenever they concluded that they were unable to take on their adversaries directly, they engaged the militant outfits to perform

the task. This vicarious engagement of extremist militant groups, apart from conferring clout on these very outfits, encouraged them to spread their tentacles in the society. The case of Afghanistan is a testimony to the fact. The same is happening in Pakistan now where the private armies are operating with impunity apart from sneaking in the neighbourhood to create terror and fear. There are areas in that country which are under their complete control. The assassination of Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer, by one of his security guards in full public view, provides a testimony to this dangerous phenomenon. It is an irony that whenever the accused is brought to the court in the murder trial which is going on, the crowds including even lawyers gather to cheer him as a 'hero'. The latest revelation that some former high ranking army and intelligence officers of Pakistan 'sold' Osama bin Laden, who was hiding in Pakistan, to US has added a new twist to the murky phenomenon of terrorism as a strategic weapon.

Historically, the strategy of raising and engaging the private armies to deal with the so-called adversaries was devised by the US in driving out Soviets from Afghanistan in the late seventies. Thousands of Muslim young men from Muslim countries designated as 'Mujahideen' were recruited and trained to participate in this so-called 'Jihad'. The media persons did ask the then US security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had devised the scheme of raising and training this private army, about their future role after the Soviets had vacated Afghanistan. He shrugged off asserting that they " would return to their home". Alas! that did not happen. Rest is the history.

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