India

Solidarity vs. the infernal spiral of terrorism

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The terrorist attack on Mumbai (Bombay) on the night of November 26-27 led to nearly 200 deaths and 300 wounded. The attention of the Indian and international media was above all concentrated on the two luxury hotels Taj Mahal and Oberoi, drawing an analogy with the "twin towers" of New York destroyed on September 11, 2001.

https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/2008_Mumbai_Attacks_Public_Response.jpg
Peace March at the Gateway of India

Certainly, it was there that the toughest fighting took place over three days between the army and a handful of jihadis. But it was also there that the wealthy were affected. The economic capital of India was nonetheless struck in seven places including hospitals, a restaurant, a cinema duplex, a Jewish cultural centre, a popular market and the big railway terminal at Chatrapathi Shivaji (CTS). The media have said a lot less about this whereas there were no less than thirty deaths in the central station; but these were ordinary Indians who rarely make the news. [1] Anonymous people whose bodies were difficult to recognise.

The fact that the attack had been carried out in so many places by a unit of only ten members highlighted the failures in the security apparatus. A police headquarters was also fired on (eleven police officers were among the victims) and the head of the anti-terrorist section of the city was killed. Media "visibility", the tourism industry, Jews and foreigners (US or British citizens) were not the sole targets, the sole objectives of the jihadis. This was also a blow against the normalisation of relations between Pakistan and India [2] aimed at creating through a bloodbath inter-communal hatreds which would be difficult to overcome.

Numerous commentators have evoked the trail of Al Qaeda, assuring that the action bears its signature (one wonders in what respect!). The Indian authorities say that the attackers were all Pakistanis, which the press try to link to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) [3], a group which would have, in the event, acted from Karachi. It is still difficult to judge whether these accusations are well founded. But whoever the authors were, the operation fits into a national and regional context which has already dangerously worsened. To evoke Al Qaeda is a way of evacuating political problems by brandishing the spectre of a mysterious terrorist organisation, without roots, striking anywhere, independently of local realities, and faced with which "anti-terrorism" would be the sole remedy. Enough to point the finger at Pakistan to allow the Indian authorities to be silent on the gravity of the situation in India itself. [4]

In India however, the spiral of inter-communal violence and terrorism took a new turn after the massacre in 2002 of around 2,000 Muslims by Hindu fundamentalist in Gujarat, in the west of the country. The authors, commanders and political supports for these pogroms have never been sentenced. Worse, the governor Narendra Modi, although heavily implicated, was re-elected to his post. The affair is all the more serious in that, despite the partition of 1947 which led to the creation of Pakistan, the Indian federation still includes a significant Muslim population of 150 million (or 14% of Indians). The sentiment of insecurity and injustice has favoured the emergence of groups of Mujahidin in several states and the appearance of an "indigenous" Islamist terrorism more or less linked to groups of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

The virulence of the far right nationalists of the Indian People's Party (BJP) –for whom only Hindus are truly Indian– and their desire to destroy the secular character of the state has increased inter-communal tensions, including against Christians. The most widespread terrorism in India is of Hindu fundamentalist origin. In this atmosphere, Islamist attacks have become more frequent and murderous. Thus, bombs placed in stations and trains had already left 186 dead in Bombay in July 2006 and last May 63 people were killed by explosions in Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan; the wealthy and foreigners were spared, so less was heard of it.

The war in Afghanistan and the unresolved problem of Kashmir have also contributed a great deal to the degradation of the situation in Pakistan. They have allowed the development of fundamentalist movements leading to bloody conflicts between Muslim sects. This contributes to the decomposition of a state already rendered fragile by national or regional antagonisms (Baluchistan, tribal areas and so on) – nobody can now control the various factions of the secret services (ISI) or the army. They render uncertain any peace process with India. US military operations carried out in Pakistani territory have added much oil to the nationalist and "extremist" fire, destabilising the country still further.

Other military conflicts engulf South Asia and a veritable arc of crisis has formed from Afghanistan in the west, to the Burmese frontier via Sri Lanka to the south. Each conflict is rooted in a local reality, like the oppression of the Tamils in the Sri Lankan case. But all this contributes to creating an overall situation which is all the more explosive in that the great powers (like the US, Russia and China) are intervening, with central Asia, given its geopolitical position, oil and "energy corridors", notably in the line of fire.

The violence of social relations in many regions of South Asia also offers a substratum favourable to terrorism inasmuch as human life is devalued. Landed proprietors have peasant leaders killed; members of "higher" castes order the liquidation of dalits ("untouchables") or adivasis (members of indigenous tribes); councils of elders condemn women to death for refusing imposed marriages and so on. The murder of innocents is customary, banalised. The murderers are rarely worried.

The Indian and Pakistani left has condemned the attack in Bombay. It calls for solidarity and demands that all terrorism – including the Hindu fundamentalist variety in India and the Islamist variety in Pakistan – is repressed. But some Indian organisations, under the shock of the event, are also demanding a strengthening of the security services, police and army. [5] That is the thin end of a deadly wedge. The state is not a stranger to terrorism, far from it.

All the terrorist movements evoked here have been supported at one time (like the most radical Pakistani or Afghan Islamist currents against the Soviet occupation which were sponsored by the US) or are today supported by the established economic and political powers, national or foreign. The Indian BJP protected Hindu fundamentalist terrorism, it has led the federal government and still governs various states; its networks penetrate the state security apparatus. It is enough to recall the state of emergency imposed in 1975-1977 to see what the Congress Party is capable of.

Also state terrorism is itself one of the main components of terrorism – and this is true in the West: see for example the case of France with its massive recourse to torture in the repression by the army of colonial liberation struggles, the sinking of the Greenpeace ship, the Rainbow Warrior by the secret services, the probable complicity in the Rwandan genocide by the Tutsis and so on.

In the name of anti-terrorism, states are making constant inroads into civil liberties. A sort of permanent state of emergency is tending progressively to empty the state of law of its content. The social movements are threatened with criminalisation. The development of the situation in the United States since September 11, 2001 [6] – but also in Europe – or the existence for years of a legal and humanitarian scandal like the prison of Guantanamo, leaves no doubt on the gravity of these drifts.

Moreover, capitalist globalisation puts workers in competition with each other and revives particularisms, favouring communalist responses, xenophobia, racism and "casteism", religious fundamentalisms from which terrorism emerges.

All the governments of South Asia (and nearly all the governments of the world) are imposing neoliberal policies which undermine solidarity. Indeed, it is precisely by strengthening solidarity that we can oppose terrorism. It is not enough to appeal to noble sentiments or to "

". Tolerance is certainly preferable to intolerance, but it really is a minimum programme! To block the infernal spiral of inter-communal violence and of terrorism, it is necessary to defend and reconstitute active solidarity. To value what there is in common between ordinary people, workers, beyond administrative, religious and cultural frontiers. That necessarily involves the defence of their social and democratic rights against the proprietors, the governors and imperial domination. Such inter-communal and internationalist solidarities can only be built in struggle.

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[1] 1. See notably Gnani Sankaran, Hotel Taj : icon of whose India ? http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12193

[2] 2. See notably Farooq Sulehria, Mumbai Attacks : An Al-Qaida attempt to provoke India-Pakistan War ? http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12256

[3] The Army of the Good. See on this organisation Farooq Sulehria, op. cit.

[4] 4. See Tariq Ali, The Assault on Mumbai : India's Leaders Need to Look Closer to Home http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12157

[5] 5. See Focus on the Global South, On the Mumbai Terror Attacks : Supporting the Human Chain in Mumbai on Dec. 10th http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12199

[6] 6.See Biju Mathew, As the Fires Die : The Terror of the Aftermath http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12205