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Mumbai attacks: what is the truth?

In this blame game being played from both sides, the only loser is justice and truth.

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An undersecretary in India's Central Bureau of Investigation, Satish Verma, has recently accused his own government of orchestrating the attack on the Indian parliament, as well as the 2008 Mumbai attack. His statement, which has come almost four years after the attack in Mumbai, has caused ripples in Pakistan, a country where many already believe that Osama bin Laden was not killed in the American raid and that the US and the Jewish lobby were behind the 9/11 episode. But is this statement coming from a government official as important as we in Pakistan think? At least, our government thinks so. Our foreign office spokesperson has asked the Indian government to "explain its position and bring forth facts about the revelations made by the former Indian government official".

There are three narratives of the Mumbai attack — the Pakistani narrative, the Indian one and the neutral one. For the joy the undersecretary's statement has brought to the majority of Pakistanis, let's talk about the Pakistani narrative first.

Kasab and his accomplices were the creation of Indian intelligence. He had no Islamic inclinations or knowledge about jihad, could not recite the Holy Quran and was heard on video calling *bhagwan* for mercy. All the characters of the Mumbai attack were stage-managed and so were the court proceedings that went on for years before Kasab's final execution. Hemant Karkare, the chief of the Mumbai antiterrorist squad, who was also killed on the same day and who was investigating state-sponsored terrorism activities, was also a prime target who was eliminated by the Indian establishment. Another person is Colonel Purohit whom we accuse of orchestrating the Samjhauta Express tragedy. Thus, the talk of bartering the accused in the Samjhauta tragedy in India against those accused of the Mumbai attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan and the ISI would never plan and execute such an operation, which would leave visible footprints. Pakistan would lose much and gain little if it was to plan and execute the Mumbai attacks. The bottom line: it was not a Pakistani plot but an Indian script.

The Indian narrative: well, India has over 10,000 undersecretaries in its central and state governments. It means little to India when one of them speaks about state complicity. Kasab belonged to the Faridkot village in Pakistani Punjab. His family disappeared from the village and nobody knows about their whereabouts. Why and who murdered Chaudhry Zulfiqar, the prosecutor in the Mumbai attack case? And why is his substitute, Chaudhry Azhar, reluctant to appear before the trial court? Why is the trial of Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi and his fellow defendants moving at a snail's pace? It wasn't the Indians but the Americans, who tried David Headley for videotaping and mapping the targets for the gunmen of the Mumbai attacks. Why would Indians plan and execute such an attack resulting in the loss of over 160 lives? If the idea was to implicate Pakistan, it could easily have been achieved with a less brazen attack. Bottom line: it is Pakistan's state or non-state actors that are behind the attacks.

The neutral narrative is that of amazement. It is ridiculous to believe that Kasab's identity cannot be established. An independent judicial panel may be able to establish this with the consent of the two governments. If the nature of the interstate relationship is based on cooperation, and pursuit of justice is a mutual goal, then to distinguish white from black is not difficult. But if this relationship is being guided by the establishments in both countries which cover up more than they uncover, then we are not likely to see an early settlement to tragedies like Samjhauta Express and the Mumbai attacks.

Statements like the one given by the former Indian government official propel people to jump to conclusions. In this blame game being played from both sides, the only loser is justice and truth. Both governments allow heaps of evidence to remain buried under the heavy load of their national security and national interests. The result is deepening hostility among the people across the divide and complacent governments that continue to execute 'cover-ups'.

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