

OPINION

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The Quint

What Durrani Denied About 26/11 is More Crucial Than His Admission

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On 6 March 2017, the Twittersphere in New Delhi lit up with the claim that Major-General (Retd) Mahmud Ali Durrani confessed that the Mumbai attacks of 2008 were executed by a terrorist group in Pakistan.

In the pieces that India's various media ran, his ostensible honesty was greeted with endless enthusiasm. After all, Durrani served as Pakistan's National Security Advisor (NSA) for (gasp) more than eight months between 1 May 2008 and 10 January 2009. He was the NSA when the attacks happened and he even risked the wrath of the State by admitting that Ajmal Kasab – the lone surviving terrorist – was Pakistani.

He admitted this long after a brave journalist had already interviewed his father near Okara in Pakistan's Punjab province. This was a form of quasi-validation that many Indians were waiting to hear from someone who was in office when the tragedy took place. Unfortunately, there is little to be celebrated in what he said. Indians, and indeed, the international community, deserve better than this.

Focus on What the General Denied

So what did the “gernail” say that was so momentous and worthy of such praise and reportage? In halting English, read from prepared remarks that included mangling the pronunciation of Mumbai, the General said:

Today, terrorism is a serious global threat that needs to be defeated by a well-considered strategy both at the national, regional and international levels. The terrorist attack in Mumbai carried about by a terrorist group in Pakistan on 26/11 is a classic transborder event.... Mistrust overruled common sense.

There is nothing new in this. The world knows that the Mumbai attacks were executed by Lashkar-e-Taiba and that this group was and remains based in Pakistan.

What the General denied was much more worthy of coverage.

At the end of his prepared remarks and during the question-and-answer session, Durrani explicitly said that the Mumbai attacks were not State-sponsored.

However, it is well-known from the testimony of David Coleman Headley, the Pakistani-American who played a key role in conceiving and executing the plan, that not only was this attack “State-sponsored,” ISI officials were foundational partners in all aspects of the gruesome, murderous rampage.

Durrani’s dishonesty, of course, was more expansive than simply denying the State-sponsorship of the Mumbai attack. He also deflected and minimised Pakistan’s duplicitous role in undermining the US-NATO-Afghan effort to bring a stable democracy to Afghanistan by unstintingly supporting the Afghan Taliban and their savage collaborators such as the Jalaluddin Haqqani Network and the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Pakistan’s proxies have slaughtered countless Afghans in and out of uniform as well as thousands of international civilian and military personnel. And all the while Pakistan has received more than \$33 billion from the United States alone, ostensibly because it is a “partner” in the US efforts there.

You Want to Like Durrani But...

Durrani has long claimed that he believes that peace between India and Pakistan is the best hope for the sub-continent. In 2000, he even published a book titled India and Pakistan: The cost of conflict, the benefits of peace.

Moreover, Durrani is so damned affable. You want to like him.

His self-proclaimed commitment to peace as well as his book and avuncular demeanour has made him a long-time favourite of the Track II mafia, in which various international donors fund Pakistanis and Indians to go on exotic boondoggles at pricey vacation destinations to discuss potential pathways to peace.

When Durrani speaks, you want to believe what he says. He’s just that kind of guy. But when you think about this logically and question the trappings of this soft-spoken and lovely human being professing peace-mongering, you have to seriously ask how he can say he truly desires harmony when he can’t even acknowledge what the world already knows: Pakistan explicitly sponsors terror in India and Afghanistan as one of its principle tools of foreign policy.

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Waiting for the ‘Right’ General

Indians are not alone in their eternal quest for that special General who may have the magic to help Pakistan become something other than a State-sponsor of terror that uses terror as a tool of foreign policy safely under its ever-expanding nuclear umbrella. Americans – like Indians – wait on tenterhooks whenever a new Army Chief or ISI chief is appointed. Inevitably, the talking heads and government proxies concur that this new General is “someone we can work with”.

They will rehearse these lines until they believe it or until the General in question reveals that he is pretty much cut from the same khaki cloth as his predecessors.

It takes a special kind of cupidity to continue to see what we want to see in these Generals rather than what we need to see. The Pakistan army can never truly want peace with India. If there were ever to be peace, the army would no longer be able to hog the budget and seize the reins of power directly and indirectly whenever they wish. In essence, if there were to be peace with India, the Pakistan army would

have to become a normal army under civilian control and right-sized for the needs of the State. The Pakistan army understands this.

Similarly, Pakistan does not want peace with Afghanistan. It wants to dominate Afghanistan. It does not want a neighbour; it wants a client. The Americans never understood this and continued to believe that there was a right combination of allurements that could – with the right General – make Pakistan a force for peace in the region rather than a menace. Time and time again, these Generals disappoint.

It's time to stop looking for something that does not exist. Pakistan's army will not change of its own accord. Why would it? The army has experienced no consequences for its behaviour and worse yet, it is confident it never will.

Instead of welcoming these retired and serving Generals with smiles and applause for niggardly offering slivers of the obvious, those of us who write about these issues and interact with these men have an obligation to call them out, to reject their crumbs of fiction-dripping half-truths and hold them to account.

They should not be allowed to return to Pakistan and report that all was placid on the talk-circuit front. Instead they should have to report to their mothership that the audience is done with the lies. We want action not smiles.

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