

## **Indian Express: Forget the dossier**

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Assembling credible evidence on the involvement of Pakistan's security agencies in the planning and conduct of the war against Mumbai does not in any way mean that India can expect genuine counter-terror cooperation from across the border or automatic pressure from the international community on Islamabad. These are objectives that India will have to win by the dint of its diplomatic persuasion and the credibility of its threat to use force against Pakistan. Constructing a convincing case on Pakistan's involvement in the Mumbai attacks is an important but small part of India's effort to compel Islamabad to act against anti-India terror groups. That the heat from India's political campaign is getting to the Pakistan leadership is evident from the sacking of its national security adviser, the retired Major General Mahmud Ali Durrani, on Wednesday. India must now start raising the temperature.

It must remember when formulating its post-Mumbai strategy, however, that this is not a Bollywood court-room drama, where the good guys win the argument and the bad guys go to jail. New Delhi should not forget even for a moment that there is no higher international authority that is about to prosecute and sentence those guilty of the Mumbai aggression. In the world of sovereign states, the burdens of justice and retribution belong entirely to governments which must exercise the political will to use force against another, with all the attendant risks. To be sure, there is the bar of international public opinion that shapes the political context of India's post-Mumbai actions. It is in New Delhi's own interest to exhaust all other options before resorting to its right of self-defence against Pakistan. Having made a solid case against Pakistan, India must quickly face up to two important realities. The first is that Pakistan's civilian government led by Asif Ali Zardari is not a free agent capable responding to India's demands. Zardari reminds the world of his unenviable political condition when he pleads for a United Nations probe into the murder of his wife and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. If he can't order a credible national investigation into Bhutto's assassination, how can we expect him to pursue those responsible for the Mumbai terror? The utter confusion in Islamabad's response to India's charges is a clear enough testimony to the political irrelevance of Pakistan's civilian leadership. The army, in theory, could deliver on New Delhi's demands; but it has no real incentive to act against a monster that it has so deliberately nurtured over the decades. Compelling adversaries, especially a nuclear-armed one, to act in a prescribed manner is never easy. After Mumbai, however, failure is not an option for New Delhi. It can't even settle for a draw or a delayed decision. The Congress leadership needs visible success, and on short order, to preserve its domestic political credibility. Having a great dossier on Mumbai, therefore, is not good enough for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. To force the Pakistani leadership to act purposefully against anti-India terror groups, India must necessarily raise the threat of military/nuclear escalation and leverage, in its own favour, the inevitable diplomatic intervention of the great powers, especially the United States. In India's two recent crises with Pakistan, the US played the key role in defusing the tensions and finding an acceptable termination of the conflict. In 1999, President Bill Clinton insisted that Pakistan must unconditionally vacate its occupation of the Kargil heights without any reciprocal concessions from India. During the military tension between India and Pakistan after the attack on Parliament on December 13, 2001, President George W. Bush pressed General Musharraf to give commitments on ending Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism on a permanent basis. While the results from that commitment were never fully satisfactory, Musharraf's restraint was indeed real. In these two crises, Clinton and Bush offered cooperation that was both unexpected and significant. Together, Clinton and Bush demonstrated that the US will no longer tilt towards

Pakistan in its conflicts with India. This in turn provided an entirely new basis for mutual political trust between New Delhi and Washington. What we don't know at this stage is what exactly Barack Obama wants to do in South Asia. On the one hand, he supports India's right to self-defence against cross-border terrorism from Pakistan. On the other hand, he has repeatedly suggested some kind of linkage between Kashmir and Afghanistan. India's principal task is not further dissemination of the Mumbai dossier. The FBI has been very much part of this investigation and the American establishment knows as much about the Mumbai attack as India, and then some. Instead India should concentrate on one consequential question: Is there any common ground between the new integrated approach towards Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India that Obama promises and India's urgent need to end, once and for all, Islamabad's war against India? India must convey two important messages to the incoming Obama team. One is that India is prepared to fully cooperate with the Obama administration in a positive transformation of the north-western parts of the subcontinent; and the other is to make it absolutely clear that New Delhi will oppose, with all the resources at its command, any American attempt to appease the Pakistan army with Indian political concessions on Kashmir. The first weeks of the Obama presidency are likely to define the broad contours of his South Asia policy. They also happen to be the UPA government's final moments in power. The time for diplomacy, then, is rapidly running out. Sooner than later, either with or without American political support, Manmohan Singh will have to make good his promise to extract a price from the perpetrators of the Mumbai aggression.

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