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| **Surprised at Gurdaspur**    **You don’t prepare for terrorism after it has happened. And you don’t just learn from your own experience.**    Written by K P S Gill | Published:July 30, 2015 12:00 am –  There is great excitement in the media over two aspects of the Dinanagar terrorist strike: One, that hard evidence in the form of GPS coordinates proves the terrorists came from Pakistan, and that they were in possession of night vision devices with US government markings; two, that the NSA-level talks are going to proceed as scheduled, but “terrorism” is going to be on top of the Indian agenda for discussions.  These are far from the many and urgent issues that are raised by this attack. An investigation is ongoing, and it will certainly uncover significant evidence over time that will point overwhelmingly to Pakistan as the source of this attack. There should be little doubt that this doesn’t matter in the least. Pakistan has engaged in terrorist proxy war against India for more than 30 years; the cumulative evidence of this is overwhelming and has been shared with Pakistan and the world; none of this has had any impact. India will have to learn to effectively defend itself.  As far as “talks” are concerned, this is an ongoing charade that will lead nowhere. Great hope is being invested in the NSA talks — but what results have the recent discussions between Prime Ministers [Narendra Modi](http://indianexpress.com/profile/politician/narendra-modi/" \t "_blank) and Nawaz Sharif produced? There have been talks and the disruption of talks for decades.  There are other issues that are far more important. The most significant of these is the degree of visible unpreparedness in a sensitive border district like Gurdaspur, in a state that has itself experienced over 13 years of the most virulent terrorism, and that adjoins another state that is still the target of a 26-year-old Pakistan-backed proxy war. Even the Special Weapons and Tactics (Swat) team was not wearing rudimentary protection at Dinanagar. Unless a crisis is immediately at hand, institutions are simply pushed into degeneration and decay, robbed of resources, deeply politicised, or just allowed to deteriorate through sheer neglect.  It is useful to recall that Punjab Police had been forged, in the late-1980s and early 1990s, into an efficient and fully equipped counter-terrorism (CT) force, with each thana provided adequate capacities — protection, transport, weapons and the limited technological tools then available — to respond to any challenge within its jurisdiction. Clearly, these systems have crumbled and, were it not for the courage of those who fought terrorism at its peak and who still serve in the police, the state’s capacity for response would now have been virtually non-existent.  Indeed, even in crisis, security forces face an uphill battle in securing the most basic resources and capacities. The civilian bureaucracy has been one of the most obstructive entities in this regard, and I recall, during the peak of terrorism in Punjab, I was in constant and abrasive confrontation with the secretariat in Chandigarh and New Delhi. Confronted by continuous ambushes and attacks, we repeatedly asked for bulletproof vehicles, but received no response. So we went ahead and improvised. Some old and condemned Ambassadors were recovered and bulletproofed, and were found to be extremely successful. Later, audit objections were raised against our efforts. We were bulletproofing vehicles for less than Rs 2 lakh, but were subsequently forced to buy them for over Rs 6 lakh. This is the genius of the bureaucracy. Significantly, at Dinanagar, the police had to borrow bulletproof vehicles from the army to approach the building under siege.  Again, when the Khalistanis got the AK-47 from Pakistan, Punjab Police was stuck with antiquated .303 bolt-action rifles. When we asked for comparable firepower, there was uniform opposition from the bureaucracy. One joint secretary in the Union home ministry wrote that no such weapon should be given to a “civil force”. There was a misconception that such weapons could be used to quell protests, without realising that not every policeman was going to be issued an AK rifle.  What is not realised is that you don’t prepare for terrorism after it has happened. You must be prepared at all times. And you don’t just learn from your own experience. States across India have been attacked by Islamist terrorists. Yet, each state is caught by surprise and pleads that the “Centre had not provided intelligence” or “resources”. As if state governments have no responsibility. And when the Centre asks for any dilution of the constitutional allocation of “law and order” to the jurisdiction of the states, there are (rightly) shrill protestations from all chief ministers.  The entire Punjab border with Pakistan was fenced during the terrorism years. Heavy patrolling and constant vigilance reduced direct infiltration to an easily manageable trickle. But today, while the fence still stands, there is increasing laxity in surveillance and oversight. Deep political patronage has sought to facilitate drug trafficking and smuggling of other contraband, and this has resulted in the regular movement of materials and men across this sensitive frontier, substantially with the collusion of some police and paramilitary personnel.  The Centre must also share at least some of the blame. Punjab has been downgraded in terms of support for expenditure on security, and the Central scheme for police modernisation has also been scrapped by the Modi regime. This is despite the fact that the IB is constantly issuing warnings that Punjab is a “sensitive state”.  Dinanagar is just a sign of threats to come. The regional and global environment is deeply troubling, and Punjab is a frontline state. It is crucial that the CT capacities of Punjab Police be restored. All police stations along the international border, in particular, need to be strengthened. Crucially, the issue of morale also needs to be addressed. No attention is paid to the fact that dozens of police officers and men who fought terrorism at its peak continue to languish in jails, and many others are still facing interminable and mischievous prosecution.  There are proliferating threats of a global Islamist terrorism today. It is high time that concerned citizens, the media and elements in the political constituency made a concerted effort to bring substantive issues of CT policy, strategy and tactics to the fore, instead of wasting efforts on high-decibel nothings.  The writer, former DGP, Punjab, is president, Institute for Conflict Management, and publisher, ‘South Asia Intelligence Review’  - See more at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/surprised-at-gurdaspur/#sthash.t9mJxO3W.dpuf> |