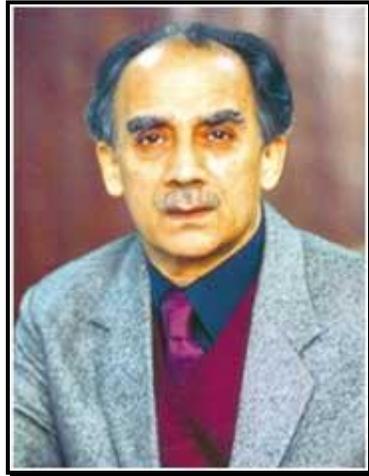




Arun Shourie
Articles on Kashmir



ARUN SHOURIE

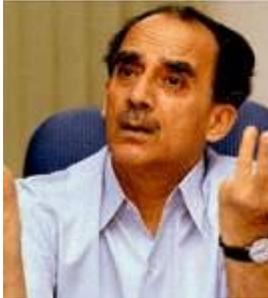
ARTICLES ON KASHMIR

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1.0 ARUN SHOURIE



Arun Shourie (born 1941) is among India's best known and controversial commentators on current and political affairs. He backs his distinctive writing and his conscientiously independent perspective with rigorous analysis and meticulous research.

Born in Jalandhar, Punjab, India, he studied at Modern School and St. Stephen's College in Delhi. He obtained his doctorate in Economics from Syracuse University in the United States. He has been an economist with the World Bank, a consultant to the Planning Commission, India and editor of the Indian Express (a leading Indian newspaper).

In a series of remarkable exposés, many of which he wrote himself, Shourie and the Indian Express uncovered corruption in the highest echelons of the government and exposed several major scandals of the era, including what has been dubbed "India's Watergate." Shourie started a one-man crusade in 1981 against Abdul Rahman Antulay, the chief minister of Maharashtra State, who extorted millions of dollars from businesses dependent on state resources and put the money in a private trust named after Indira Gandhi. The story caused the eventual resignation of the state governor, the highest-ranking official in India ever forced from office by newspaper reporting, and great embarrassment to Gandhi and her ruling Congress Party. Shourie's exposés resulted in a prolonged labor dispute at the Bombay offices of the Indian Express, where a labor organizer with ties to Antulay encouraged workers to strike for a minimum wage double than what was paid at any other newspaper in India. It also resulted in a government crackdown that included a host of legal cases launched against the Indian Express by various agencies. In 1982, Goenka fired Shourie as a result of continued government pressure. Between 1982 and 1986, Shourie wrote for various newspapers and magazines. He was appointed executive editor of the Times of India in 1986 but was lured back to the Indian Express by Goenka in 1987. Shourie launched a staunch attack on then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi over the Bofors howitzer gun purchase scandal. This in some ways led to Mr. Gandhi's defeat in the next parliamentary elections.

Among the many battles Shourie fought for press freedom, perhaps the most famous was his crusade against the government's proposal in 1988 to introduce a defamation bill. It was widely perceived that the bill had been introduced with unusual speed in Parliament in an attempt to muzzle the Indian Express, and the entire media community joined Shourie and the Indian Express in condemning the move. At one stage, there were 300 cases filed by the government against the Indian Express, and credit supply from banks was cut off. Shourie, however, continued his battle against government corruption until 1990, when differences on editorial policy forced him to resign from the Indian Express. The differences involved Shourie's opposition to the implementation of Mandal Commission Report, which gave reservations for Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and were initiated by then Prime Minister V.P. Singh's government. After that, he devoted his energy to writing books and regular columns, which appeared in different languages in 30 newspapers across India.

Shourie has definite rightist leaning and is considered close to the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) ideology.

His writings have gained him a vast following around the country, as well as several national and international honours. Among these are the Padma Bhushan, the Magasaysay Award, the Dadabhai Naoroji Award, the Astor Award, the K.S. Hegde Award and the International Editor of the Year Award. The Federation of Indian Publishers recently conferred The Freedom to Publish Award on him.

Arun Shourie has been a member of the Rajya Sabha and also held the office of the Minister of Disinvestment, Communication and Information Technology in the Government of India under Atal Bihari Vajpayee's prime ministership.

He has written 15 books which include "Worshipping False Gods", "Eminent Historians - Their Technology, Their Line, Their Fraud", "Missionaries in India" and "The World of Fatwas" among others.

His book The World of Fatwas deals with Islam and Worshipping False God on modern day Dalit icon Dr. Ambedkar. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arun_Shourie

2.0 HAZRATBAL MOSQUE CRISIS: HOW AND WHY IT HAPPENED?

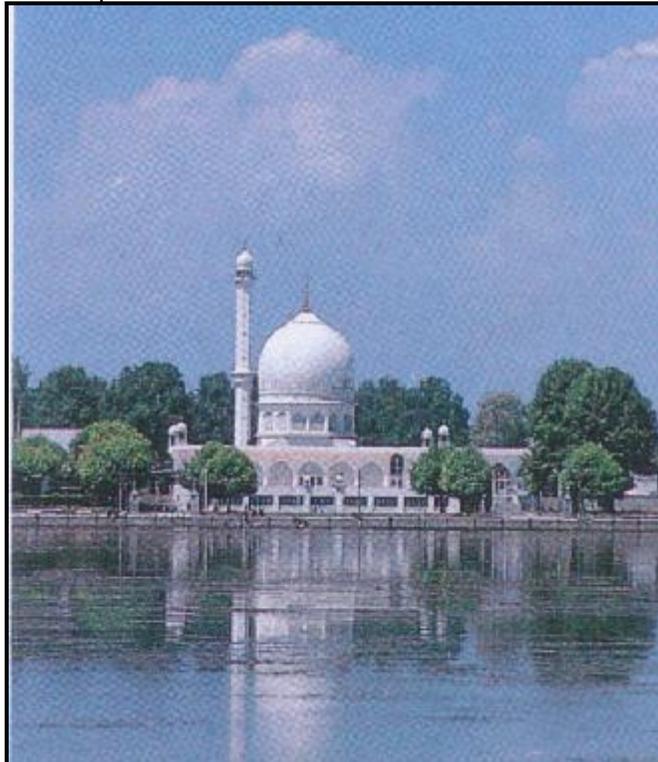
May I begin with a few passages from my book 'A Secular Agenda'? It was sent to the press in late September and comes out later this week. A chapter, "No time to relent", which concludes the section on Kashmir notes:



"On April 9, intelligence agencies received information that a number of militants had gathered at Hazratbal mosque. The army and the BSF surrounded the place. Eighteen high-level militants were inside. They were as good as in the bag - it was just a question of waiting them out. But suddenly and insistently the army and the BSF were ordered... to lift the cordon. The militants escaped With great effort and at great risk three of them

were caught subsequently one of them was the constable whose death became the occasion for the strike by police. Why in hell were they allowed to escape in the first place?

"The revolt by the J & K police showed three things - the depth to which such nonsense had pushed the situation, the opportunity we still had if only we would let the army etc. work, and also how we were squandering every favor- able turn. The policemen were all defiance and bravado. In just 10 minutes they were covering before soldiers and pleading that the soldiers save the honour of the J & K police by not lowering the police flag! That was yet another moment to begin to re-establish authority. But like every turn it too was allowed to pass.



The Hazratbal mosque.

"The consequences were not long in coming. Since May, civilian and military intelligence had been reporting that mercenaries had begun entering Sopore. Intelligence and others urged decisive and early action. Nothing was done. By September, about 600 of them were reported not only to be there, they were reported to have entrenched themselves in bunkers dug out in some houses at various points in the town. Minimal action in May-June would have seen the end of them. By September, a Bluestar-type operation alone would have sufficed. And intelligence was warning that if that sort of action was not launched immediately, and the snow were allowed to set in, the mercenaries would get another four to five months to fortify their presence. What sort of an operation would be necessary then?

"Indeed with the governor's dithering the paralysis has crept from Sopore to Srinagar itself. Till April, the security forces used to enter and search whichever place they had reason to believe was being used by terrorists as a hide-out or a meeting place. In the following months, they were kept from entering Hazratbal, the medical and engineering colleges and other places. The result has been predictable. The terrorists and their civilian front-men have now a large presence at these sites and they have made arrangements so that, should the armed forces now attempt to storm the places, government must risk substantial civilian casualties..."

Now, this was not foresight. It is what I was being told by intelligence officers. They had been sending reports to this effect to every high quarter. It is because they were receiving absolutely no response at all to their warnings that they had reached out to others.

At the top, the persons agreed with everything, said they saw the gravity of the situation, that they would take requisite action swiftly, and did absolutely nothing.

I cannot pretend to have been shocked. I cannot even pretend that I was taken in by their "agreeing with everything": I have learnt that this is their way of avoiding the bother of going into matter any further. I cannot even pretend that their deciding nothing, their just sitting-transfixed as possums was any surprise. But I was perturbed: The matters were so urgent, the officers were not getting a hearing. I, therefore, kept going back, and urging others to seize the matter. To no effect.

By late September-early October, communication between Srinagar and the home ministry had broken down completely. Mr Rajesh Pilot, the George Fernandes of the current round, who had wrecked so much by his bullshiness, who along with Mr Farooq Abdullah had sponsored Gen (Retd) KV Krishna Rao, was by now blaming Gen Rao for the state of affairs; Gen Rao in turn was letting it be known that he had no time for junior ministers from Delhi. Mr Chavan was still in sulk. Everything, therefore, depended on Mr Rao. He saw how dear the 'personality clashes' were proving for the country. But habits ingrained deep by a life- time of lying low had left him little inclination to intervene. Mr Arjun Singh left him no time.

At about this time intelligence agencies reported that arms were being stored in the police barracks adjoining the Hazratbal mosque. And, that the barracks and the shrine were being used by the terrorists to 'interrogate' and torture those they charged with being informers. Even if the shrine is out of bounds, at least raid and clean up the barracks, the intelligence agencies urged. The proposal was vetoed. If not a raid, at least send senior officials on a surprise inspection. Even that was not done.

On October 14, the terrorists held what was virtually an exhibition of arms and ammunition they had piled up inside the shrine. This too was reported. Nothing was done. Then, it seems, came reports that the militants were going to whisk away otherwise damage the relic or the mosque. Then the army was asked to cordon off the place.

But three things were apparent at once. There was no plan about what was to be done after the cordoning, nothing had been decided about what the final objectives of the siege were going to be: To save the relic? To nab the militants? Yet the honour of the army, indeed of the country had been committed.

Second, Delhi still had no time. Don't ask me, I am completely out of it - that was Mr Pilot's refrain, Mr Chavan had not stepped forth: Mr Rao has left things to Mr Pilot - that was his premise. Mr Rao in turn was busy - with the re-entry of Mr Asoke Sen, with scotching Mr Arjun Singh, with fobbing off the troubles in Karnataka, with fobbing off the pulling and tugging of rivals in Delhi, with bringing about a truce between Mr ND Tiwari and Mr Jitendra Prasad so that the list for UP could be put out...It was not till the fourth day of the siege that he found time to hear the officers.

The third fact was even worse. Every hour showed that the coterie of officers around Gen Rao was acting at cross purposes with the army. The moment the siege was laid it was decided, and announced, that water and electricity be cut off. In fact, they were not cut off till two-and-a-half days later by the army taking the matter in its own hands. We do not rule out force, said the corps commander. Forces shall not enter the shrine at all, said Gen Rao. On October 23, water supply was restored, and on the 24th, it was announced that food would be sent in - the army had not been consulted about either decision.

The decisions were being taken, the 'negotiations' were being conducted by persons about whose tenacity, judgment, inclination there were gravest apprehensions among officials in Delhi. In their hands and Gen Rao's. They had many concerns, the country's interest must have been one of these. But their dominant concern was that they, and no one else was, and remained in charge. A scuttling of the

decision of no less than the PM's just a few weeks earlier had been symptomatic. Mr Pilot had recommended the appointment of Mr KPS Gill as DGP, J&K. He had sent the file directly to the Prime Minister - that he had not routed it through the home minister too had been symptomatic. Having been given the impression that his appointment was through, Mr Gill started discussions in Delhi about the state of affairs in the Valley and about what he would be doing. The Prime Minister eventually cleared the file, noting that he agreed with the proposal in principle, but adding that the home minister may also see. The file remained in transit for two days.

An authority in the highest echelons in Delhi (the person's identity seems to have been established conclusively) not only alerted the clique in Srinagar - You will be nobodies, Mr Gill listens to no one - he suggested the way out for them. The Governor had the 'constitutional authority' to appoint to the post an officer from within the state, he noted. The appointment of a local-cadre officer was swiftly announced, and the orders about Mr Gill scuttled.

During the tenure of Mr Jagmohan and of Mr GC Saxena, there was an inner group which decided things - it included key persons from the army, military and civilian intelligence, the paramilitary and civil administration. That group has little authority now; and in a word, has been replaced by those officials. And it is not as if these latter are the fingers of one hand.

Yet decisions of the greatest moment - the decisions which shall determine the fate of our country - are in their hands. The sixth day into the siege, the standing committee of the NIC was called to meet. Some counselled 'utmost restraint' - they did not spell out what it meant, and what else was the government doing in any case but be 'restrained'? Mr Biju Patnaik counselled either of two options impartially! Send the fellows packing to Pakistan, the world would then know, he said, or storm the place. Mr Chandrashekhar said he was for neither course being determined in Delhi, such things ought to be left to the men on the spot.

It was not evident what precise level of devolution he had in mind. But the prime minister seized on what Mr Chandrashekhar had said. And Mr Rao wanted to assure all present that he had himself spoken to the governor that morning, and had assured him that the Governor was in charge. There would be no interference.

Several participants in the meeting were greatly troubled. It is not just that people on the spot working to cross purposes. It is that people on the spot can decide the logistics, the timing etc., of a specified option. How can they decide the option itself? The consequences of storming the structure, and of letting the terrorists go, will be very different - they will range from effects on the morale of the forces and our surviving as one country to our foreign relations. The corps commander on the spot, the governor cannot decide among such vastly different options. That was obvious. Yet the way the Mr Rao seized upon Mr Chandrashekhar's observations, and 'summed up' the meeting, left participants feeling that once again devolution had dissolved into abdication.

There were a dozen things to convey - that negotiations ought to be entrusted to officials who have been specifically trained to conduct them; that the Prime Minister must himself hear the assessment of the corps commander, of the officer in charge of state intelligence, of the governor, that he must hear them one-to-one. But no one could effectively convey these to him. "He will agree with everything..." said one. "He will misuse any meeting in private", said the other. "Who can push a string?" exclaimed the third.

Even though the situation has been allowed to deteriorate to this terrible extent, the country had sufficient competence to handle it - human, technical, material. But whether that competence will at all be allowed to act depends on people whose competence, inclinations, priorities are attuned to anything but the peril our country is in.

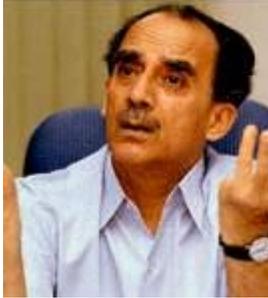
The principal leaders taken together are from Mrs Gandhi's court. Taking orders, passing on decisions, obedience, in fact feigning obedience - these are the skills that their years in those quarters honed, not that of taking decisions themselves. And their overwhelming concern too is not the peril of the country, but the other courtier - their dread is not that the country might be broken but that this other fellow may trip them; their aspiration is not that our country be strong and vibrant, it is to plant the tale about that rival in the quarters. That is one factor which accounts for the blundering.

And there are the stratagems they picked up from Mrs Gandhi: Never have the sturdy and independent as colleagues; and, never disturb them when they are quarreling and plotting to pull each other down.

The consequence is before us: Squabbles of Mr Pilot and Mr Chavan, of Mr Pilot and Gen Rao...- all have been allowed to fester. And suddenly that is the 'team' which must handle Hazratbal. Notice too the doggedness with which that other stratagem has been applied - of having only innocuous men in positions of authority: To the point that today we have a President who cannot give much advice, to say nothing of direction; a vice-president so decent that he can be depended on never to be stern; an external affairs minister who is so totally dependent; a home minister who is a man of integrity but, how shall we put it?, so self-effacing and reticent; a defence minister who isn't there at all... But the end will be the same as it was in Mrs Gandhi's case: Everyone is too weak to hurt the Prime Minister, but no one is strong enough to help him either. Yet this is the 'team' that must suddenly handle Hazratbal. And, as if such hands were not unsteady enough, there are our intellectuals. Mr Pilot, himself an intellectual of note, recently set up a think-tank of intellectuals on Kashmir. Just a few days ago they declared, 'New hope in Kashmir.' And they named a group which, in their view, was promising focal point for commencing a dialogue. That group is today in the forefront of calling for processions to break the siege and liberate the shrine - in the fore-front of urging action that will help the terrorists. But, perhaps I judge too hastily - the intellectuals haven't quite spoken since the terrorists took over the shrine. For many of our papers too the siege is but a spectator sport. One paper finds the siege of the terrorists symbolic of the siege of the people of Kashmir. Another focuses on cruelties of our forces - not a word about what the jawans have to go through. Suddenly everyone is repeating the phrases of the Jamaat propagandists - 'the holiest of shrines in Kashmir.' But till just last year the shrine was the special target of the venom of the Jamaat - partly because worshipping relics is entirely impermissible in orthodox Islam, it being condemned as a species of idolatory; partly because of Shia-Sunni animosities; partly because the shrine had come to be associated so much with Sheikh Abdullah's cult. But 'the holiest' it suddenly is. 'But it isn't just the rulers, and the intellectuals, and the press. We contribute our mite no less: See the people throng to bazars, see them vie for tickets to Michael Jackson's concert - is this a people concerned that the crown of their country is close to being sawn away? The nemesis thus - not just of the politics of our rulers, not just of the discourse and perceptions of our intellectuals and pressmen, the nemesis of our own ways. If the country comes out of this episode with honor it will be in spite of us, and only because of the very forces our intellectuals and pressmen deride.

Source: Observer, October 27, 1993

3.0 CALAMITIES COME AND GO, BUT DECISION TO STAY REMAINS



"Give me some time and we will get over all these troubles" that was the prime minister speaking during the Charar-e-Sharief debate in the Rajya Sabha.

But had he not had time since February when the mercenaries were spotted in the town? Indeed, having put the country through abject humiliation at Hazratbal in October 1993, had he not had a year and a half's time to prepare for the next siege? And in the Hazratbal case also, the first report about terrorists moving to usurp the place was given to the government in July.

The fact is that the prime minister does not plan to do anything with the time he gets it is just a figure of speech with him. "Leave it to me, I will make sure that not one guilty person gets away. I assure the House, from now on I will personally monitor the case on a day today basis" On the securities scam, Bofors, Ayodhya, the functioning of the Congress, the descent of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar into casteist gunda raj, the manner in which Channa Reddy was conducting himself, the way in which General K.V. Krishna Rao was not conducting himself, the paralysis in his own ministries, the running feud in the home ministry -- on everything he has stood up and chanted those words in the end.

The last time was when not having done anything to stop Chavan and Pilot from making a fool of the country, he took the Kashmir portfolio directly under his charge. The move was hailed: it is positive proof that he is serious about the matter now, we were told, you will see there will be decisive action now. In the months since he has had the portfolio, nothing has been done to organize even the department, let alone doing something about Kashmir. A single joint secretary is all that the government has working full time on the matter. And he, too, has not been attending office for sometime now as he has been down with typhoid.

Nevertheless, once again: "Leave it to me. Give me some time and we will get over all these troubles." But there are new traits, too, which have surfaced this time around. First, there is a new device: to claim that the particular thing was not done not out of neglect but because it was his policy not to do the thing! For two and a half years the country has been without a defense minister. Suddenly the prime minister tells Jaswant Singh in the Lok Sabha that not having a defense minister has been a conscious decision of his. It is high time the defense portfolio was handled by the country's prime minister, he says. Is it because something is going on which is so secret that no one except he can be trusted with it? Is it that war is imminent? Is it his way of making sure that no Goldstar siphons off money in defense deals? No explanation, just "It is high time that ..." Has he not constituted the Cabinet committee on political affairs too, asked my friend Jaswant Singh, because he has concluded that it is high time that the prime minister was his own CCPA?

It has been exactly the same with Charar-e-Sharief. Ever since the mercenaries and terrorists started congregating there in February, forces on the ground were waiting for a decision on what they should do. The mercenaries could have been easily plucked out when they were just a few. But no decision came. They brought in more of their associates. They transported arms and explosives and, as has now been seen, land mines in enormous quantities. The whole town knew of their buildup: witness the residents who left the town in their thousands. But no decision was taken. Eventually the army was asked to encircle the place. But that was all. They kept waiting for a decision as to what they should do. None came. In the event, they were reduced to being mere spectators, crows on a wall, till three hours after the mausoleum was burned down. "You can go in now." An exact replay of Ayodhya in that sense. And whose responsibility was it to take that decision? Of the prime minister? That is Narasimha Rao. Of the defense minister? That is Narasimha Rao. Of the minister in charge of Kashmir affairs? That is Narasimha Rao. Of the minister in charge of RAW? That is Narasimha Rao. The minister in charge of IB? That, too, is Narasimha Rao. Of the only minister with whom Gen. Krishna Rao condescends to talk? But that, too, is Narasimha Rao.



Charar-e-Sherief.

And yet, he says that whatever has happened or not, whatever has been done or not is the responsibility of the state administration and the men on the spot.

It is this brazenness which is new, and of which I fear we shall see more in the coming months. "I am the Congress president and I shall decide what is to be done," he says, and that ends the matter.

Development works are being speeded up in Kashmir, he says in the wake of the Charar being burned down. It is not just that that is a farce of a response, it is that it is a total falsehood. The entire local administration of the state has been on strike for more than two months now. They routinely refuse to carry out orders -- whether the order is to protect pilgrims on the Amarnath Yatra or it is to update the electoral rolls and yet the prime minister says, "Development works are being speeded up."

In the case of Hazratbal it is the same. The government abjectly surrendered. But the prime minister refers to it as having been such a success that the government decided to repeat the strategy in Charar-e-Sharief! The result is that the town has been burned down, the mausoleum is gone, the main mercenaries have escaped, the people are outraged, and the prime minister is fine-tuning words: the occurrence is better described as a partial failure of policy, he says, not a complete failure.

Not just brazenness, with the old cunning there is a new obstinacy.

The prime minister is palming off responsibility not just verbally, but in a deep sense. To avoid taking a decision he let both sides in his own government have their say on TADA. As the side advocating its abolition was more vociferous, in the end he went along with them. And now others must get a substitute through the country must live with the consequences.

Yet no one can do anything about the matter. The adjournment motions in parliament on Charar-e-Sharief were symptomatic. They have come and gone. The government's ways will not change one bit as a consequence. Even the opposition seemed to be just going through the motions: when it came time to vote only 186 of its 240 members of parliament were present.

Indeed, the discussion became a diversion. The question suddenly became a matter of one party versus the rest of which side deployed the better debating tactics.

Our situation is the one depicted in the experiment. Let ten sturdy men stand one behind the other facing a wall.

At the head of the column put a weakling. Each man puts his hands to the shoulders of the man in front, the man in front puts his hands to the wall. Everyone pushes. The strength of the ten counts for nothing; the pressure on the wall will be no greater than that weakling in front can put on it.

That is our situation. Cabinet ministers grumble, Congress MPs visit each other's houses and lament, opposition leaders protest, editorial writers declaim, the people are indignant but nothing happens for the man in charge just looks the other way.

At the same time, the people, especially pressmen, should not forget their own contribution. They help create the atmosphere in which such failures are certain.

Just go back to the days immediately after the government let the terrorists free at Hazratbal.

How much play the press gave to the secessionists-sponsored demand that the army be removed from the vicinity of the shrine. It was replaced. The Border Security Force set up checkpoints well outside the shrine. The press played up the demand that even these be removed.

Charar-e-Sharief has been the same story. If persons going in and out are searched the howl goes up "innocents being harassed." When as a consequence they are not searched and the place becomes a stockade of mercenaries the howl goes up,

"How did the army let so many land mines and the rest get through?"

Worse, there is a certain glee in purveying any and every allegation so long as it puts our men in the wrong. For five days some of our papers in Delhi kept repeating the allegation of some resident of the town that he had seen a helicopter (at dead of night) fly over the mausoleum and sprinkle powder over it; the place had then been shelled to set it on fire. This allegation was carried under four to eight column headlines on page one. And on the sixth day on an inside page one of those very papers reported that there was no evidence for the allegation at all that the houses bore no marks of mortar shelling or even bullets.

Officers and jawans who are there are not there for their pleasure. They are risking their lives, many of them are sacrificing their lives so that our country may survive. They are already handicapped by the absence of policy. This broadcasting of allegations and concoctions cannot but cripple them.

That much must be clear even to those who broadcast the fabrications. But a certain perversity has entered large sections of which these pressmen are representative. They will be satiated only when the country actually breaks. See, we told you they will proclaim it could not survive...