
Counter-Terrorism: Critical Concepts

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Though terrorism gained recognition as a form of warfare in the post-World War II period, it is a fairly ancient mode of warfare, starting with the American War of Independence. Modern terror began in Russia in the 1880s and within a decade, appeared in Western Europe, Balkans and Asia, although the most destructive day in the history of terrorism was September 11, 2001. It came in four waves. The first wave, due to the failure of democratic reforms, was in the form of “anarchy” and adopted the method of assassination of prominent officials. The second wave comprised basically the “anti-colonial” wars of liberation against the former colonial powers; 95 per cent of these were fought outside Europe and resulted in the creation of a few new states such as Ireland, Israel, Cyprus and Algeria, among others. As empires dissolved, the second wave receded, but was overtaken by the “New Left Wave”, prominent among it being the Vietnam War, which brought out the effectiveness of the Vietcong’s radical nationalism even with the primitive weapons against modern technology. Vietnam also saw the introduction of helicopters, chemical agents to defoliate forests and the use of air power in combating low intensity wars. When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) replaced the Vietcong as the heroic model. However, the second and third waves consisted predominantly of terrorism with a “nationalist” and “ideological” focus respectively.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) has been the pioneer (1920s) in the innovative use of technology at the tactical level like the integrated use of the explosive, detonator and time delay unit, now commonly known as IED (improvised explosive device) for targeting symbolic targets with lorry-bombs across international borders. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in

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Sri Lanka perfected the concept of “suicide bombers” first used by the PLO in Lebanon . The fourth wave has religion as the motivating factor, Islamic groups being the most radical and fanatic — Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hizbollah comprise the prominent movements.

Among all the waves, use of terror, assassination and kidnapping has been common. The three events that have made the terrorist movement a formidable one are the creation of Israel; the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets in 1979; and the Gulf War of 1991 and the Iraq War of 2003. After September 11, 2001, the US switched to the ‘preemptive’ doctrine, from the ‘deterrence’ doctrine, as deterrence does not work on the non-state actors, who are ‘underground’ and, hence, not visible or accountable like the ‘state’. The Iranian revolution of 1979, added another dimension where Ayatollah Khomeini propagated that Islam has no frontiers, leading it to become international. Religious terrorism with *jihadi* involvement or martyrdom operations has manifested in many parts of the world — Palestine, Chechnya, Bosnia, Afghanistan and post 2003 Iraq.

The Nature and Range of Terrorism

Terrorism is fundamentally an attack on the state. It may be described as an act of violence, committed against innocent people to create fear, with an underlying political motive. This fear is an intended effect and NOT merely a by-product of terrorism. Terrorists are, therefore, criminals and NOT so-called freedom fighters. International terrorism has international or trans-national consequences in which terrorists strike targets outside and beyond their country of origin such as the September 11, World Trade Centre attack or the strikes by Pakistan-based outfits in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). International terrorism also implies that terrorist groups, like the Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI), Al Qaeda, etc. have an organisation/network/linkage in a number of countries. For instance, we have identified terrorists who were nationals from 16 countries, operating in J&K. The question is: if collateral damage and casualties from terrorism are inevitable, should the government have any qualms about swift and ruthless retaliation ?

We need to understand that terrorism is different from insurgency or revolutionary/ guerrilla warfare, as it is an overwhelming criminal act rather than merely a political offence. Even if it is argued that terrorism is employed by revolutionaries as a tactic, such means cannot justify the end. Finally, the right to life is more fundamental than any other right. This is something that needs to be clearly propagated to everyone, including the human rights activists.

International terrorism is not a new phenomenon to the world and to India in particular. The September 11 incident has only demonstrated another facet of international terrorism — the tremendous potency of technology and innovation — besides the globalisation of the economy which has permeated national boundaries. Multinational corporations and non-state players now have a worldwide reach. These have compromised the authority of the state. Non-state players and black money as well as the narcotics trade have acquired power, making some of the

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terrorist groups (armed wing of the JEI, the LTTE and PLO) financially viable and independent. The revolution in information technology (IT) and communication also enables instant transmission of ideas and information at the global level by terrorist outfits who can now exploit cyber terrorism as well as the deadly and sophisticated precision-guided missiles (PGMs), and other weapons of mass destruction.

The rise of religious fundamentalism has introduced a new ideology which sanctifies *jihād* (holy war) and *fidayeen* (suicide) attacks. This exploits the situation of 'backwardness' and economic disparity of the frustrated youth of society.

Terrorism today, therefore, has been transformed into a trans-national, high-tech, lethal and global phenomenon. The response to terrorism needs to be structured accordingly and the decision-making process itself needs to be modernised.

On the larger international scene, the following factors impact on terrorism:

- (a) Globalisation has made geographic borders transparent to the flow of ideas, people and also turmoil.
- (b) Technology has extended the reach and capabilities of the terrorists at the global level.
- (c) Economic interests of national and multinational corporations (MNCs) predominate all other interests. Therefore, unfriendly acts by some of our neighbours are not questioned.
- (d) The lack of international cooperation to undertake anti-terrorist action till the September 11 incident. Today, there is better realisation and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1373 is a step in the right

direction. However, unless implemented and enforced, it is of little use. This, therefore, needs to be converted into an international convention and adopted by all nations.

Long-Term Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Following from the above understanding of the nature of international terrorism that faces us today, it is clear that a long-term strategy is required to counter terrorism. Terrorism has to be comprehensively addressed on all fronts — political, economic, social and military. This strategy needs evolve from our national aims and objectives to protect our core values. These core values are:

- (a) Consolidate as a secular, federal democratic state with freedom of speech, equality and justice.
- (b) Protect sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- (c) Promote socio-economic growth and development.

We must learn from the experiences of other nations. However, at the same time, we need to realise clearly that our situation is particular to us and there are no direct lessons to learn except a reevaluation of our own experience. Our strategy must be realistic — it cannot be similar to the US model of worldwide capability or the Israeli strategy of massive and immediate retaliation, as the respective environment and capabilities are different. While we can take some useful lessons from the British dealings with the IRA or even the Egyptian policy on eliminating the *jihadis*, one principle is clear — whatever response we adopt, it cannot be a knee-jerk reaction or evolved in an ad-hoc manner.

Political Strategy

- (a) International terrorism cannot be fought alone effectively, as has been our experience so far. All nations must join hands to combat it, as is being done for Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. UNSCR 1373 must not remain on paper — it must be applied and the defaulting nations punished.
- (b) Externally sponsored proxy war must be exposed and international pressure applied. We must highlight more aggressively the justness of our cause and the support to terrorism by unfriendly players, both state and non-state.
- (c) The political strategy must address the root causes of terrorism by winning the minds and hearts of the people by resolving the genuine issues of conflict, whether social, economic or ethnic alienation.
- (d) A strategy of reconciliation and reconstruction pays greater dividends not only to defeat terrorists but also transform them, as being attempted in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Internal Strategy

Our policy of meeting political/economic aspirations has been successful in many cases by the creation of new states and autonomous councils, with limited military containment. However, it has not succeeded where internal support has been potent. We, therefore, need to move from a policy of appeasement and accommodation to firm action, before the problem becomes uncontrollable.

- (a) Adopt proactive policies to confront the terrorists militarily, and at the roots of the terrorist ideology — fundamentalists, social evils and sources of terrorism e.g. narcotics/drug trade.
- (b) Enact effective anti-terrorist laws and legal framework.
- (c) Modernise and enlarge the intelligence network.
- (d) Modernise the state police and paramilitary forces with respect to training, equipment and ethos.

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Economic Development

- (a) Spread the fruits of development more evenly, throughout the country .
Locate some of the public sector units in the remote areas even if they are non-profit making or provide special incentives to the private sector, alongwith security to encourage them to invest in development.
- (b) Put in a greater developmental effort in the remote areas for the weaker sections of society — which, though a stated policy, is not visible at present.
- (c) Reduce demographic displacement resulting in social/ethnic tension such as in Assam and Tripura, through the joint development of sensitive border belts along Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- (d) Enhance our economic and military capabilities so as to widen the gap between India and its neighbours sufficiently, and act as economic and military deterrence which would then inhibit such actors from pursuing such unproductive policies .

Social Environment

- (a) Promote a moderate and secular polity through the media, intelligentsia

and religious institutions. The ethos of a composite culture, as already developed in the armed forces may, serve as a useful role model.

- (b) Address the outdated education system of *madrassas* by quality modernisation and laying down guidelines of a uniform syllabus. We cannot continue to recognise just religious education such as that of the *madrassas* as an entrance-system for universities. Suitable alternatives have to be created.
- (c) Upgrade our communication systems so that television and telecommunications spread to our remote and border areas, which are currently being targeted by hostile propaganda.
- (d) Continue realistic psychological and information warfare campaigns so that the will of anti-national elements is suffocated and hearts of the populace are won.

Military Strategy

We need to clearly spell out our counter-terrorism strategy/doctrine. This should tackle its causes, and not only its symptoms. It needs to be stressed that J&K is only a symptom of terrorism and NOT the cause. The direction of military strategies should be as under :

- (a) The aim of military operations should be to create a secure and suitable environment, so that social, economic and political issues can be addressed effectively. **Seeking political solutions to accommodate the aspirations without fully eliminating the terrorists, their structure and support bases only results in a fire fighting situation and actually prolongs terrorism. This results in enormous costs, militarily and economically.**
 - (i) The first step should be to build up the military forces and their capabilities (which are not adequate currently), and thereafter consolidation of these capabilities, and destroying the militants, their support bases and overground workers.
 - (ii) A reactive response is not the answer. A reorientation of the armed response is required so as to launch actionable and specific surgical military operations with minimum collateral damage, but with speed and precision.
 - (iii) An important element of a proactive effort is to increase the costs of proxy war to Pakistan, by undertaking strikes on the logistics and support structures supplied by it.
- (b) The evolution of a superior intelligence system is imperative. This should encompass human, technical, and electronic intelligence, as also modernisation of their processing and dissemination — both external and internal.

- (c) Effective surveillance and management of the borders to check infiltration (International Border/Line of Control), is also necessary. This should be achieved through technical means of surveillance, backed by highly mobile, specialised forces as a reaction capability rather than the present system which is manpower intensive.
- (d) Foreign-based terrorists have to be hit at their bases, training camps and sanctuaries to end the surrogate terrorism or proxy war by Pakistan. We have to create the means and the 'will' to do this. Special forces, both overt and covert, need to be employed for this task.
- (e) Imaginative security of our vital installations, nuclear assets and airports. Static posts or pickets are not the answer. Electronic sensors and effective intelligence is the need.
- (f) Preventive measures against nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons and cyber-terrorism.
- (g) The army is the ultimate weapon of the state and its over-employment affects its operational role. The police and the paramilitary should normally handle the internal security. However, they are not capable of fighting a proxy war such as in J&K unless their capabilities are upgraded.

Comprehensive National Counter-Terrorism Policy

At present, there is a lack of a consistent and comprehensive policy at the national level. The core of the issue is that we need to respond efficiently and rationally to the emerging challenges. Collective action to fight by total cooperation is a must, as the economic costs of combating terrorism by a nation are colossal. Collective action is not confined to active combat alone. Simultaneously, foreign sponsors of international terrorism have to be identified and tamed.

Collective action is also applicable at the national level. We cannot continue with the present situation where the armed forces bear all the responsibility of dealing with anti-national elements, while other members of society, from the safety of their homes, advocate what they deem as politically correct measures. A democratic polity and a diverse society such as India's does not support stringent measures and anti-terrorist legislation, even when necessary. Thus, at present, the security forces have to function in an environment of lack of total physical and legal support. Therefore, legal reforms and stringent anti-terrorist legislation have to be enacted. As an example, the media which has such great reach today, should be used as a force multiplier to shape public opinion and counter false propaganda. **The media must be taken along as a 'weapon' of the state and not of the terrorists.**

Conclusion

Fundamentalist forces have to be addressed by both strong arm tactics like the Egyptians did under Hosni Mubarak to chase the terrorists out of the city mosques, as well as by the promotion of a secular polity by containing/neutralising radical religious groups of all religions or as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) led coalition forces are doing in Afghanistan to tackle the Taliban forces.

Technology enhancement, NBC and cyber-terrorism have given the terrorists unlimited powers and to counter these, we must not lose any time to modernise our security apparatus. For this, very heavy investment and effort are required and we must be prepared to follow this effort through. There is also a necessity to have institutional security, through an overall improvement in intelligence interception and police efficiency as the list of political targets continues to grow in the urban and industrial fields. The citizens of the country also have to be motivated to feel responsible for the well-being of the nation — the state apparatus alone will not suffice. Simultaneously, we have to deploy special forces for specific tasks and they have to be trained accordingly. There is also a need for the Home Ministry to evolve a policy framework on internal security.

Ultimately, the roots of terrorism have to be removed through good governance. Political corruption and lack of good governance is a basic contributor to the frustration setting in, in the society, which is then exploited by unfriendly nations. Needless to say, this has to be addressed immediately by striving to achieve economic well-being, social justice and the political aspirations of the populace. In a country of our size and population, this will take considerable time. Therefore, we have to put in a sustained effort to initiate, plan for, and implement such efforts seriously, and remove them from merely the realm of election speeches.