

OPINION

India: Challenges of Modern Terrorism

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The high-intensity blasts in many parts of the country in recent years, killing hundreds of people, have sent out a common message about the ability of modern terrorists to attack with great accuracy at a time and place of their choice. The upsurge in serial bomb blasts has marked the beginning of the pernicious era of terrorism. Much blood has flowed since terrorists struck a shocking sequence of plane attacks and bombing at the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the U.S. This has been followed by tremendous rise in terrorist activities across the globe. History bears testimony to various such tragic events. Few years ago the gruesome bombing of innocent civilians in Oklahoma city (which left more than 200 people dead or missing) sent shock waves around the world. The

Sarin (a nerve gas) attack on the Tokyo subway years ago that resulted in 12 deaths and 5500 injured has created a serious problem of safety. Chemical weapons are normally not so easily detectable by anti-terrorist squads. They are easily transportable compared with conventional weapons. There is a lack of serious law and regulation that prevents the acquisition of such chemical weapons. International cooperation and treaties for avoiding the use of nuclear weapons could, thus, prove an important strategy in management of nuclear terrorism.

In an environment marked by increasing politicization, easy access to Cyclotric Methylene Trinitrate (RDX), Erythritol Tetranitrate (Penta) and sophisticated weapons like carbines, light mortars, hand grenades, AK 56 and AK 47 assault rifles, the revolution in communi-

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cation network and growth of international narcotic trade spread through “the Golden Triangle on the borders of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand , it is not possible for any country to tackle the problem easily. The complicity of various security officials in dealing with drug smuggling was revealed by the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control Meeting, which was held at Vienna a few years ago. The UN spokesmen torpedoed the credibility of anti-narcotic drug control officials. The officials observed that about 60 per cent of the drugs such as Heroin which is available in western countries goes via Mumbai. Besides, the international meeting on drug trafficking at the instance of Interpol held in New Delhi a few years ago revealed the obnoxious nexus between terrorists and drug smugglers. The increasing cases of drug peddling and their support to terrorist and subversive activities have compelled the government to enforce drug laws vigorously and promptly. This can become highly effective if the speedy and proper trial is ensured.

Foreign hands

The suicidal terrorist attacks on Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly and incredible attempt to

sabotage the Indian Parliament closely on the heels of the September 11 blasts, revealed the sinister face of terrorism in India. The recovery of large quantity of sophisticated weapons such as Anti-Aircraft Guns, Anti-Tank Guns, Missile Launchers and Remote Controlled Airborne Aerodynamic Modules by the paramilitary forces in Kashmir shows the level of outside support to the militants in Kashmir. The statements of the surrendered and captured militants in Kashmir exposed the hand of ISI in providing logistic and training facilities to the intruders. Pakistan’s involvement in aiding and abetting intruders in Kashmir by setting up training camps in POK has been exposed a number of times. The strategy to ignite religious sentiments of the Kashmiri identity by harping on the issue of numerical preponderance of the Muslim community has helped Pakistan in creating base for its claims and fighting proxy war in Kashmir for quite sometime.

All such acts are violent culmination of terrorist plans that were carefully executed. The terror attack on Sankatmochan temple and Samjhauta Express blast were mainly designed to ignite a communal fare-up. This also reveals the clandestine networking of terrorists and their

access to explosive material. The planting of bombs on train in Mumbai might have been carried out by locals, but training in assembling toxic compound and their perfect timings of carrying out such heinous acts displayed their nexus and level of motivation.

The proclaimed goal of over the last three decades of secessionist campaign in the North-East has been to get more autonomy. Militant outfits like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Bodo ultras are posing a serious threat to the entire security apparatus. Terrorists were down in North-East for some time but certainly have not been wiped out, notwithstanding the claims of the government officials. The situation in this region has turned volatile particularly after the two simultaneous bomb blasts in Dimapur Railway station and Hongkong market in Nagaland that killed 35 innocent civilians last year. Secessionism in North-East is basically a sequel of economic underdevelopment and local incompetence and outside support, which, over the years, generated acute unemployment. The international linkage of the area has added deadly dimension to the ongoing problem of insurgency in North-East. The Bodo militants have

used Bhutan and the ULFA activists have crossed over to Bangladesh for procuring arms and training. In past, Naga insurgents made full use their border with Myanmar. The Chinese involvement in backing insurgents during 1970 is important to remember in this context.

The factor of alienation

To a considerable extent, militancy has become a new avenue for providing a means of livelihood to most rebels. Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino were successful in driving the rebels underground in the North-East, but potency of insurgents is intact. Although the Central government has made various efforts to find solution in the past by initiating the Tripura accord, the Assam accord and the Mizo accord, the grievances of various emerging factions within the militant organizations still remain live. Consequently, insurgent activities against the government and clashes between the factions have continued unabated. Since the entire region is a hilly area with thick forest, it provides excellent base for carrying out clandestine guerrilla activities that has been responsible for the death of numerous people over the years. For example, several security officials have died on the National

Highways No-53 and 39, which connect Manipur to the rest of country. These days rebels seem to be reasonably confident of their access to vantage points. Moreover, the strategies and methods have become more sophisticated and successful in acquiring more lethal weapons from across the border.

The criticism of the government's policies by the insurgents and their supporters created tremendous support in local population for the rebels. Moreover, their preconceived notions of "we versus they" have helped in keeping the morale of insurgents high. Lack of sufficient resources has also created a serious problem of force deployment over the years. Consequently, training and ground force exercise have been affected. In addition to all this, the geographical location of the North-East has made it difficult for the Indian armed forces to gain reliable intelligence. Fresh difficulties are presented by the mobile members of the rebel organizations who are trained in guerrilla warfare and get logistical help from border areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh. The disturbing issue is that neither withdrawal of the armed forces from the North-East nor the occupation of the entire region by the armed forces seems tenable anymore.

New methods

These days terrorists are more confident than ever before of their access to the vulnerable points before carrying out any of their attacks. And they plan their attacks in a heroic manner for the justification and fulfillment of a cause, which they think is just. Thus, they attempt, by their acts, to inspire and manipulate fear to achieve a variety of purposes. Therefore, jostling crowds, busy hotels, crowded trains, high-ways and countryside are increasingly becoming targets of terrorism. There is an apprehension that with the availability of biological and chemical weapons the terrorists will start their campaign with renewed vigour and pursue their mission of virtually unstoppable destructions.

In a situation where terrorist violence has assumed nightmarish proportions, the nations of the world should devise a new strategy encompassing all interests and ramifications. It is high time that various countries of the world devised a clear policy of "Strategic coordination" to combat this international menace. There is a need for truly effective preparedness programme at the government level. First of all we must know about the people involved in terrorist

activities and their motivation. Dealing with a terrorist incident and mitigating its consequences need to be carefully thought out. Sufficient data about the area within which the event is unfolding could be of immense use. There is the obvious need for good intelligence and policing. But government alone cannot do much to stop it. Individuals and groups can make a significant contribution towards improving the general security environment.

On the other hand, there is a need for the sophisticated security procedures that can go all the way from airport screening to the border area. Some kind of positive programmes can prove effective. There is also a need to promote open institutions, including political institutions, to absorb the ethnic, religious and political pressure and allow them (the terrorists) to vent their feelings in a proper way.

The states affected by terrorism should open the avenues for negotiated settlement of disputes and exhibit genuine willingness to resolve long festering problems. The efforts of the state to maintain security on the face of terrorist threats should go hand in hand with increased devolution of

power to the people and greater democratisation of the system of power and administration. This threat can be encountered by training and development of a new mechanism bolstered up of a multidimensional and multi layered approach based on checks and balances.

The myopic foreign policy pursued by major powers of the world towards realisation of their strategic and economic interests only created fertile breeding grounds for the growth of international terrorism. The series of recent terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia has sent out message loud and clear that revenge in international politics can lead to pernicious ramifications and tremendous upsurge in terrorist activities across the globe. Afghanistan is still facing the problem of restructuring and economic stabilisation. The strategies of imposing arms and economic sanctions on the so-called rogue nations during the last few years have been counter-productive, and rather helped these nations to gain international sympathy. Although the hope of a permanent solution of the problem of terrorism is still far away, one hopes that the powerful nations will develop a more mature understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism that has assumed alarming proportions. ■