

Tackling Terror and Our Response Mechanism

Lieutenant General Chandra Shekhar, PVSM, AVSM (Retd)*

‘I say to you that no war is ever won through terrorism. It’s that simple. Because (if you employ terrorism,) you earn the opposition, hatred and rejection of those whom you need in order to win the war’.

Fidel Castro, My Life

Introduction

Despite the truth of the above statement, the number of terrorist attacks in the World today increase every day. We in India, particularly face the brunt of such violent attacks, the most recent being the tragic Assam bomb attacks which have left hundreds dead, injured or bereaved. India is a complex society with diverse cultures, religions, ethnic groups and economic levels. This is our strength. Unfortunately, however, the multifaceted nature of our Nation has also been our bane. The reasons are many. There are many groups within our Country who feel wronged, marginalised or exploited. Thus, we have ongoing terrorism in large areas—right from Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in the North to some of the States in the Northeast, to large swathes of the tribal belts of Andhra Pradesh (AP), Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, and Orissa. We also have Islamic fundamentalist groups supported by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) carrying out terrorist attacks all over the Country.

It was because of uneven economic growth levels of the ethnic groups and diverse cultures, that Article 370 for J&K and the Sixth Schedule for the North east States was introduced, so that special provisions were provided for these areas. No outsiders were allowed to settle there. Special quotas, additional autonomy and rights were granted. The aim was to prevent exploitation of the region and its people from outside these areas. Ironically and regrettably, these have only heightened the divisions, rather than improving harmony. This is true both in J&K and the North east States. Religious fundamentalist groups have further exploited the diversities and differences, while bad politics, inept administration and a weak bureaucracy have not done enough to improve the lot of the people.

The only way to counter the terrorist threats in each of these regions, is to evolve specific ways of governance and development, based on their specific social, cultural and ecological needs. However, broadly, the issues involved may be divided into three categories: Terrorism in J&K, Situation in the North east States and Internal challenges of ‘Naxalism’ and Islamic fundamentalism.

Fighting Terrorism in J&K

The separatist movement in J&K has caused us the greatest concern so far. The situation has resulted due to a series of historical blunders in the past, compounded by electoral politics of the State, corrupt administration and active Pakistani support for cross-border terrorism. Article 370, though well intentioned, has not facilitated the integration of the ‘Valley’ with the rest of the Country. A consistently unfathomable political and administrative volte-face and lack of strategic thought, has allowed Pakistan to retain POK despite battlefield gains by the Indian Armed Forces in 1948, 1965 and 1971. In more recent times, the mishandling of the Amarnath Shrine Board episode by the State and the Centre has undone all the work of last two decades. The sanctity of the National institutions stands low and has to be restored and strengthened.

What has caused this situation and how can we rectify it? The causes may be summarised as:-

- (a) The policy of appeasement and inaction by the Centre.** This has to be rectified. A firm message needs be sent to the separatists and their supporters that the law of the land will not be allowed to be violated.
- (b) The lack of a ‘proactive’ and ‘retaliatory’ Policy to eliminate the bases, camps and terrorist-support systems in Pakistan, POK and J&K.** This has to be revised realistically to include credible diplomatic and military operations with international cooperation and support.
- (c) Political reluctance to take firm action on anti-national elements (ANE’s).** This should not be tolerated. Alleged atrocities by the security forces (SF) as also by the separatists must be fully investigated. Remedial steps must be taken to restore the confidence of the populace. Justice must be seen to have been done.
- (d) Corrupt and parochial administration in the States.** This needs to change. Civil society should not be subjected to any harassment and must be given a fair deal. A humane approach by the SF in the States must be insisted upon.
- (e) Neglect of modern education and inadequate steps to build a moderate society.** This needs to be immediately addressed. The Madrassa system of education must be made more broad-based, without giving an impression of interference in religious affairs.
- (f) Ineffective policing and intelligence acquisition.** This must be improved. Modernisation of police functioning and effective utilisation of intelligence inputs should be ensured. While conducting security operations, sensitivities of the local populace should be kept in mind.
- (g) Marginalisation of National institutions, press and political parties at the expense of unproductive confidence building measures (CBM’s), or pandering to Pakistani surrogates such as Hurriyat.** This must not be continued. Contradictory acts such as the Government talking to separatist elements on issues like proposals for “autonomy” whereas the same proposals recommended

by the mainstream political parties were rejected, must not be indulged in by the Indian Government. Talks must be held to find a realistic solution to the conflict but with mainstream parties along with representatives of the dissatisfied elements, as also with prominent personalities of civil society.

The political dimension to conflict resolution in Jammu and Kashmir needs to be looked at carefully. In a complex situation like J&K where society is divided along religious beliefs and regional identity, we need to develop an accommodative political settlement with greater devolution of power. We need to create an inter-governmental joint council between the Governments of J&K and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), with equal representation to look after matters of inter-state dimension. These would include trade, communications, river water, tourism, forestry across the line of control (LoC), which could be redefined without being redrawn.

What is often forgotten in the excessive focus on the Kashmir Valley's dissatisfaction with the Central Government, is the dissatisfaction of the Jammu and Ladakh regions with their State Government. Three regions of J&K (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh) may be given autonomous status with their own elected Governments under a federal J&K Government. However, defence, external affairs, currency and strategic communications should continue to remain with the Centre. The same model should be applied to POK and the Northern Areas. As in the Irish Model, a joint council for cross border affairs should be set up. And finally, at the apex an Indo-Pak Commission, the two Prime Ministers need to be involved and selected ministries must be constituted. This would require gradual implementation of agreed upon policies and would have to take into account the sensitivities of India, Pakistan and the J&K region. The question of sovereignty of India and Pakistan over respective areas of J&K and POK may be accepted by all the involved parties. The unprofitable and unproductive exercise of bringing up these issues every now and then should be stopped. The recent decision on CBM's and commencement of bilateral trade across LoC slated to begin from 21 October 2008 is a right step towards conflict resolution.

Situation in the North east Region

It is quite evident that the Sixth Schedule, created for the protection of tribal laws, customs and land rights, along with the provision of autonomous 'Hill Councils' has not prevented tribal insurgencies in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam. The special rights and laws in fact have led to a worsening situation. They have prevented their integration with the Country and resulted in the division of Assam. The lack of strategic foresight has perpetuated the British legacy of 'divide and rule' while allowing the 'Church' unlimited powers of governance contributing to tribal alienation. Earlier, the demographic invasion of Assam and Tripura by erstwhile East Bengal's cheap labour, traditionally patronised by the British Tea Gardens, was followed by the Congress for electoral gains. The continued illegal influx from Bangladesh, allowed due to a corrupt administration, has also created social disharmony in Assam. Thus, today the divide has become more intense between Meities, Kukis, Nagas, Assamese and Bodos. Insurgency, other than in Mizoram, remains unresolved and has become an industry. The violence by All Assam Students Union (AASU), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Tripura National Volunteer Force (TNVF) to fight illegal migrants, and a "soft approach" by the Centre towards Bangladesh, has led to a large illegal Bangladeshi influx into many States, which are exploited by the fundamentalists. A firm National resolve and consensus are lacking due to 'Vote Bank politics'.

While we have been able to undertake joint operations with the Bhutanese and the Burmese, the Bangladeshis have not only been uncooperative but are actively indulging in covert operations by HUJI in India. Swift raids by Special Forces and Air Power, along with diplomatic steps against insurgent groups and camps in Bangladesh should be undertaken. We need to learn from the Israelis or the Russians on how to protect our National interests, as recently displayed by the Russians in Georgia. Firm action to deter support to ANE's is essential, besides deporting illegal migrants. Simultaneously, communications and economy must be effectively developed to integrate these areas with the mainstream.

Internal Challenges of Naxalism and Islamic Fundamentalism

Our diverse 'social fabric', uneven economic development and low education standards, coupled with radical Islamic ideologies around us provide a suitable support base for exploitation by radicals of all hues. Lack of development, economic deprivation, and disputed land rights in the forests, have provided a ground for 'Naxalite revolutionary ideology' in the tribal belts of Andhra Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand. While the Naxalite violence has a strong ideological motivation, the economic dimension must not and cannot be neglected. The problem can be solved only through economic development, justice, and education. Raising more armed Police battalions is not going to give us any dividends. Instead, we should aim for better mobility, improved communications/ connectivity, effective local leadership at the grass roots and good governance.

On the other hand Muslims have been led to believe that they are denied equal opportunities, rather than focussing on their lack of modernisation. Pakistan has deftly played its cards to exploit these sentiments of the Muslims in Kashmir, as also in other parts of the Country to stoke Islamic fundamentalism. Thus, today many of the mosques and madrassas preach and exhort extremely radical thinking and action. The rise of religious fundamentalism has introduced a new ideology which sanctifies Jihad. This exploits the sentiments and economic deprivation of the frustrated youth. This situation is also seen in other countries, such as Pakistan, Turkey and the UK. In these countries, and in Pakistan too, madrasa education and 'Imams' are being given enlightened exposure, to integrate them into national mainstream. This is the answer for India as well. The methods to integrate Muslims into the mainstream are economic development, modern education and moderate policies.

Future Road Map for Tackling Terrorism

The steps essential towards an effective long-term policy to tackle terrorism are outlined below:-

Evolvement of an integrated Politico - Military Approach. Terrorism is basically a politico - military problem, as a terrorist movement develops when a section of the populace feels that political or civil justice is denied to them; to counter which military forces are then marshalled by the State. Thus, radical Islamic groups feel that they have been wronged and are not getting a fair deal. Whether in Kashmir or elsewhere in the Country, the State Governments have mishandled internal events concerning Muslims such as the demolition of Babri Masjid or Gujarat riots in 2002. Similarly, the Naxalite movements are a result of sustained denial of the interests of the rural and tribal communities. Since the root cause of these problems is political, they must be addressed at the political level, with military action taken only to destroy or degrade the potential of the terrorists. There is no alternative, apart from finding a political answer, along with steps to foster equitable economic development and social harmony by developing an integrated strategy, which addresses all the dimensions of the problem.

Create a sound Intelligence frame work. All intelligence agencies-IB, RAW, Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and others, must establish an integrated intelligence network, which is accurate, timely and actionable at strategic and tactical levels, along with a computerised data base and a multi - agency centre. They have to modernise technical and electronic intelligence, as also the human intelligences (HUMINT) at the grass roots level. This cannot remain an exercise in itself but has to be shared with the States effectively. The States' special investigation branches / forces also need massive overhauling. The existing resources and their training have to be upgraded so that they are better manned and better equipped.

National Counter Terrorism Centre. Terrorist attacks and normal law and order problems are entirely different issues. The State Police forces have to handle terrorist attacks with many constraints, little guidance and coordination. There is also a lack of trust between the 'central agencies' and the state organs. A National Counter Terrorism Centre to detect, guide and plan counter- terrorist actions would go a long way, by being the 'Focal Policy Centre'. The devastating terrorist attack of October 30 in Assam could have been avoided had the intelligence agencies talked to each other and coordinated their efforts, as they all had prior information of the impending blasts.

Effective Anti Terror Laws. The Police and the law enforcement agencies need special powers for prevention and detection of terrorism related cases. There is a need for tougher anti-terror laws, which are pending the Centre's approval. While the fear of misuse by the States is an entirely justifiable one, suitable 'checks' and 'balances' should be built in these laws. At the same time the Police and Intelligence agencies cannot be expected to deliver decisive results if they are handicapped due to lack of effective anti-terror laws. The Central Government appears to have understood the urgency of enacting suitable anti-terror legislation in the overall National interest.

Modernisation of Police Forces. The Police Forces in the States need to be better-trained, better-equipped and better-motivated. They must have improved communications, mobility and capability to operate in various types of terrain and environment. The tendency to add manpower, without matching modernisation, is not cost effective.

Strategy to Interdict & Eliminate the Support Structure. The terrorist bases, camps, arms and ammunition supply-lines and finance-sources have to be eliminated. Keeping in mind the strategic environment and military capabilities, we need to develop a 'Proactive' response both for interdiction of external support and internal overground workers. Diplomatic efforts and joint operations similar to Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bhutanese anti terrorist operations have to be developed. Where international cooperation to fight terror is not forthcoming, National response needs to be developed. The tendency to opt for a 'soft approach' is counter productive and undermines National will.

Winning Hearts and Minds of the People (WHAM). When a majority of the population supports a terrorist movement, it is evident that only a people friendly approach will work. On one hand, economic developmental projects and civic action programmes need to be undertaken; on the other, 'Information Operations' to counter hostile propaganda have to be deftly handled. Local participation at the ground level must be maximised and encouraged, as was done in Punjab and Mizoram to successfully tackle terrorists. We should seek the support and involvement of civil society, educational institutions and religious leaders for detection, prevention and elimination of ANE's. The subverted over-ground workers must be targeted, with concerted efforts of disincentives, motivations and rewards. The genuine demands of the 'people', whether economic, social or political must be addressed with fairness, justice and firmness. However, demands affecting National sovereignty, constitution and secular fabric must be firmly disallowed and fully resisted. A firm balance between a humane approach to the people has to be fine-tuned with a strong message to the militants.

Finally, we must recognise that total protection against terrorist attacks is impractical, but an unflinching commitment to public safety and adoption of a comprehensive response by the Nation to tackle terror wholeheartedly is imperative. As the list of political targets continues to grow in the urban and industrial field, State apparatus alone will not be able to provide security. Institutional protective measures at the respective institutions need to be adopted by all concerned. Radical religious groups in all the religions have to be neutralised. Anti-terror laws have to be terrorism specific and not misused to settle political scores or to target a particular community. We should strive to forge National consensus on defensive measures against the source of terrorism. The response needs to be structured taking into account all aspects. The decision making process itself needs to be modernised. While the fruits of appropriate development need to be spread more evenly throughout the Country, political, administrative and military responses must be scrupulously fair and just. In the end, I would like to again quote Fidel Castro, a veteran of both politics and war :-

'There are principles that are elementary in war and politics...Ethics is not simply a moral issue - if ethics is sincere, it produces results'.

***Lieutenant General Chandra Shekhar, PVSM, AVSM (Retd)** is a former Vice Chief of the Army Staff and

presently a Member of the USI Council and Chairman of the Board of Management, Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation at USI.
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