Transnational Terrorism: Challenges and Responses for India

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"The 26/11 attacks on India were planned and organised in one country, where the attackers were trained, the logistics and communications support chain extended over at least seven countries, and the attack was carried out in our country".

- Mr Shiv Shanker Menon,

India's National Security Adviser

Introduction

Transnational terrorism remains the defining security paradigm of the post modern era. Globally there were 11,000 terrorist attacks in 83 countries with over 58,000 victims and 15,000 fatalities in 2009.2 Almost 90 groups were associated with these attacks with Taliban and Al-Shabaab posing the biggest challenge. India too has been impacted by spread of violence on the periphery as well as within over the years. India's response to terrorism has improved considerably from the ignominy of incidents in 2008; which started on New Years Day and ended with the complex terror attack in Mumbai on 26 November, commonly referred to as 26/11. The transnational significance of this strike is evident with many groups now replicating such attacks across the World.

While 2009 was the first terror free year in the Indian hinterland, two attacks in Pune and another in Bangalore [till August 2010], underline that the road ahead continues to be challenging. Moreover, with an extremely unstable political as well as security situation across India's western borders, state philosophy of support to terrorism and transnational terrorist groups from neighbours, there is a need for continued vigilance. The challenges of transnational terrorism have become diverse ranging from surrogate criminal organisations, financial networks and information and cyber war. These manifestations have been denoted by the, 'Karachi Project,' and emergence of the Headley-Rana duo's links with diverse intelligence agencies. Evolution of the Indian Mujahideen and right wing extremism are other trends that denote new transnational challenges that India will have to face in the years ahead. On the other hand, capacity building remains a, 'work in progress,' as the Home Minister, Mr P Chidambaram publicly acknowledges from time to time.3 A review of the transnational terrorism challenges faced by India and possible responses is therefore necessary.

Transnational Terrorism – Challenges

South Asia with India at its centre remains challenged by multiple forms of terrorism. Some writers as David C Rapoport and Paul J Smith refer to these as waves to include anarchism, separatism, left wing and religious extremism. The first identified wave is 'anarchism'. The next wave, associated in the past with anti colonialism or nationalism, has today manifested as 'ethnic separatism'.5 The 'New Left Terror,' emerged as the next form; first seen globally in the 1970's with an attack by the Black September Organisation at the Munich Olympics, and as the first wave of Naxalism in India, since 1967 – which has sprung even more viciously today. The fourth wave of terrorism is the contemporary phenomenon of 'religious extremism'. The al-Qaeda remains the singular manifestation of this ideology. The level of violence in this wave is unrestrained, 'morally justified' by religious exclusivism associated with such groups. 6 Use of terror as a tool by militant groups in an insurgency can also be seen as another sub form in many areas in India. Terrorism in India is increasingly seeing a hybrid of forms; different waves and ideologies are being used to create disorder, which combine cause and effect, seamlessly.

There are a number of factors which support growth of terrorism in modern societies particularly in the context of ongoing developments in South Asia. Large multi ethnic and developing nation states such as India will face the challenge of rebellion by one or more communities who perceive marginalisation.7 Rapid growth of population, youth bulge, unemployment, urbanisation, industrialisation and its ill effects, with social, political and economic assemblages competing for the same resources, lead to a need for redistribution of power in society, achieved by some through the gun.

While development is the core agenda there is a time differential between economic change and socio-political satiation, best explained by the Kondratieff cycles which indicate that it takes approximately ten years or more for the socio - political system to adjust to changes brought about by economic growth, thereby, creating uncertainty and instability in society in the interim.

In the external dimension, separatism is a cause fostered and supported through terrorism by antagonist states. The involvement of the state is invariably through intelligence agencies and has multiple firewalls; therefore, making it difficult to trace them directly, except at times when there is grave human error or intelligence agency attempts to overreach itself.

Why Transnational Terror?

Transnational interactions as per Nye and Keohane involve movement of, "tangible or intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or an intergovernmental organisation."10 The malign form entails individuals of nationalities other than the home state influencing 'political' activities across borders.11 When governments fail to achieve foreign policy goals through conventional linear diplomatic and other means they resort to terrorism. Thus, when diplomacy, propaganda and psychological war cannot achieve national objectives or international law and organisations are not able to address key grievances and there is near parity in military and nuclear forces as in the case of India and Pakistan, terror can become a tool for the state.12 This is also denoted as the stability- instability paradox.13 Globalisation and informationalisation has provided terrorist groups greater opportunities for effective engagement with their peers across the globe. Of the many catalysts for transnational terrorism, information and free flow of money can be identified as the main contagions.14,15 In short, transnational terrorism can be identified as the downside of globalisation.

State Support to Terrorism and Cooperation in South Asia

Weak state formation and national identity in some parts of South Asia creates conditions for support of terrorism by antagonist powers, as SD Muni states, "There is an unavoidable external dimension to the challenge of terrorism in South Asia, primarily due to the integrated nature of the region – unnatural borders, socio-economic contiguities and the cultural identities across these borders – and also because of globalisation which has played a significant role in the spread of terrorism. No internal conflict is truly internal."

Institutionalising support to terrorism has also been a defining element of some states e.g. Pakistan. Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence's (ISI) anti India activities are now well documented but the influence has spread well across the region. Imtiaz Gul in his book, "The al-Qaeda Connection"17 writes how the US intelligence agencies, namely the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the State Department, knew of the role of the ISI in virtually, "colonising" Afghanistan but preferred to turn a blind eye.18 On the other hand, Gul has also provided an account of how the ISI and Director General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Bangladesh facilitated the activities of Indian terrorist groups in the North East (such as the ULFA) by providing linkages with others such as the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Ealam (LTTE).

There have also been instances of cooperation between the states in combating transnational terrorism. Sri Lanka is a classic case wherein three regional rivals, India, China and Pakistan tacitly cooperated to assist the Sri Lankan government to put down the LTTE during the civil war from 2006 to May 2009. However, each state acted in its own interest. The second case of cooperation in recent times is that of India and Bangladesh. The Awami League led government on coming to power in 2009, adopted a cooperative approach by turning in leaders of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) – they had been harboured in that country for long. The change is based on a larger recognition that it would be in their best interests to cooperate with India.

States thus tend to collaborate when such cooperation is seen as beneficial and a high level of strategic understanding exists.20 A possible matrix based on current status of India's relations with its four neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar, based on factors such as political relations, border security, type of support to terrorist groups and their capability, and the 'Likelihood of support to Terrorism' is listed in Table

	Political Relations	Border Security	Type of Support	Capability of Terror	State Response to

				Groups	Counter Terrorism
Pakistan	Strained or Adversarial	Line of Control contested, Coastal Security Weak	Political, diplomatic operational, financial and training	High with multiple groups operating.	Adversarial supports, groups operating in India
Bangladesh	Varied based on the political party in power Generally good when Awami League is in power, weak with Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Weak, trans-border infiltration is possible.	Low level of political support, some training and sanctuaries.	Low, indigenous HUJI while others are groups operating in North East India	Varied based on political party in power
Myanmar	Satisfactory	Weak, sanctuaries to terrorist groups and trans-border movement is possible	Sanctuaries due to poor presence in areas adjoining Indo Myanmar border	High with large number of groups operating in North East India	Poor, effective surveillance of border areas lacking.
Nepal	Varied	Weak, trans-border movement is possible with ease	Provides access, transit, facilitating support operations	Low	Poor, ineffective control of vectors supporting terror.

Table 1 – Matrix of Likelihood of State Support to Terrorism in South Asia

Transnational Counter Terrorism Strategic Construct

India has so far employed four broad strategies to cope with terrorism – use of force, enforcing law and order, political negotiations and socio economic development.21 In the global and the regional dimension, Professor Muni has highlighted many strategies ranging from, "sharing of intelligence, military support, joint operations, border management, question of sanctuaries, shelters, refugees, flow of arms, training camps ___ etc". 22 Thus a joint approach bilateral, regional or multilateral is a key requisite to meet the challenge of transnational terrorism. This is particularly important in South Asia where the flow of ideologies, support structures and people are co-joined. Even where operational coordination is limited, other areas such as legal and regulatory pacts and treaties can be worked out.   A multi-faceted agreement or a set of agreements are necessary for effective cooperation in say extradition, financial, intelligence and information sharing, migration, border control, travel and trade. Similarly, a regional financial architecture to target money laundering could be evolved.

Where there is state support to terrorism, the USA has a comprehensive set of counter measures which includes ban on arms exports and sales, controls over export of dual use items that can enhance a country's military capability, proscribing economic assistance and imposing varied financial restrictions from time to time.23 India could do well to evolve a coordinated well publicised policy highlighting disincentives that would be applied in the future.

Since terrorism is a socio-political issue, trust building between people is also important. This is particularly relevant for India and Pakistan. A recent survey by Pew Research Centre entitled, "Concern about Extremist Threat Slips in Pakistan," states, "Indeed, they (Pakistani citizens) are more worried about the external threat from India than extremist groups within Pakistan. When asked: Who poses the greatest threat to their country — India, the Taliban or al Qaeda? Slightly more than half of Pakistanis (53 per cent) chose India, compared with 23 per cent for the Taliban and just 3 per cent for al-Qaeda".24 This support is also fostered through transnational political parties as Jamaat-e-Islami.

In the larger perspective for multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies as in India, Professor Rohan Gunaratne highlights the need to avoid the ethnic and political card for short term electoral gains.25 Within this paradigm, counter radicalisation and de-radicalisation strategies will also have to be considered given propensity of religious radicalism in the post modern era.

Intelligence and counter-intelligence will be defining instruments for controlling and combating terrorism.26 Frequently states may be able to prevail over terrorism but are not able to effectively reduce militancy. It is important to reduce the gap between a successful counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency campaign to ensure that the basic causes are addressed with alacrity because festering sores due to perceived injustice would create grounds for terrorism or other forms of agitation from time to time.

Countering transnational terrorism will also place a premium on harmonisation between various arms of a state and extending the same regionally and globally. For coordination of intelligence and operations a National Counter Terrorism Centre is being planned by the Ministry of Home Affairs in India. This plan appears sound and includes intelligence coordination and dissemination down to districts, improving first responder capability and building capacity of local and central police. Effective implementation of the plan will ensure high degree of internal security assurance though it may take time, up to a decade or so, and there may be some slippages yet it needs to be pursued vigorously.

When all else fails, a state would have to be prepared to go to war, either full scale inter-state war, of the type which was virtually forced upon India in December 2001 after the attack on the Parliament, it could be a 'localised limited war' like Kargil War in 1999, a border or a shooting war, or a prolonged phase of hostilities in the 'No War, No Peace' (NWNP) mode. Employment of special forces, armed drones, clandestine and covert operations are other hard options envisaged to coerce a state or a non-state actor to give up the path of terrorism.

There is a justified moral debate over employment of covert options by states, in as much as targeting terrorist groups and violent non state actors are concerned. this will bear the scrutiny of ethical logic, where all precautions to avoid collateral damage have to be taken and should not be confused with fostering militancy in other states which cannot be justified.

Employment of these tools by a state after a terrorist attack would largely depend on fatalities suffered and a state's capacity to exercise the given option. With a major terrorist attack, as on 9/11, the USA went to war which was facilitated by their capability to do so, far away from the mainland. India on the other hand, chose political and diplomatic tools after 26/11, where the number of fatalities was below 200. A possible matrix of options that a state may use when faced with a transnational terrorist attack based on intensity of strike in terms of fatalities could be evolved as indicated in Table 2. Special Forces and intelligence operations can be employed against non-state actors as well. However, a declared capability and the 'will' to act is necessary.

Option	Intensity of Terrorist Strike		
	High	Medium	Low

	(> 500 fatalities)	(>200 fatalities)	(>200 fatalities)
Politico Diplomatic	√	√	√
Diplomatic	√	√	√
Economic	√	√	√
Inter State War	√	-	-
Border War	-	√	√
Shooting War	-	√	√
Localised Limited War	√	√	-
NWNP	-	√	√
Special Forces/Drone Operations	√	√	√
Clandestine	√	√	√
Covert	√	√	√

Table 2 - Possible Options, Post Terror Attack

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be said that India remains challenged by transnational terrorism in many dimensions. The state response so far has not been very effectual. However, post 26/11 a plan is in place which when fully operational will considerably enhance internal security. As has been brought out this will be an action oriented rather than rhetorical regional endeavour by building a cooperative security structure with commitment to comprehensive approach. India's commitment to adopt a plural and multi ethnic society based on equity and equality has to be supplemented by accountable and participative structures of governance at all levels from the grass roots to national level. Also, there is an urgent need to establish multi-disciplinary mechanisms for countering transnational terror. Such mechanisms must be supported by efforts of the political, diplomatic, social, economic, information and security establishments. Yet when all else fails, the country will have to be prepared to use military force with a well calibrated response, while retaining control of the situation at every stage of the crisis. This will require capacities to be built up and complete synergy in politico-diplomatic-military fields.