

Terrorism in South Asia: Anatomy and the Root Causes

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Abstract: *This article examines the phenomenon of terrorism in South Asia. As we know that South Asia has a long history of Conflicts, terrorism and trans-boarder ethnicity. The developmental challenges faced by most of countries in South Asia leads to unemployment, Socio-economic marginalization, separatism, ethenic nationalism and religious extremism. The technological threshold is low despite claims of high technology. Over 40 percent of total population are illiterate. There is human rights abuse, unemployment and uncontrolled corruption. These and other factors make for a complicated crisis history marked by an assortment of events, political violence and terrorism. South Asia is the most terror affected area of the world. Each country suffers varying degree of insurgency and terror. In fact all countries are intertwined as far as terror networking is concerned. The major conflicts in the region between India and Pakistan keep the resolution of terror problem elusive. With these threats to political stability and territorial integrity, South Asia remains a region with a high potential for violence and conflict. Terrorism is a disease which needs to be treated rather than fought. We are not fighting an enemy but mentally sick and misguided who must be brought on course by looking in to their grievances and aspirations. In order to find a lasting solution for terrorism in south Asia, it is necessary to find the basic structure (i.e; Anatomy) and Root causes of terrorism in South Asia, so that the problem can be dealt more effectively. This article also provides a detailed account regarding these complicated issues.*

Keywords: *Ethnic separatism, marginalisation, Poverty, Religious extremism, Root causes of Terrorism, Structure of Terrorism.*

I. Introduction

South Asia is a group of countries with common colonial past, long history of conflict, war, terrorism and trans-boarder ethnicity. Nationalism, ethnicity and religion are powerful factors that contribute to terror. These countries, including India, at best are developing and far from achieving the status of developed countries. India, Pakistan and Srilanka should be considered developing, the remaining are least developed. The technological threshold is low despite claims of high technology. Over 40 percent of total population are illiterate. There is human rights abuse, unemployment and uncontrolled corruption. The political class often ignores the aspiration of the people who vote them in. There is no bar in criminals becoming politicians and ministers. Ethnicity is double edged, it is used to germinate and spread terrorism and yet the same platform is used for communication and resolution of disputes.

It is said that, "South Asia has had more than its share of crises and wars, their causes ranging from national identity and irredentism to mutual interfering in each other's politics, the unfinished business of a botched partition, and conflicting territorial claims. Also notable, few of the major clashes were of a bilateral nature". These and other factors make for a complicated crisis history marked by an assortment of events, political violence and terrorism.

Any discussion of terrorism in South Asia cannot ignore its wider influences and ramifications for the rest of the world. The issue of terrorism has been discussed by analysts and policy makers extensively from diverse and multiple perspectives, depending upon the specific context and requirement at a given point of time. Diverse political experiences, ideologies, ethnic identities and economic conditions across and within the states pose significant challenges, for conflict /crisis management in the region. As in the case of many other regions, South Asia has been increasingly overwhelmed with what has been termed "non-traditional security threats" such as ethnic and ethno-nationalistic insurgencies that undermine the ability of state institutions to manage conflict. As the problem is transnational coordinated approach is lacking due to continuous mistrust and rivalry between different countries of the region.

Most of the countries in South Asia have insurgency movements. The level of violence is variable, but several of these conflicts have been classified as high intensity. The separatist Tamil Tiger movement in Sri Lanka is one example, where an ethnic group seeks territorial withdrawal from the state entity. The Kashmir dispute feeds on and exacerbates political instability in both India and Pakistan. India faces further challenges in its north-eastern regions. The Maoist movement in Nepal impedes effective government in a similar way, and over the past few years commentators have expressed concern about the possible Talibanization of Pakistan. Afghanistan easily qualifies to be one of the foremost strategic challenges to that the international community

faces today. Even the western powers are contemplating the withdrawal of their troops from this war-torn southern Asian country; the situation in Afghanistan is nowhere close to stability. It is therefore; no doubt that Afghanistan has the potential to adversely affect the stability in the Asian region and beyond. With these threats to political stability and territorial integrity, South Asia remains a region with a high potential for violence and conflict. Nepal has been much in the news in the past couple of years or so, in part because of the palace massacre of the royal family, but mainly because of the ferocity and intractability of the Maoist insurgency. Weakened states and enfeebled political institutions and leaderships are increasingly incapable of dealing with domestic crises in South Asia, which, in turn, breed inter-state conflicts. Cross-country migration and refugee flows, as well as the issue of treatment of one's own nationals in neighbouring countries, have the potential to trigger inter-state conflict.

South Asia is the most terror affected area of the world. Each country suffers varying degree of insurgency and terror. In fact all countries are intertwined as far as terror networking is concerned. The major conflicts in the region between India and Pakistan keep the resolution of terror problem elusive. Pakistan continues to pursue its policies of exporting terror in its neighbourhood and the world over the state policy. Pakistan is central to cause of terror problem in South Asia. AlQaeda, Taliban and a large number of other terror groups operate in concert with anti west, anti Jew and anti India agenda.

As everybody knows that, Terrorism and political violence are not new challenges in South Asia. They have long been used by groups espousing a wide variety of causes, including national self-determination or separatism, both right- and left-wing politics, and militant religious extremism. In many instances, the fragility of relatively young political systems and nascent democracies has also generated a permissive environment for the use of political violence. In addition, militant religious groups are exploiting local grievances and drawing on international events to promote radical and extremist causes, though the underlying objectives of many of these groups remain the capture of state power and the transformation of systems of government.

Terrorism is not a problem of only one state in south Asia. It is however, the transnational nature of terrorism that is playing a significant role in transforming the rhetoric and the challenge in South Asia. The ferocity and organization of the attacks in Mumbai testify to the potential of terrorism to not only challenge national security but threaten regional and international peace. Not only this, major states of India are continuously under the threat of Terrorism. Same is the case with Pakistan, Bangladesh and rest of countries in South Asia. The tribal belt of Afghanistan and Pakistan becomes the new and the hottest battle ground for the proxy war. These developments have eventually weakened both India and Pakistan as in their endeavour to bleed each other, they have become hostage to a variety of terrorist organizations and now the handle is finally in hands of these groups who through a repeat of Mumbai, assembly attack in Jammu and Kashmir and Parliament attack in India or the recent attack on educational institutions and minorities like ahmadiya community in Pakistan, like adventures can at any time ignite a round of hostilities between different neighbours.

The stability of South Asia, and the success and failure of initiatives for the resolution of existing conflicts will in the twenty first century depend on the exploration of new ideas, ideologies and strategies that provide concrete and effective alternative to violence as a means to political ends; and these alternatives must appeal, equally, to the establishment and to the alienated groups that currently believe that violence is only method to secure some relief within the prevailing system.

II. The Anatomy Of Terrorism In South Asia.

In modern times the humanity is facing a challenge of different kind of war. Here the enemy is not visible and battlefield nowhere. But the entire globe is in the grip of destruction. No one is safe. The name of this new war is terrorism. It seems to have become endemic to modern society. It continues to be generated by recurrent social crisis, arising from the increasing fear of marginalisation of some sections of society caused by the indiscriminate spread of Capitalism and free economy, through much publicised globalisation which may be perceived another dimension of religious fanaticism. The point can further be elaborated by stating that colonialism was common cause that eventually contributed to secessionism. Ethnically discriminatory practices followed by British in favour of the Tamils as the root cause of conflict in Sri Lanka. Another point is that violence-Social, political or economic or physical perpetrated by the state or the agents of the state against other state or its own people also generates terrorism to a great extent.

Taking South Asia, the conceptualization of terrorism does not differ basically as the anti-terrorist legal measures adopted by each country suggest. For India, terrorism means ;intentions to threaten the unity, integrity and security of India or strike terror in people or any section of the people by using bombs, explosive substances, firearms or other lethal weapons'. For Pakistan, 'Terrorism is to strike terror or create disturbances by using bombs, explosives firearms or inflammable substances. It also includes an act of gang rape, child molestation, or robbery coupled with rape'. For Srilanka, terrorism means causing the death of any specialized person, committing any other attack upon such persons, which would be punishable with death or imprisonment

for seven years 'Nepal considers, 'terrorism as 'any act or plan of using any kind of arms, grenades, or explosives with the objective of hurting the sovereignty or the security and law and kingdom of Nepal'

In order to understand terrorism in South Asia, four broad categories of political violence and terrorism may be identified; (A) Ethno-nationalist separatism;(B) Left ideological;(C) Religious extremism/sectarian and (D) Externally organised; These four categories of terrorism have been found in different countries of South Asia. The war for a Tamil homeland by the LTTE in Sri Lanka; insurgency in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan and in India's Northeast for separate identity and statehood, all fall into the ethnic category. The Maoist movement in Nepal, although monarchy has been overthrown, the Maoists along with other political forces are trying to draft a Constitution for the country. The left-extremism raging in India's so called 'red-corridor' (across Maharashtra and Andhra to Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Bihar) is the representative examples of ideologically led political violence and terrorism. As of June 2010, Indian Government has identified 83 districts in nine states as Naxal hit in central and eastern parts of the country. The Naxalites however claim to operate in 182 districts. Moreover; religious extremism has also become the main cause in fuelling terrorism in South Asia. Examples like mujahideen, Jihadists, Hindu fundamentalists and so on-have tried to influence their co-religiosities in neighbouring countries to adopt the path of violence against the established governments. The utilization of Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jamait-ul-Dawa and Islamic extremist groups of this genre by Pakistan to launch attacks into Afghanistan and India could easily escalate into inter-State conflicts and Terrorism. In the Af-Pak region and within Pakistan, jihadi terrorism driven by Islamic extremism and aimed at promoting a 'purist' Islamic state is being confronted by the 'international community, in collaboration with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Lastly, there is 'cross-border' terrorism against India inspired and organised by Pakistan. This cross-border terrorism goes beyond fuelling political unrest in India's Jammu & Kashmir to reinforce Pakistani claims on this region, and extends to whole of India with the purpose of weakening its economy and sabotaging its political and social stability. The Kashmir conflict has clearer external factors in its origin, due to which terrorism became a distinctive factor in the mid-1980s.

In Sri Lanka the Tamil movement was transformed from a relatively peaceful one until the 1960s into an extraordinarily violent struggle with regional ramifications in the 1980s. Assassinations and suicide bombings became central means of terror. A similar central trait is the marginalization of the so-called moderates. It is argued by some that the major locus of international terrorism has shifted to South Asia. Terrorist acts are committed in relation to both internal and inter-state conflicts, and the level of violence is alarming. Allegations are also frequently made that governments may support cross-border terrorism to undermine neighbouring states. The latest disclosures with regard to the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008 clearly reveal the character of externally organised terrorism in South Asia. Analysts also point out that India's involvement in the Tamil insurgency in its early stages, or Bangladesh's support and sheltering of India's Northeast insurgents or China's support for the first phase of Naxal insurgency in India during the late sixties and early seventies also can be taken as examples of externally organised political violence and terrorism in South Asia.

It can be no doubt, but the critical difference between all these examples and that of the Pakistani 'cross-border' terrorism against India is that all the former Cases of political violence had their basic roots within the country of their manifestations and the neighbours exploited the turmoil and conflicts for limited Strategic and foreign policy goals. Many other places in India is a category in itself, wherein terrorism is used as a Systematic instrument of strategic policy, of confronting and weakening India; Of waging a war by other means. The above categories however are not rigid. There is considerable overlap and spill-over among them. Take for instance, the extremist left ideological groups; the Maoists; in India and Nepal. The ethnic component in these insurgencies is clearly visible. The Nepal Maoists mobilised the marginalised ethnic groups like Magars, Gurungs, Limbus, Kirats, Thakalis, and Tamangs etc. This has added the powerful agenda of meeting the aspirations of these 'nationalities' to the ideological programme of the Maoists. In case of Indian Maoists, the tribal's from the backward eastern region are the mainstay of the insurgency. There are also other regional identities enmeshed in the movement that are reflected even at the leadership levels and in the strategies being pursued by the insurgents. Similarly, in the predominantly Tamil ethnic insurgency of Sri Lanka, various militant groups were divided along ideological lines. The Eelam Peoples 'Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) with its strong Marxist orientation had a perpetual ideological discord with the LTTE. Even with the religion driven terrorist groups with allegiance to Islamic extremism, sectarian (Shia-Sunni) and ethnic divisions cannot be ignored. Besides the ethnic and ideological overlap in the categories of insurgent and terrorist groups in South Asia, the groups also have logistic and ideological supportive linkages, even across the borders.

Belief in militancy and sympathy for the militants gradually raised among the Tamils after the ethnic riots of 1983. With the massive exodus of Srilankan Tamil Nadu after the 1983 riots; India could not remain unaffected by the events. New Delhi offered its good offices to resolve the conflict to ensure its national security interests and stability in the region. At the same time, the Indian intelligence agencies provided military training

to prominent Tamil militant groups. This encouraged the militants to take on Sri Lankan forces with more confidence in what is known as 'Eelam Wars'. Reports are also there that, LTTE in Sri Lanka consistently tried to link up with Indian and other insurgent groups to promote their commercial interests (selling arms and explosives, providing training etc.) as also to forge a common front against the Indian state. Reports of the LTTE's links with the Andhra Maoist groups and northeast ethnic insurgents have appeared in Indian media. The nature and extent of ideological and logistic linkages between the Nepal Maoists and the Indian left-extremist groups have been debated in the Indian media for a very long time. The South Asian Maoists groups forged an institutional relationship in July 2001 by establishing a Coordination Committee of the Maoist Parties of South Asia (CCOMPOSA). This committee meets periodically and adopts resolutions in support of 'revolutionary struggles' in South Asia. Also the terrorist outfits in India like Indian Mujahedeen's are suspected to have linkages with jihadi groups in Pakistan and even Al Qaeda. The links between Al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban and jihadi groups are well established. There is a tendency among the policy makers and political leaders to project the terrorist and insurgent groups as coherent organisations. This is far from the ground-reality of these groups. The diverse and differentiated natures of these organisations become evident, on closer scrutiny of their various layers and tiers.

III. Root Causes Of Terrorism In South Asia

The basic concept of the root causes of terrorism is that certain conditions provide a social environment and widespread grievances that, when combined with certain precipitant factors; result in the emergence of terrorist organizations and terrorist acts. These conditions—such as poverty, demographic factors, social inequality and exclusion, dispossession, and political grievances—can be either permissive or direct. The idea suggests, for example, that "human insecurity, broadly understood, provides the enabling conditions for terrorism to flourish. What is the relationship between root causes and patterns of terrorism? Can this relationship be systematically explained; can a theory be developed that incorporates root causes and that has general explanatory value as to where and why terrorism occurs? Do root cause explanations have greater utility in explaining certain types of terrorism? If root causes are key determinants of support for terrorist groups, for the emergence of terrorist groups, and for the occurrence of terrorist activities, what are the implications for the war on terror and contemporary counterterrorism policy?

When we look towards this critical subject i.e., the root causes of terrorism, the general explanations tend to identify poverty, the lack of democracy or history as prominent factors causing terrorist violence. In debates on terrorism, we quite often come across abstract notions, such as poverty causes terrorism or democracy is the antidote to terrorism. However, a closer look at the ground reality reveals that this is not always the case. Africa is mostly poverty ridden and politically authoritarian and the western world is rich and democratic, yet the latter has seen more terrorism than the former. Democracy may be an antidote to terrorism, but its lack or absence in a country or a region cannot be construed as a principal cause of terrorism. Poverty plays an indirect role in terrorism also becomes clear when we critically analyse the case of madrassas in Muslim countries like Pakistan afflicted with terrorist violence.

The structure of societies and polities together with continued exploitation of people by the designated members of the upper caste, class, and political elites is taken as the factor responsible for terrorism. For, these elites have not been able to transform themselves into new, progressive elites regardless of the nature of political systems. As a result, steeped in tradition of disparity and exploitation, South Asian region in general inherits a peculiar mixture of socio-economic and political structures in addition to producing new breeding grounds for modified parochialism such as the rise of religious and sectarian factors which also contribute to violence and terrorism.

Although protracted conflicts have been prevalent in South Asia for more than 50 years, there is hardly any cause of terrorism which is uniformly applicable to all South Asian countries. Yet, some critical variables can be identified. These include, persistence of poverty and accompanying deprivations like unemployment, low levels of literacy, limited access to health services, years of misgovernance, which have made violence the only means of bringing about a change and alienation of whole cultural or ethnic-groups brought about by threat to life by frequent communal violence and destruction of means of livelihood. There are also other issues like territorial disputes inherited from colonial past, Water disputes and Intra-State conflicts involving ethno-linguistic and religious groups with cross boarder affiliations. Conflicting economic interests, these and other factors are also said to have created terrorism generating conflicts and spilling over national boundaries.

One of the key elements that sustain terrorism in a particular situation has been the role of external support. This has been widely discussed. There are growing knowledge bases on this as the very nature of terrorism has grown into massive conglomerate with an intrinsic international network. There are various ways that the phenomenon of external support to a terrorists movement or a group has been recorded. In Pakistan, free education provided by madras or religious schools has attracted a large number of people. And at least some schools clearly inculcate extremism and violence in the younger minds as reflected in the orientation of

formations like the Taliban. There are a number of reports that the LTTE raises money through external agencies and drug trafficking.

There are two pertinent examples of support for terrorists from hostile neighbours. Firstly, India's support to Tamil militants in Sri Lanka is a widely known fact. And the second example is that of Pakistan's involvement in assisting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir in India. Though India maintains that its support was essentially guided by its changing threat perception and security concerns emanating from Sri Lanka, it did provide initial boost and substance to Tamil militant activities.

Another feature of the phenomenon is continuous intervention and financial aid policies of big powers like United States which has also added to the problem. US approach to South Asia had been given a position of priority. Clinton had already given more importance to this region than had the earlier Presidents. After September 11, the coming together of the new threats to US and the new policy meant that South Asia rose to first position in US foreign policy priorities. The War on Terror policy of United States has resulted into a situation of anarchy in Pakistan as major Drone attacks of US and NATO armies is said to be the challenge for Pakistan Sovereignty and internal security. Hundreds of people have left their homes and migrated, and majority of homeless young people have joined Pakistani Madrasas, that are fuelling terrorism continuously. US intervention in Pakistan and Afghanistan has resulted into a war like situation in South Asia instead of creating a secure environment for which US claims its presence.

Not only this, Terrorism also impacted the domestic political structures in South Asian countries in a negative way. It has encouraged militarism, chauvinism and a distinct tilt towards Right wing extremism. It has been used as an excuse for undermining democracy. Though the LTTE as an organization was set up to voice the legitimate demands of Tamil population in Sri Lanka, its degeneration into a terrorist outfit gave the Sri Lankan state the excuse to use brute force and follow militaristic policies and it finally succeeded into obliterating the LTTE. While this was welcomed, it also led to a massive upsurge in Sinhala nationalism, which is coming in the way of a political settlement between the Tamil population and Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan government.

Terrorism in relation with South Asia cannot be treated with a single or a broad brush. Needless to say, terrorism or violence by non state actors in pursuance of particular political objectives is not a new phenomenon for this region. However the fact is that the attention this issue has received at this juncture is linked with global developments post-9/11. The new definition of terrorism that is being pursued by the west sees terrorist activities primarily as violence pursued by networks like Al Qaida. These networks do not necessarily have a regional or national agenda even though such organizations operate in parts of South Asian region as well. The United Nations has also paid less attention towards the political issues of this region which has resulted into a war like situation in South Asia. Though several developmental programs have been started by United Nations in different countries but development alone cannot end the crisis in this region.

The convergence of limited response capacities of governments and law-enforcement agencies with grievances about widespread corruption, under-development, socioeconomic marginalization, and the sometimes problematic role of the state, make South Asia an attractive operating base for a wide array of violent groups whose empty talks and actions can have an impact on ethnic and ideological kin across political borders.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has made several attempts to forge regional responses to common challenges, including drugs, small arms, and counterterrorism, its efficacy is often held hostage to the relationship between India and Pakistan. In recognition of the difficulties of political engagement, SAARC has consequently focused primarily on regional economic development rather than on political questions. A wariness of international intervention and encroachments on territorial and political sovereignty, engendered by the history of colonialism in the region, adds an additional obstacle to regionalization and the development of any supranational regional organization. Along with that strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, Political instability in Afghanistan, Religious extremism in Bangladesh also acts as barriers for regional cooperation to combat terrorism in South Asia.

In future, terrorism might endanger the existence of human kind as a whole, since its fanatical forms do not know any limits and would not stop before anything. If we have to understand the underlying principles of terror and terrorism. We have to get acquainted with it, just the same as with any other social phenomenon, in its historical development and context. The international community is already considerably awakened to dangers and inhuman phenomenon of terrorism. What is needed to curb and eliminate the evil is to unite and fight terrorism in all forms and manifestations. States sponsoring terrorism must be isolated by international community and forced to abandon the weapon of terrorism. Nations must not distinguish between friends and foes when it comes to identifying terror sponsoring states. Such states must face the united might of humanity to save itself from scourge.

IV. Conclusion

Terrorism is a disease which needs to be treated rather than fought. We are not fighting an enemy but mentally sick and misguided who must be brought on course by looking in to their grievances and aspirations. A tooth for tooth strategy is counterproductive and has never succeeded. No effort is being made to defend the actions of terrorists; their actions are not being approved, nor encouraged. However, the states must follow the law and not retaliate indiscriminately. Negotiations should be the hallmark. Terrorism cannot be tackled by state terrorism. Despite actions by armed forces of the states, the menace of terrorism has increased.

Terrorism which itself is an amorphous term and its activity is not easy to address either by the state or by other domain of civil society. In some countries, terrorism originates from religious bigotry and in some others, the issue of identity, the desire to have an honourable and secured life or the objective of a democratic system and freedom becomes the motivating factor for resorting to extreme forms of actions that are characterized by violence, killing, extortion and crimes of various kinds. When other channels fail or are perceived to have failed by involved actors, conveniently branded as terrorists by the opposite side, the former use coercive intimidation to further their goals.

The introduction of special or extraordinary laws to address terrorism can be particularly detrimental to the protection of human rights, as they can lead to long-term institutionalization of oppression and foster a culture of impunity within state security forces and agencies. Widespread human rights abuses by security and law enforcement officials seriously undermine relations between security services and minority populations which have further contributed to cycles of violence across much of the subcontinent. In India, for example, the current government repealed the 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) after a parliamentary review committee found that of 1,529 people detained under its provisions, which allowed the government to detain terrorist suspects for up to 180 days without charges, “the cases of 1,006 did not meet prima facie standard-rights groups noted that the law was “often used against marginalized communities such as Dalits (so-called untouchables), indigenous groups, Muslims, and the political opposition. The Armed Forces Special Powers act, which is operative in Jammu and Kashmir has resulted into human rights violations to a great extent where 2010 alone witnessed hundreds of deaths without any charge sheet and action on part of the State Government.

The cooperation between different governments and establishment of regional intelligence unit can help to a great extent, cooperation between Bangladesh and India to fight terror is noteworthy. This has also produced significant results and dealt a major blow to Islamist groups as well as Northeast insurgents. Though this cooperation is admirable, it has still not reached a level seen in the case of India and Bhutan, where security forces of both countries launched coordinated assault against the terrorists in their respective territories leaving little room for terrorists to escape. However, the cooperation with Bangladesh should not be underestimated.

Combating terrorism is not a easy task in South Asia, as there are number of issues which act as barrier for cooperative effort, but India, said to be the hegemon of the region can play a crucial role. Along with that all the countries of the region should realize that continuous rivalry can prove dangerous in long run. A regional, technically focused counterterrorism mechanism which may be complementary but not formally related to SAARC should be established to stimulate practical cooperation at the functional level. Among other things such a mechanism could provide a platform for counter terrorism training and other capacity building activities, facilitating the exchange of expertise and information among government officials, which is essential for building the trust needed for effective cross border cooperation as well as the sharing of good national implementation among the countries of the region.

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