

## **Islamist Terrorism in South Asia: International Politics and its Ramifications**

**SAMSON S. CHIRU**

Principal

Mt. Everest College (Affiliated to Manipur University)  
Senapati (Manipur) India

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Terrorism is characterized, first and foremost, by the use of violence. Mostly, the targets are noncombatants. Realists suggest that political violence used by terrorist groups is illegitimate on the basis that states alone have a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.

Still, terrorism has targets. But needless to say, that some targets are missed. And these missed targets could mean that it fails to strike the object targeted at; it could also mean where the victims of the target consist of the mixture of people who are not specifically targeted at; the third and the most important one, when it fails to give the clear message of their target and crumbles altogether.

In India, the presence of the persistence of the terrorist movements specifically the Osama Bin Laden and its Al Qaeda networks, Laskar Taiba and others are the greatest threat to Indian democracy. Though democracy in India has its own failure to achieve. The failure of the democratic principles to fight the terrorist as mentioned per se is itself the failure of the democratic country.

India enjoys a stable democracy, has one of the world's highest growth rates of over 9 per cent and is seen as an emerging economic and political power. This has been achieved without curbing democratic freedoms, using army in a military role, resorting to air strikes and using area weapons, capable of causing heavy collateral civilian damages. Interestingly, a special antiterrorism act which was passed in March 2002 was repealed after 2 years in September, 2004 to dispel misgivings, unfounded though, among section of Muslims that it was discriminatory and directed against them. Democracy was used as an effective tool to fight terrorists.

In Jammu and Kashmir, even at the height of terrorist violence with average killing figures as high as 3,000 a year, elections to state assembly were held in 1996 and 2002 (state assembly having a 6year term) with an impressive turn out. Even parliamentary elections for the government in the center were held regularly along with rest of the country. Terrorist resistance to holding of elections by unleashing violence against the party leaders, candidates and voters was resolutely countered. Successful holding of free and fair elections proved to be silent but most effective display of civil societies' rejection of terrorists—both in terms of means and ends. As elected governments had

a political interest in maintaining law and order and providing security to their voters, they became principal instruments of fighting terror unleashed by their coreligionists.

Largest number of Muslims have fought and died in the name of Jihad from this region in the last quarter of a century. However, Indian Muslims, who are numerically the biggest, have largely, remained out of it. In contrast, though India with over 40,000 civilians killed is world's biggest victim of Islamic terrorism, ironically, majority of those killed were Muslims falling prey to the bullets of their coreligionists from across the border. All the states where Islamic radicals received state or civil society support are politically unstable, particularly new convergence developing among Jihadi groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh and the security implications of this for both the Indian subcontinent and the world at large, burdened with no or weak democracies, trapped in slow economic and social growth and seen as near failing states. More importantly, though theocratic Muslim majority states, they themselves are facing vicious sectarian terrorism.

This presentation addresses several questions:

1. Distinguishing radicalism from the Islamic term Salafi or fundamentalists.
2. Distinguishing Islamic term Salafi or fundamentalists from Insurgents.
3. Distinguishing Terrorism as a tactic not as an enemy: Terrorism is the 'how,' not the 'who' or 'why'. The 'who' are good Muslims. The 'why' is Islamic fundamentalist.
4. High tolerance of Indian civil society strategic import not as weakness but as of the brave.
5. India's historical experience of grappling with civilizational conflicts, avoiding head on collisions with civilizational adversaries and preferred conflict avoidance and conflict resolution trying to contain physical confrontation at a low level.
6. The element of strategic response towards dealing with terrorism as essentially a problem of policing and criminal administration rather than a military problem. And its contrast of highhandedness of the civilian populace by military forces.
7. One uniqueness of the corner stones of India's counterterrorist strategy is of delinking Islam from terrorism and treat terrorists as a class devoid of any religious identity. (United States' approach is also in similar line)
8. Thwarting terrorist efforts to project as soldiers of Islam and seize control of Muslim society through coercion and persuasion (United States' approach is also in similar line).
9. Prevention of Communal polarization of the civil society on religious fault lines. In this approach, Muslims are seen as victims of the phenomenon rather than its perpetrator.

The study will find out why the world is nowhere near containment of Jihadi terrorism—genetic mutation of a grave and fast growing malady of Islamic radicalism. The malignancy manifests in propagation of pernicious ideology of hate, revenge and violence, diabolical acts of terror, treating all conflicts with nonMuslims worthy of Jihad and branding liberal Islamic regimes, organizations and individuals as unIslamic. Flawed diagnosis of critical ingredients of the phenomenon, its networks—both real and virtual and the areas and societies where it thrives and strikes often get lost in the din of spectacular acts of violence.

From this perspective, South Asian countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India have a special import—both academic and empirical; South Asia, particularly, the first three where the virus multiplied most prolifically and the last where it struck most lethally.

One of the corner stones of India's counterterrorist strategy has been to delink Islam from terrorism and treat terrorists as a class devoid of any religious identity. Terrorist efforts to project themselves as soldiers of Islam and seize control of Muslim society through coercion and persuasion are sought to be defeated. To achieve this, communal polarization of the civil society on religious

fault lines is prevented. Muslims are seen as victims of the phenomenon rather than its perpetrator.

It was duly reflected in enactment and enforcement of laws, affirmative actions to redress genuine grievances, supporting liberal and pluralistic Islamic thought and political engagement of Muslims.

The study will also attempt to find out the various elements of strategic response dealing with terrorism as to why it is conceived essentially a problem of policing and criminal administration rather than a military problem. The police forces which are locally recruited and belong to the same religious, ethnic, linguistic and social milieu were put on the lead role. The central forces whenever deployed were governed by the civilian laws and made answerable to the civilian judicial and administrative authorities. Infirmities of the police were made good through central assistance in training, equipment, intelligence etc. and enhancing their strike capabilities by placing central forces at their disposal. To achieve optimal coordination, in Kashmir, the entire counter terrorist apparatus was placed under a unified head quarter headed by the elected chief minister. Local heads of army, police, and intelligence worked as its members and his advisors.

Therefore, a need arose to discuss strengthening of intelligence apparatus and accorded a high priority. Working on the doctrine that if you fail to surprise the terrorists you are in for surprises, intelligence operational capabilities were substantially increased. Country's Intelligence Bureau was designated as the nodal authority for counter terrorism. Aiming at seamless coordination platforms like Multi Agency Center and Joint Task Force on Intelligence, with representative from all central and local security agencies, were created.

As both the terrorists and their hardware came to India from Pakistan and Bangladesh effective border management became an integral part of India's counterterrorist response. Access was sought to be denied to the intruders by erecting border fencing along IndoPak and IndoBangladesh borders complimented by border lighting, sensors and other technical devices. In addition, central forces were deployed on the borders to check infiltration. Though it did reduce the menace, it failed to eliminate it.

A major part of India's counterterrorist effort also centered around denying strategic targets to the terrorists and upgrading overall protective society. Specialized outfits were created for providing security to the Indian Prime Minister and other important threatened personalities. Strong antihijacking measures were taken and aviation security strengthened. While India achieved commendable success in denying strategic targets to the terrorists, it failed to provide full protection to common citizens. India's huge size, population of over 1.1 billion and a free democracy left some inevitable gaps which enabled the terrorists to strike.

Another objective of the study is that in security terms India pursues the objective of zero tolerance to terrorism, in political terms it also believes that all solutions cannot be found exclusively through use of coercive power of the state. Thus, the study will focus on the premise the state alone has the legitimate rights to use force, as the realists propounded to deal this menace. Political initiatives have to play a seminal role in complementing the security efforts including exposure of diabolical designs of the terrorists and building a strong civil society support for governmental initiatives.

India has kept its doors open for peace initiatives provided the violence was abjured. It politically engaged over ground separatist leaders in J&K to narrow down the differences and convince them of futility of violence. Over a period of time it had a moderating effect.

Another area of the study is to deal the neutralizing collaborative networks of terrorists like gun runners, operators of funding channels, smugglers, organized crime syndicates etc. that

figured high in India's response strategy. Intelligence driven capabilities were developed to degrade these networks, most of them having transnational linkages. Tackling Pakistan, primary exporter of terror to India, remained a high priority in this study. Political and diplomatic pressures were exerted to make it abandon use of terrorism as an instrument of its state policy. Political engagements and initiation of confidence building measures did help but not to the desired extent. It is found that there were serious gaps in what Pakistan promised and what it delivered.

It is the one of the objectives of this study that why defining the salafi and radicalism with the fast radicalization of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh on one hand and erosion in the will and capability of the governments in power there the overall security scenario in the region stands highly vitiated. Taliban's ground entrenchment; recruitments of new cadres, battle preparedness and increase in drug linked financial resources are a cause of concern. Bases in Pakistan make smothering of Al Qaeda too distant a possibility. Drying up of accurate operational intelligence is reducing tactical success rate of the troops. In Pakistan, sharp accretions in sectarian violence among competing radical groups, growing hold of heavily armed terrorists in North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan and credibility of the military regime at all-time low have forced the government to play on the back foot.

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