

India's Complex Security Environment & the Need for International Partnerships

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SATGIN HAMRAH, NOV 21 2015

South Asia has been mired in terrorist activity for decades. This includes India who has a diverse threat landscape and subsequently has not been immune to the violence, destruction and fear related to modern day terrorism. Effectively fighting existing terrorism within India and decreasing the likelihood of a potential spillover effect associated with transnational terrorism requires strong offensive and defensive polices. Given the realities of the modern world and the rapidly evolving threat landscape it is essential for India to develop and effectively implement pragmatic counter-terrorism strategies in addition to strategic relationships with its South Asian neighbors and the United States.

South Asia has been consistently entangled with terrorism for many years. As noted earlier, India has not been immune to this volatile threat landscape and has consistently been one of the main targets of terrorist activity since its birth. The challenges associated with its security environment are predominantly from ethno-nationalist, Islamic, narco and left wing terrorists. The organizations that are recognized by the United States Department of State as Foreign Terrorist Organizations include: Lahkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Harakat ul-Mujahadeen, The Communist Party of India (Maoist), Harakat ul-Jihad-i-Islami, Jamiat ul-Mujahadeen and the United Liberation Front of Assam.

Despite having a relatively diverse threat environment the violence caused by religious extremism has been the main cause of death, injuries and destruction in India. The strategies and tactics often utilized by these terror groups include: suicide bombing, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and handheld weapons. In order to have a better understanding of India's threat landscape, it is important to note where it originates. Much of the terrorist activity in India stems from existing conflicts throughout the country. As a result, the regions that are most impacted by terrorism are Jammu, Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and the northeastern states.

Overall, the level of terrorist activity in India remains constant. Consequently, this has resulted in India emerging as one of the world's most consistent targets of Islamist militants. For example, on July 2006, terrorists planted seven bombs on the Suburban Railway of Mumbai, causing the deaths of at least 174 people. According to the U.S. government's National Counter-Terrorism Center, in 2007 more than a thousand people died in India due to terrorist attacks. This ranks India fourth in the world in terms of terrorism related deaths, lagging behind Iraq Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Another example is the Mumbai attacks of November 2008, in which a terrorist assault on Mumbai's hotel district in addition to bomb attacks across India during the same year claimed hundreds of lives. Moreover, in 2014, at least 407 civilians were killed as a result of terrorist attacks in India.

Another important factor that has already begun to impact India is the growing support that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is receiving in the country. The Indian government views it as a growing threat, particularly given India's large Muslim population and the socio-religious marginalization experienced by many Muslims. Therefore, the ISIL factor can potentially have a significant detrimental impact on the country. It is important to note that ISIL has successfully recruited members from the Indian Muslim community. While the exact number of individuals who have joined the organization is not known, it is estimated that approximately 50 to 200 individuals have traveled from India to join this terrorist organization. In the past, individuals interested in joining a terrorist

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organization would often travel to Pakistan. Now they also have the option of going to fight with ISIL.

In response to India's volatile threat environment, it is important for political leaders to develop and implement a highly effective multi-lateral counter-terrorism strategy. Given the nature of modern terrorism, in order to be successful, India cannot go about it alone; it needs to work with its South Asian neighbors, along with the United States. More specifically, India should deepen counter-terrorism cooperation with the United States and its neighbors by focusing on mutual interests in eliminating threats posed by Islamic terrorist organizations. This can help increase India's resource-stripped security and intelligence agencies to better address their vulnerabilities. This approach should include prioritizing multi-pronged and multi-lateral strategies and measures to fight terrorism. Furthermore, strategies need to include multi-lateral campaign against terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, LeT, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Haqqani Network.

By working with international partners, India can better coordinate a comprehensive policy for countering radicalization and violent extremism. This will greatly assist it in expanding its capabilities for defensive and offensive measures. It can also result in sharing information on a need to know basis, as well as enhancing the development of successful coordinated strategies to defeat terrorists, thus, significantly enhancing its security. Information sharing is fundamental to a vital and effective strategy. The careful maintenance and development of responsible information sharing between partners is critical to the success of national and international counter-terrorism strategy. It is highly likely that there will be significant challenges working with international partners and sharing information regarding threats. Nonetheless, these partnerships will result in India being better able to monitor terrorist activity, and implement effective offensive and defensive counter terrorism strategies and measures.

The global threat landscape is rapidly changing and becoming increasingly volatile. This has consistently been a reality in South Asia, including in India. In order to address challenges to its national security India needs to develop and implement effective strategies and tactics that address its diverse security environment in a multi-pronged and multi-layered manner. This includes mobilizing collective action to meet the persistent threats posed by terrorism today. The utilization of a multilateral strategy that includes working with its neighbors such as, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, as well as global stakeholders such as the United States will help degrade and ultimately eliminate threats. In our interconnected world, it is consistently more difficult to address a volatile threat landscape without partners who can effectively utilize their core competencies and deliver essential capacity to share burdens.

About the author:

Satgin Hamrah is a PhD student in History at Tufts University and has earned a Master of International Relations degree from Boston University and a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Southern California. She is also a Doctoral Fellow at the Fares Center For Eastern Mediterranean Studies at the Fletcher School at Tufts University and a PhD Fellow at the South Asia Democratic Forum.