

Key Drivers of Terrorism in South Asia Today

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South Asia's Strategic Importance and the Context of Terrorism

Recently, the whole world's attention has moved towards South Asia. The media repeatedly talks about terrorism in the region. This is partly because some hard-line terrorist outfits have been found to be either hiding in South Asia or have visited it in the past. This information has changed the world's opinion of South Asia as the most temporal region.

South Asia lies in the southern part of Asia. It comprises of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. All of these countries have people of very diverse ethnic backgrounds. The people are so different that many times, its inhabitants have asked why it is not considered a separate continent.

Because of its geographical and economic importance, this entire region has been invaded many times by different prominent ancient empires. Almost every great empire of the ancient world up to the 20th century has sent armies to South Asia. These constant invasions have impacted the region politically, economically, genealogically, and geographically ("History of South Asia | Essential Humanities" 2017).

Colonial Legacies, Armed Groups, and Criminal Networks

While most other invading armies tried to unite the region and influence the locals with their culture, the Europeans sought to subjugate their subjects. The Europeans came as masters and ruled over the area dictatorially. This had a significant impact on South Asia. South Asian people stood up to revolt against their European masters.

During the height of these resistances; in the middle of the twentieth century, some people formed armed groups that would attack the white man and his businesses ("The Indian Independence Movement Began in 1857" 2017). These armed groups formed a strong resistance and led their nations to independence. However, once the respective regions became independent, these armed groups had no other work left. They were not merged into the newly created armies of their respective nations. Some of them joined politics and combined their groups in their political parties, but most other teams were left stranded.

Subsequently, these armed groups have joined hands with smugglers, bandits, corrupt politicians, mafias, and terrorists to act as mercenaries. They have been used as hired guns, to do other people's dirty and illegal work. The work might range from kidnapping for ransom to murdering a famous person.

Transnational Terrorism and the Impact of Global Attacks

Since then these groups have resorted to much bigger activities. It has been noted that these groups have often been used to fight proxy wars for other power groups. These groups might be either political parties or even foreign countries. Since political parties support them, it is difficult for anyone to stop them from such activities. On 11 September 2001, a terrorist group attacked the U.S. by colliding two airplanes with the World Trade Center. The world was shocked by these events, more so because they took place in the United States, a superpower. After these attacks, intelligence agencies reported that they were carried out by a terrorist outfit, known as Al Qaeda.

In the days that followed, media houses worldwide reported this only on this event. The U.S. government claimed that this was an intelligence failure and somehow the terrorists had sneaked into the country. Just hours after this attack, Al Qaeda claimed that they had carried out an act. Within hours of this news, media personalities were discussing the role of Al Qaeda and how Islam somehow supports these terrorist acts.

In the attacks of 9/11 the people, it was Al Qaeda that claimed involvement in the attacks and, the accused were all Arabs. However, South Asia became the focus of the world powers. Possibly because Osama bin Laden; the Al Qaeda chief had established Afghanistan as his base. And also, because somehow all the terrorists caught, had at one point or the other, visited any one of the South Asian countries.

Religion, Ideology, and the Historical Roots of Militancy

South Asia has had proximity with religion. During the days of the British Raj, many religious scholars founded schools of thought. These gained fame and popularity when the researchers and their students joined the independence movement. During this time these schools of thought attracted hundreds of young men and women, who joined them for the independence movement.

Even after South Asian countries gained independence, these schools of thought continued to attract students worldwide. Because of their involvement with the freedom movement, they had close ties with the regional terrorists. Perhaps this was when the United States launched the military operation

in Afghanistan.

This information brings to light the fact that terrorism has been a part of South Asia for a long time. The small-time criminals and armed outfits that started by kidnapping imperialists and later resorted to banditry and small incidences of terrorism have become international terrorists.

Youth Recruitment, Poverty, and Economic Exclusion

However, one wonders what the exact reasons might be for young men to join terrorist forces and fight against their own country. Apparently, terrorist outfits like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Naxalite-Maoists, and the Baluchistan Liberation Army have not been created in the name of God; they were in fact created because a group of men that differed with the policies of their Government.

The young people who join these organizations do so not because they believe in the ideology, but because they want to escape their problems (Newman 2006). It is noted that these challenges range from a declining economy to an uneven social structure.

The empirical evidence confirms that there is a high integration between economic growth, inflation, and terrorism ("Macroeconomic [Consequences of Terrorism](#) in Pakistan" 2017). Thus, as economic growth increases, it allows people to buy more and more, thus raising the demand for consumer products and leading to inflation. Inflation causes the prices to go up and leads to fewer people being able to buy what most applications have ("The Changing Nonlinear Relationship between Income and Terrorism Journal of Conflict Resolution – Walter Enders, Gary A. Hoover, Todd Sandler, 2016" 2017).

Political Instability, Class Division, and Institutional Failure

Ultimately resulting in a gap in the social structure and a class divide ("Terrorism and Poverty: Any Connection? BECKER – The Becker-Posner Blog" 2017). Economic growth is, hence, a major contributor to terrorist attacks. This means that the level difference is one major reason why young men from the lower and middle classes resort to terrorism. They probably think of themselves as Robin Hood. Robin Hood himself was a fictional outlaw who helped the poor. His way of helping was to loot and plunder the city; where the rich lived, and distribute the money among the poor. He was constantly at odds with the sheriff but did not consider this as something wrong.

Apparently, South Asian countries have been witnessing political shifts for ages; ever since they became independent. Countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh have been see-sawing between civilian and military leadership. Even still, they have not decided which leadership style is best suited for

them. This is quite unlike the West. The West has come up with one system and stuck to it.

Political instability is also a cause for a decline in the economy, which results in poverty. These factors allow young men to divert their talent from a possible job to harmful activities. Moreover, during times of political instability terrorist and separatist groups spring up which give military training to young men. Countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India have witnessed several years of political instability which has apparently turned such countries into breeding grounds for terrorists.

Regional Cooperation and Strategies for Countering Terrorism

Another point according to the recent study, because of which South Asia has become a hotbed for terrorism, is the burgeoning population. All of the South Asian countries have large populations. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have a combined population of 1.7 billion, more than China's population. With such a huge population that is growing every minute, it is next to impossible for the respective governments of these countries to provide any facilities. Hence, the people do not have adequate jobs and access to clean water, sanitation, food, and housing. This has caused a lot of unrest among the people and is one reason why most South Asians are turning towards terrorism. They feel that terrorist outfits can help them fight for their rights.

The fact that there are so many reasons for the youth of South Asia to join terrorist forces is alarming. This indicates that the region has many problems that need to be addressed. There is a need for regional strategy and cooperation. More must be done locally in South Asia, to promote values of democracy, multiculturalism, and ethnic and religious tolerance. Continued emphasis on the military approach should be discouraged because it can lead to anarchy.

To get rid of the menace of terrorism, a regional body should be formed. This body can be a part of the SAARC. Its duties would be to go through the problems faced and possible solutions to these problems. This body should be given authority to make decisions for the betterment of the region.

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