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# Counterterrorism Cooperation in South Asia: History and Prospects

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the prospects and challenges for effective regional counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia.

### MAIN FINDINGS

- Two discernable patterns emerge from the cases of terrorism in South Asia. First, these cases all involve indigenous uprisings that turned to the use of terrorism. Second, every case saw external intervention frequently exacerbating the original conflicts, prolonging their duration, and dramatically expanding their scope.
- There are few examples of effective regional counterterrorism cooperation in the region. South Asian states have been more prone to use terrorist proxies to achieve foreign and security policy goals rather than evince any willingness to engage in viable counterterrorism cooperation.
- Weak regional institutional frameworks, the long history of discord, conflict and distrust among the South Asian states, and organizational weaknesses of counterterrorism capabilities present significant barriers to regional counterterrorism cooperation.
- The prospects of counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia are distinctly mixed. Though the possibilities for Indo-Pakistani counterterrorism cooperation in the foreseeable future are negligible, there are limited prospects for cooperation between Bangladesh and India, Sri Lanka and India, and Nepal and India.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- No South Asian state, of its own accord, can devise a mechanism to overcome the considerable challenges that thwart regional counterterrorism cooperation. External actors such as the U.S. and the EU may be required to play a substantial and sustained role to initiate such a process.
- Sustained pressure on Pakistan is needed to shift Islamabad's policy position regarding the use of jihadi forces against India to attempt to wrest control of the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir and to exploit existing Hindu-Muslim tensions within Indian society.
- There is potential for external actors, such as the U.S. and the EU, to play a role in assisting South Asian states with the functional features of policing and counterterrorism cooperation, such as training, border control management, electronic surveillance, and intelligence-sharing.

South Asia is no stranger to terrorism. In fact, terrorism as a political strategy long predates the creation of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh as independent states. This report will briefly outline the history of terrorism in the region, discuss past attempts at counterterrorism cooperation, assess the current prospects, and outline the likely challenges that lie ahead in enhancing such cooperation.

## A Historical Overview of Terrorism in South Asia

### *India*

In the early part of the twentieth century, a segment of the Indian nationalist movement veered toward political extremism and the use of terrorism.<sup>1</sup> In the post-colonial era in South Asia, terrorism as a political tactic first re-emerged in the state of West Bengal in the form of the Maoist Naxalite movement. The Naxalites received considerable propaganda support, and possibly material assistance, from the Maoist regime in the People's Republic of China (PRC), which, at the time, was flush with revolutionary fervor and reflexively hostile toward India. The Indian state effectively but ruthlessly crushed this neophyte Maoist terrorist movement.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the most significant indigenous terrorist movement erupted in the Indian border state of the Punjab in the early 1980s. The origins of this movement were deeply rooted in the exigencies of Indian domestic politics.<sup>3</sup> Sensing an opportunity to escalate the conflict, however, Pakistan soon became involved in aiding and abetting the Sikh terrorist movement, thereby dramatically expanding the movement's scope and duration.<sup>4</sup>

Also, around this time, India witnessed the rise of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which sought to create an independent state in the country's northeast.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, in 1989 an ethno-religious insurgency erupted in Indian-controlled Kashmir. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), an indigenous organization, was initially at the forefront of this movement.<sup>6</sup> Owing to Pakistan's swift involvement on behalf of the insurgents, however, the movement rapidly adopted terrorism tactics and evolved into a religiously motivated and externally supported extortion racket.<sup>7</sup>

For a variety of complex reasons India has witnessed a recrudescence of Maoist terrorism. Currently, the country faces a significant resurgent Maoist insurgency that has afflicted as many as fourteen states and 165 districts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Argov, *Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement, 1883–1920, with Special Reference to Surendranath Bannerjee and Lajpat Rai* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Ranjit Kumar Gupta, *The Crimson Agenda: Maoist Protest and Terror* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India: Punjab, Ethnic Conflict and the Test for Indian Federalism* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> For evidence, see "Patterns of Global Terrorism: Asian Overview," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 1995, [http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/arms/PGT\\_report/1994PGT.html](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/arms/PGT_report/1994PGT.html).

<sup>5</sup> R. Upadhyay, "United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)—A Deviated Movement?" South Asia Analysis Group, March 28, 2005, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers14%5Cpaper1307.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> On Pakistan's involvement, see Arif Jamal, *Shadow War: The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Anuj Chopra, "Maoist Rebels Spread Across Rural India," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 22, 2006; and Sudeep Chakravarti, *Red Sun: Travels in Naxalite Country* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008).

## Sri Lanka

In the early 1980s, the Tamil separatist movement, in the wake of an anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo in 1983, took a turn toward terrorism, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) spearheading the movement.<sup>9</sup> In May of 2009, after a brutal and sanguinary civil war that claimed upwards of 90,000 lives, the LTTE suffered a military defeat on the battlefield.<sup>10</sup> Despite international public professions of an interest in reconciliation, the Sri Lankan regime adopted a triumphal tone in most domestic pronouncements.<sup>11</sup>

## Pakistan

Pakistan-based terrorism has also contributed to two major recent crises in Indo-Pakistani relations. The first crisis ensued after the December 13, 2001, attack on the Indian parliament. In this attack, two Pakistan-based terrorist organizations, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Mohammed, were implicated. Following the attack, India embarked on a massive strategy of coercive diplomacy designed to induce Pakistan to end support for such terrorist organizations.<sup>12</sup> Though General Perez Musharraf, under substantial private and public pressure from the United States, made a number of public commitments to terminate the Pakistani security establishment's links with terrorist groups, in practice his government failed to sever these links. Subsequently, LeT-led attacks on a number of sites across Bombay (Mumbai) on November 26, 2008, contributed to a breakdown of the fledgling but ongoing Indo-Pakistani peace process that had been initiated in 2004.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, Pakistan, which had long been a sponsor of terrorism, has faced considerable blow-back from several of these terrorist groups, most importantly from elements of the Taliban.<sup>14</sup> It is at least ironic that the Taliban, which was spawned under the tutelage of General Naseerullah Babar, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's minister of the interior, has in the last two years directed its ire against the Pakistani state.<sup>15</sup>

## Nepal

Terrorism was also one of the chosen tactics of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) during its insurrection in the 1990s. The Nepalese Maoists had ties with their Indian counterparts but did not receive support from the Indian state.<sup>16</sup> After eschewing violence, the Maoists joined the electoral process and came to power in 2008, ousting the Nepalese monarchy.<sup>17</sup>

## Bangladesh

Bangladesh has witnessed its share of domestic terrorism. The majority of terrorist groups involved in Bangladesh have targeted the country's dwindling Hindu population, harassed fellow

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion of the origins of Tamil grievances and the resort to terrorism, see Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Weaver and Gethin Chamberlain, "Sri Lanka Declares End to War with Tamil Tigers," *Guardian*, May 19, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Teresita C. Schaffer and Elizabeth Laferriere, "Triumphalism and Uncertainty in Post-Prabhakaran Sri Lanka," *South Asia Monitor*, July 1, 2009 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Sumit Ganguly and Michael R. Kraig, "The 2001–2002 Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Exposing the Limits of Coercive Diplomacy," *Security Studies* 14, no. 2 (Winter 2004–2005): 290–324.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Schmitt, Mark Mazzetti, and Jane Perlez, "Pakistan's Spies Aided Group Tied to Mumbai Siege," *New York Times*, December 7, 2008; and "Difficult to Resume Peace Process with Pak: Pranab," *Indian Express*, December 17, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Sumit Ganguly and Paul Kapur, "South Asian Security after Mumbai," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 15, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Hutt, *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Randeep Ramesh, "Former Maoist Guerillas on the Brink of Historic Nepal Election Victory," *Guardian*, April 14, 2008.

Muslims whom they consider to be inadequately devout, and sought to build ties with transnational terrorist organizations. A coalition government under the aegis of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which held power between 2001 and 2006, did little to contain the rise of Islamist terrorism within the state.<sup>18</sup> The new Awami League regime of Sheikh Hasina Wajed may adopt a less lenient posture toward these groups.

### *Afghanistan*

After witnessing the eventual victory of the Taliban over other indigenous insurgent groups in the civil war that ensued following the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan finds itself again in the throes of continuing turmoil and violence. The Taliban, who had been effectively ousted from power in late 2001, have managed to successfully regroup in Pakistan's western borderlands and are now wreaking havoc against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the country.<sup>19</sup> In an effort to end depredations by the Taliban against the fledgling elected government, the current U.S. administration appears poised to adopt a new, broader counterinsurgency strategy.<sup>20</sup>

### *Regional Trends in Terrorism*

With a few exceptions,<sup>21</sup> two common patterns are discernible in all the cases of terrorism discussed above. First, these cases all involve indigenous uprisings that resorted to the use of terrorism because, correctly or not, members of these dissatisfied groups perceived that normal politics would not enable them to achieve their ends. Also, in every one of these instances, external intervention and support from interested regional states worsened matters. Foreign involvement usually prolonged the duration and dramatically expanded the scope of the original conflicts.

For example, India's initial support for various Tamil terrorist organizations contributed significantly to these group's capabilities. Similarly, Pakistan's unrelenting support for a host of Kashmiri insurgent and terrorist groups has fundamentally transformed the indigenous features of the Kashmir insurgency and rendered it almost intractable. Such support has also, for all practical purposes, blighted any prospect of bilateral counterterrorism cooperation between India and Pakistan. Furthermore, it remains far from clear that the regime of President Asif Ali Zardari exercises any effective control over the Pakistani military and the security and intelligence services. On the contrary, it appears that these entities still have distinct organizational imperatives and political goals that may well be at odds with the professed interests of the Pakistani civilian political leadership in ending support for terrorism.<sup>22</sup>

## Limited Counterterrorism Cooperation

The history of counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia is quite limited. States in the region have been far more prone to the use of terrorist proxies to achieve foreign and security policy

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<sup>18</sup> Sumit Ganguly, *The Rise of Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Peter Baker and Dexter Filkins, "Obama To Weigh Buildup Option in Afghan War," *New York Times*, September 1, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> The exceptions are Pakistan and the Taliban as well as the Maoists in Nepal and more recently in India that have not witnessed any formal external support.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Perlez and Salman Masood, "Terror Ties Run Deep in Pakistan, Mumbai Case Shows," *New York Times*, July 27, 2009; and Frederic Grare, *Rethinking Western Strategies Toward Pakistan: An Action Agenda for the United States and Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).