



SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS DRIVING TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA

South Asia, a geopolitically volatile region encompassing India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, is a complex mosaic of historical grievances, ethnic tensions, ideological radicalism, and systemic governance failures. Terrorism in this region is not a mere manifestation of religious extremism or separatism—it is the outcome of deep-rooted socio-political fault lines, exacerbated by state complicity, foreign influence, and fractured national identities.

1. Historical Legacy of Partition and Ethnic Fault Lines

The Partition of 1947 was not just a political division—it was a civilizational rupture. The unresolved issue of Kashmir, the trauma of displacement, and the drawing of artificial borders have bred generations of mistrust. Ethnic communities like the Balochs in Pakistan, Tamils in Sri Lanka, and Rohingyas in Myanmar have long-standing grievances rooted in marginalization, giving rise to insurgency and cross-border terrorist movements.

2. Religious Radicalization and Ideological Indoctrination

Religious extremism—especially Wahhabi and Deobandi interpretations of Islam—has been aggressively exported by foreign actors like Saudi Arabia and sustained by Pakistani madrassas. The Taliban in Afghanistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami are products of state-nurtured jihadist ecosystems that exploit poverty, illiteracy, and ideological vacuum to create suicide bombers and insurgents.

3. State Sponsorship and Deep State Networks

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has consistently weaponized non-state actors as instruments of asymmetric warfare against India and Afghanistan. The strategic use of terror

as a low-cost, deniable proxy tool—especially post-Kargil and during the Kashmir insurgency—reflects a militarized state policy rather than rogue elements. Afghanistan under Taliban rule now risks becoming a terror haven again, exporting jihadism into India and Central Asia.

4. Weak Governance, Corruption, and Political Instability

Failing institutions, judicial inaction, political patronage, and rampant corruption create fertile ground for terrorism. In Bangladesh, for instance, political rivalry between the Awami League and BNP has often seen terror outfits like Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) being used as pawns. Nepal's decade-long Maoist insurgency and Sri Lanka's bloody ethnic conflict with the LTTE stemmed largely from political exclusion and systemic injustice.

5. Cross-Border and Intra-State Dynamics

porous borders in South Asia—especially the India-Nepal, India-Bangladesh, and India-Myanmar frontiers—allow for the easy movement of arms, operatives, and illicit funds. Coupled with poor coordination among intelligence agencies and limited technological capabilities, this facilitates the survival and growth of terror modules across the region.

6. Economic Deprivation and Youth Disillusionment

South Asia is home to the world's largest youth population, yet also suffers from high unemployment, poor education, and rural neglect. Extremist recruiters prey on disillusioned youth by offering ideological purpose and material incentives. In Kashmir, for example, joblessness and political alienation continue to fuel recruitment into terror ranks despite India's counter-insurgency efforts.

7. Foreign Geostrategic Interests and Proxy Warfare

Terrorism in South Asia is also driven by external players using regional instability to gain strategic leverage. China's silent complicity in shielding Pakistan-based terror groups at the UN, Iran's quiet Shia networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the West's selective counter-terrorism narratives—particularly during the Cold War and the War on Terror—have all contributed to a fragmented regional security architecture.

8. Digital Jihad and Social Media Radicalization

The advent of the internet and encrypted communication has globalized South Asian terrorism. ISIS-inspired lone-wolf attacks in Sri Lanka (2019 Easter bombings) and online radicalization in Kerala and Kashmir demonstrate how digital platforms are now battlegrounds for ideological warfare. WhatsApp, Telegram, and dark web channels are being weaponized to coordinate attacks, fund operations, and spread propaganda.

Strategic Insight

To effectively counter terrorism in South Asia, it is imperative to **disrupt the ideological supply chains, dismantle state-sponsored terror infrastructure, and address the root causes of marginalization**. India, being the region's anchor power, must combine **military precision, diplomatic pressure, counter-narratives, and strategic surveillance** to secure its borders and its people. Regional cooperation through platforms like **SAARC, BIMSTEC, and QUAD+** must be refocused on counter-terrorism synergy.

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