# Terrorism: India's unending war

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Since its independence in 1947, India has been facing the problem of insurgency and terrorism in different parts of the country. For the purpose of this column, insurgency has been taken to mean an armed violent movement, directed mainly against security forces and other government targets, to seek territorial control; terrorism has been taken to mean an armed violent movement directed against government as well as non-government targets, involving pre-meditated attacks with arms, ammunition and explosives against civilians, and resorting to intimidation tactics such as hostage-taking and hijacking, but not seeking territorial control.

India has faced exclusively terrorist movements in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, bordering Pakistan, and part insurgent-part terrorist movements in the northeast, bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh; in Bihar, bordering Nepal; and in certain interior states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa that do not have international borders.

India has also faced terrorism of an ephemeral nature, which sprang suddenly due religious anger against either the government or the majority Hindu community or both and petered out subsequently. Examples of this would be the simultaneous explosions in Mumbai on March 12, 1993, which killed about 250 civilians, and the simultaneous explosions in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, in February 1998. Tamil Nadu has also faced the fallout of terrorism promoted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka in the form of attacks by LTTE elements on its political rivals living in the state and in the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

India had also faced, for some years, Hindu sectarian terrorism in the form of the Anand Marg, which, in its motivation and irrationality, resembled to some extent the Aum Shinrikiyo of Japan. The Marg, with its emphasis on meditation, special religious and spiritual practices and use of violence against its detractors, had as many followers in foreign countries as it had in India. Its over-ground activities have petered out since 1995, but it is believed to retain many of its covert cells in different countries. However, they have not indulged in acts of violence recently.

**Causes**

The causes for the various insurgent/terrorist movements include:

***Political causes*:** This is seen essentially in Assam and Tripura. The political factors that led to insurgency-cum-terrorism included the failure of the government to control large-scale illegal immigration of Muslims from Bangladesh, to fulfil the demand of economic benefits for the sons and daughters of the soil, etc.

***Economic causes*:** Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar are prime examples. The economic factors include the absence of land reforms, rural unemployment, exploitation of landless labourers by land owners, etc. These economic grievances and perceptions of gross social injustice have given rise to ideological terrorist groups such as the various Marxist/Maoist groups operating under different names.

***Ethnic causes*:** Mainly seen in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur due to feelings of ethnic separateness.

***Religious causes*:** Punjab before 1995 and in J&K since 1989.

In Punjab, some Sikh elements belonging to different organisations took to terrorism to demand the creation of an independent state called Khalistan for the Sikhs. In J&K, Muslims belonging to different organisations took to terrorism for conflicting objectives. Some, such as the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, want independence for the state, including all the territory presently part of India, Pakistan and China. Others, such as the Hizbul Mujahideen, want India's J&K state to be merged with Pakistan. While those who want independence project their struggle as a separatist one, those wanting a merger with Pakistan project it as a religious struggle.

There have also been sporadic acts of religious terrorism in other parts of India. These are either due to feelings of anger amongst sections of the Muslim youth over the government's perceived failure to safeguard their lives and interests or due to Pakistan's attempts to cause religious polarisation.

The maximum number of terrorist incidents and deaths of innocent civilians have occurred due to religious terrorism. While the intensity of the violence caused by terrorism of a non-religious nature can be rated as low or medium, that of religious terrorism has been high or very high. It has involved the indiscriminate use of sophisticated Improvised Explosive Devices, suicide bombers, the killing of civilians belonging to the majority community with hand-held weapons and resorting to methods such as hijacking, hostage-taking, blowing up of aircraft through IEDs, etc.

Certain distinctions between the modus operandi and concepts/beliefs of religious and non-religious terrorist groups need to be underlined, namely:

Non-religious terrorist groups in India do not believe in suicide terrorism, but the LTTE does. Of the religious terrorist groups, the Sikhs did not believe in suicide terrorism. The indigenous terrorist groups in J&K do not believe in suicide terrorism either; it is a unique characteristic of Pakistan's pan-Islamic jihadi groups operating in J&K and other parts of India. They too did not believe in suicide terrorism before 1998; in fact, there was no suicide terrorism in J&K before 1999. They started resorting to it only after they joined Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front in 1998. Since then, there have been 46 incidents of suicide terrorism, of which 44 were carried out by bin Laden's Pakistani supporters belonging to these organisations.

Non-religious terrorist groups in India have not resorted to hijacking and blowing up of aircraft. Of the religious terrorists, the Sikh groups were responsible for five hijackings, the indigenous JKLF for one and the Pakistani jihadi group, the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (which is a member of the IIF), for one. The Babbar Khalsa, a Sikh terrorist group, blew up Air India's Kanishka aircraft off the Irish coast on June 23, 1985, killing nearly 200 passengers and made an unsuccessful attempt the same day to blow up another Air India plane at Tokyo. The IED there exploded prematurely on the ground. The Kashmiri and the Pakistani jihadi groups have not tried to blow up any passenger plane while on flight. However, the JKLF had blown up an Indian Airlines aircraft, which it had hijacked to Lahore in 1971, after asking the passengers and crew to disembark.

All terrorist groups -- religious as well as non-religious -- have resorted to kidnapping hostages for ransom and for achieving other demands. The non-religious terrorist groups have targeted only Indians, whereas the religious terrorist groups target Indians as well as foreigners. The Khalistan Commando Force, a Sikh terrorist group, kidnapped a Romanian diplomat in New Delhi in 1991. The JKLF kidnapped some Israeli tourists in J&K in 1992. HUM, under the name Al Faran, kidnapped five Western tourists in 1995 and is believed to have killed four of them. An American managed to escape. Sheikh Omar, presently on trial for the kidnap and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi in January last year, had earlier kidnapped some Western tourists near Delhi. They were subsequently freed by the police.

Non-religious terrorist groups in India have not carried out any act of terrorism outside Indian territory. Of the religious terrorist groups, a Sikh organisation blew up an Air India plane off the Irish coast and unsuccessfully tried to blow up another plane at Tokyo the same day, plotted to kill then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi during his visit to the US in June 1985 (the plot was foiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation), attacked the Indian ambassador in Bucharest, Romania, in October 1991, and carried out a number of attacks on pro-government members of the Sikh diaspora abroad. The JKLF kidnapped and killed an Indian diplomat in Birmingham, England, in 1984. In the 1970s, the Anand Marg had indulged in acts of terrorism in foreign countries.

None of the non-religious terrorist groups advocate the acquisition and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Of the religious groups, the Sikh and the indigenous Kashmiri terrorist groups did/do not advocate the acquisition and use of WMD. However, the Pakistani pan-Islamic groups, which are members of the IIF and which operate in J&K, support bin Laden's advocacy of the right and religious obligation of Muslims to acquire and use WMD to protect their religion, if necessary.

The Sikh terrorist groups did not cite their holy book as justification for their acts of terrorism, but the indigenous Kashmiri groups as well as the Pakistani jihadi groups operating in India cite the holy Koran as justification for their jihad against the government of India and the Hindus.

The Sikh and the indigenous Kashmiri groups projected/project their objective as confined to their respective state, but the Pakistani pan-Islamic terrorist groups project their aim as extending to the whole of South Asia -- namely the liberation' of Muslims in India and the ultimate formation of an Islamic Caliphate consisting of the Muslim homelands' of India and Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Sikh terrorist groups demanded an independent nation on the ground that Sikhs constituted a separate community and could not progress as fast as they wanted to in a Hindu-dominated country. They did not deride Hinduism and other non-Sikh religions. Nor did they call for the eradication of Hindu influences from their religion. The indigenous Kashmiri organisations, too, follow a similar policy. But the Pakistani pan-Islamic jihadi organisations ridicule and condemn Hinduism and other religions and call for the eradication of what they describe as the corrupting influence of Hinduism on Islam as practised in South Asia.

The Sikh and indigenous Kashmiri terrorist organisations believed/believe in Western-style parliamentary democracy. The Pakistani jihadi organisations project Western-style parliamentary democracy as anti-Islam since it believes sovereignty vests in people and not in God.

Religious as well as non-religious terrorist groups have external links with like-minded terrorist groups in other countries. Examples: The link between the Marxist groups of India with Maoist groups of Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; the link between the indigenous Kashmiri organisations with the religious, fundamentalist and jihadi organisations of Pakistan; the link between organisations such as the Students Islamic Movement of India with jihadi elements in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; and the link between the Pakistani pan-Islamic jihadi organisations operating in India with bin Laden's Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

**The role of the diaspora**

Religious as well as non-religious terrorist groups draw moral support and material sustenance from the overseas diaspora. The Khalistan movement was initially born in the overseas Sikh community in the UK and Canada and spread from there to Punjab in India. The indigenous Kashmiri organisations get material assistance from the large number of migrants from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, called the Mirpuris, who have settled in Western countries. The Marxist groups get support from the Marxist elements in the overseas Indian community.

**Funding**

The following are the main sources of funding for terrorist and insurgent groups:

Clandestine contributions from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence.

Contributions from religious, fundamentalist and pan-Islamic jihadi organisations in Pakistan.

Contributions from ostensibly charitable organisations in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Contributions from trans-national criminal groups, such as the mafia group led by Dawood Ibrahim who operates from Karachi, Pakistan.

Extortions and ransom payments for releasing hostages.

Collections -- voluntary or forced -- from the people living in the area where they operate.

Narcotics smuggling.

The funds are normally transmitted either through couriers or through the informal hawala channel. Rarely are funds transmitted through formal banking channels.

**Sanctuaries**

Religious terrorist organisations have their main external sanctuaries in Pakistan and Bangladesh, while non-religious terrorist organisations look to Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. Some northeast non-religious terrorist groups also operate from Bangladesh, while certain religious groups get sanctuary in Nepal.

Since 1956, Pakistan has been using its sponsorship of and support to different terrorist groups operating in India as a strategic weapon to keep India preoccupied with internal security problems. Before the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the then East Pakistan was the main sanctuary for non-religious terrorist groups operating in India. Since 1971, the present Pakistan, called West Pakistan before 1971, has been the main sanctuary for all Sikh and Muslim terrorist groups.

Pakistan has given sanctuary to 20 principal leaders of Sikh and Muslim terrorist groups, including hijackers of Indian aircraft and trans-national criminal groups colluding with terrorists. Despite strong evidence of their presence in Pakistani territory and active operation from there, its government has denied their presence and refused to act against them. It has also ignored Interpol's notices for apprehending them and handing them over to India.

For some years after 1971, the Bangladesh authorities acted vigorously against Indian groups operating from their territory. This has gradually diluted due to the collusion of the pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh's military-intelligence establishment with Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment, the collusion of Bangladesh's religious fundamentalist parties with their counterparts in Pakistan and the unwillingness or inability of successive governments in Dhaka to act against these elements.

In Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar, there is no collusion of the governments with the Indian terrorist groups operating from their territory. Their authorities have been trying to be help India as much as they can. However, their weak control over the territory from which the terrorists operate and their intelligence and security establishment does not allow for effective action against the terrorists.